

Mapping Exercise of Home Based Workers in Maharashtra

prepared by

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Introduction

Home-based work has a much wider scope of activity than the singular task of an individual working from his/her home. This essential service is tied in with a larger chain of forward and backward linkages that enable the value addition till the goods reach their final destination of sale. The forward links could be smaller as in the case of local small or micro entrepreneurs marketing these items, or much larger as in the case of the items that are being exported. Either case, the individual working from home has some of the most crucial tasks to perform before the goods make their way to the consumer through shops or markets or export houses.

The mapping exercise commissioned by Homenet India was conducted in the state of Maharashtra from 28 Oct and 07 Dec 2011. Since this was a particularly small timeframe, exhaustive interviews, both in numbers and in quality could not be undertaken. However through this mapping exercise, several such workers and trades were documented, for which there is no precedent.

In Maharashtra, the mapping exercise was conducted in three districts, viz, Mumbai, Nashik and Solapur. A total of 146 interviews were conducted, of which 17 interviews were those of keypersons and the rest were with workers.

Within Mumbai, four areas were examined, namely:

- i. Amrut Nagar (Ghatkopar)
- ii. Panjrapol (Deonar)
- iii. Lallubhai Compound (Mankhurd)
- iv. Rajeev Gandhi Nagar, Muslim Nagar and Mukund Nagar (Dharavi)
- v. Shivaji Nagar (Mankhurd)

In Nashik, Uttam Nagar in CIDCO Ambad area and Shivaji Nagar in Satpur area were examined. While in Solapur, there was concentration of a wide variety of trades within the single area of Saibaba Chowk in Ashok Chowk area of Solapur. This study brought to the light the large variety of home-based trades in existence which were predominantly assembly tasks, and a small number were entrepreneurial too. This is important because it reinforces the structuralist view of interdependence of the formal and informal sectors.

The entry into each of the areas was through certain keypersons. These include organisations and individuals known to the researcher. The qualitative paradigm was used through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions directly with workers, key informants and in some cases, the local political representatives. Information regarding the tasks performed, payment and working conditions was sought from the workers as well as the keypersons. Special focus was given to information regarding occupational health hazards. Lastly, workers were asked to come up with recommendations for improving their work and life.

This report serves to give detailed presentation of the data collected on the key themes mentioned above. Each area has been dealt individually, with a brief introduction with its location specifics and the researcher's observations of the infrastructure and amenities. This is followed by a brief note on the existing home based trades found in the area through this research, after which, a detailed description of each of the trades is provided. Case studies have been presented to bring out the uniqueness of some of the cases. The concluding section brings out some of the core issues and observations from the field.

A. Amrut Nagar, LBS Marg, Ghatkopar (West)/ Vikhroli, Mumbai

Introduction to Amrut Nagar

Located atop a hill, sandwiched between affluent Ghatkopar (west) on the one side and Powai (Vikhroli) Hiranandani complex on the other, the Amrut Nagar slum is situated right behind R-City mall on the busy LBS road in Mumbai. The slum is an example of stark contrasts in terms of distribution and access to resources, low-paid creative activity, deprivation and ethnic tensions. Families residing in the area comprise two main groups, the Maharashtrians and UP migrants mainly from the Azamgarh district. The houses were *pucca* and most residents owned their homes. The size of these homes varied, some had a single-room with kitchen, others had a ground plus mezzanine structure, some others had 3 separate sections (kitchen, living-cum-bedroom, and a small utility area at the entrance). In most cases, the kitchen was a separate section of the house, and the floors were tiled.

Availability of water emerged as the main issue. Water is supplied for a maximum of two hours per day, and the timing is not fixed. Children are heavily involved in helping to fill and ferry water from the tap to the home. Scarcity and short-time availability of water every day has often caused multiple fights among families, including some violent ones. Sanitation facilities are found to be inadequate and in urgent need of repairs. There are open sewers in almost all parts of the slum, but for some which were covered with concrete slabs. Pigs, rats and dogs run in the sewers and then in the areas. The cleanest and large spots in the area built with expensive materials such as white marble are found to be temples or worship areas.

Brief note on existing home-based trades

A large number of women in this area are involved in tying satin tassels at the ends of *rakhis*¹, tying tassels at the end of *dupattas*² and embellishment of jewelry necklace-thread. Few are also involved in assembling of key chains and making incandescent mantles for paraffin lamps (also popularly known as petromax lamps). One woman was found to be an entrepreneur, who stitched blouses for women in the area. Mantle-making is the only trade where men were found to be involved in home-based work (two respondents). Most women talked of their activity as 'timepass', the colloquial Indian term referring to 'getting rid of boredom' or 'killing time'. Most women did not switch on lights or fans while working in order to save power, but the television was on in almost all households.

The term 'gross' (loosely pronounced as '*gruss*' by the workers), refers to 12 dozen or 144 pieces. As far as home based work is concerned, this is the basic unit of transaction, in that, orders are taken and returned quoting the number of 'gross' provided or made. When we say so many gross per day, we do not mean full days or 24 hours, rather, we mean while looking after other domestic chores and fulfilling their family's needs, they manage to make that many orders in the leftover time.

Organisations in Amrut Nagar

There was no membership based organisation or NGO in the area. If there was, the residents were not aware of it. Secondary research indicates that there is an NGO called Amrut Nagar Welfare Association in the area,

¹ The thread/ bracelet tied on a male's wrist by his sister for a traditional festival.

² Veils or long stoles are a standard Indian garment worn mainly by women.

but their role or involvement in the community is not clear. Organisations specifically focused on organising home based workers too, were found not to exist. In such a situation the local powerful keypersons take on additional importance in resolving daily issues and handling conflicts. Invariably, these persons are local politicians who reside in the same area as well.

Description of trades in Amrut Nagar

1. *Dupatta* tassels

Of the interviewees, the largest number of workers was found to be involved in tying tassels on *dupattas* (see image 1). The work is seasonal in nature and therefore the order volume and frequency is inconsistent. Two of the women interviewed— sisters-in-law in a joint family— prefer to sit in their home (ground plus mezzanine structure) to do this work. There is very little space in the home at the ground level, which includes their kitchen and washing area. Their television set is on, while they do not use electricity or fans while working. Their mother-in-law blames them for the mounting electricity bills due to their engagement in this low paid activity (*“do rupaye ka kaam karte ho, to itna bill aata hain”*).

Other women in the same area sit in a circle under a *peepul* tree, which is assumed to be a community area for common use. All of them complained of back aches, shoulder aches and leg pain. Some also talked of gastrointestinal problems due to constant sitting and bending while doing the work. They said that earlier the rate per piece used to be Rs.30 per dozen and now since late 2007 it has come down to Rs. 24 per dozen. This could be explained by the impact of the global recession on the garment industry. One 12-year old girl was

Indu Ramesh Saroj female 30+, married, 2 children

Indu, from Bhadvahi UP, came to Mumbai after her marriage. She has two school-going children. She sits in a circle with a group of other women from her native place to do her home-based work. The task involves tying tassels in a complex pattern to the rim of a *dupatta*. A single *dupatta* is tied to a solid object so that the tassel-knots can be tied in a pattern easily. Indu uses a steel bucket and/or a rectangular stool as a solid object. She sits on the floor outside her home with women who are her next-door neighbours. They too hail from the same native place as Indu's. For tying tassels on the entire rim of a *dupatta* in a pattern, Indu gets Rs.2 per piece (therefore Rs.24 per dozen). Since the work requires precision and accurate tying of knots in a pattern, she can complete one to two dozen in a day. Her kids play with other kids in the same area while the work is being performed (see image 2).

Indu's husband is a rickshaw-driver who does not own his rickshaw. In a recent campaign against rickshaw-drivers in Mumbai relating to metre-frauds, her husband's earning took a major hit. As a couple, they are finding it difficult to sustain a family of five; comprising them, their two children and a senior citizen (mother-in-law). Empathising with the increased pressure on her husband to work extra hours to make the same amount as before, she had once proposed the idea of working as a domestic worker in the plush Hiranandani neighbourhood nearby. Her husband angrily snubbed her by saying, 'I will break your hands and legs if you bring up the idea of going out to work'. She talks with urgent concern about the unchanged rates given per piece over the past few years, even though impact of prices of commodities and services have increased. Inflation has been eating into their low incomes and she does not know a way out.

found to be cutting threads after the mother finished tying the tassels.

2. Rakhi tassels

The second largest numbers of respondents were found to be involved in tying satin tassels (also known as *gonda*) to the ends of *rakhis* (see image 3). Below is the case of Jyoti, who performs this task. Others like her perform the same task, but have complained of more occupation related health problems than Jyoti. For instance, one respondent talked of gradually deteriorating vision, while almost all others talked of persistent back ache and hand ache.

Jyoti Jaiswar
female 20, unmarried

Jyoti is a third generation migrant from Amazgarh, Uttar Pradesh. Her father died recently. Along with her mother, Jyoti performs the task of tying tassels at the end of *rakhi* threads. The task involves tying tassels to each end of the *rakhi* for it to be considered a finished good. A bunch of *rakhis* are tied to a solid object so that the assembling of the tassels can be done easily. In most cases, an empty plastic kerosene can is used as the solid object. Jyoti sits cross-legged on the floor to perform this task. For tying tassels on both sides and packing bunches of finished *rakhis*, she gets Rs.7 per gross. Jyoti manages to complete two gross per day. Her mother completes an additional two gross. The material required for this task is provided by the middleman and others like Jyoti go to him for picking up the material. This work is available round the year, except for eight days before *raksha bandhan*, the rakhi festival.

Jyoti and her mother have back aches. As the mother-daughter duo is the only income generator in the house, they worry about their ability of saving adequately so as to provide for Jyoti's marriage. Inflation and price rise on basic commodities like food have made a major dent in their already low savings. The 20-year old therefore wonders if the State could make a provision for social security specifically focused on young women like her.

3. Necklace thread embellishment

There are three kinds of tasks related to necklace thread embellishment. Firstly, there are women who are involved in tying golden threads with few red ones, at the end of the necklace thread (see image 4). This further goes to the next set of workers who add a ball of red thread with a few golden threads toward the end which helps in adjusting the length of the necklace (see image 5). Thirdly, there are those workers who tie tassels at the end of the necklace threads (see image 6). In the first case, women get orders for tying golden thread on artificial jewelry necklaces. However, in the second and the third tasks, it was found that the material was much higher quality as after processing; it goes to goldsmiths for making precious and semi-precious jewelry.

This trade is heavily dominated by workers originating from UP. One of the respondents, Chandravati Jaiswar (55 years old), has been engaged in this trade for the past 12 years. Earlier she used to tie the golden and red thread at the end of *mangalsutras*, but now the thread is sent for all kinds of necklaces. Her husband is unemployed and they have two grown daughters and a son. One of the daughters and the son work outside as a bank call-centre employee and driver respectively, in addition to her home-based work. She has no problems with the middlemen and employer who have been providing her work for the past few years. The

task involves tying the necklace thread to a solid object, which in her case, is an empty kerosene can and/or a plastic chair. She uses a wooden *charak* (which roughly looks like a wooden hand-blender) on which she has pre-mounted the golden thread. She takes one end of the necklace thread and turns the *charak* six to seven times and cuts the rest from the bundle rolled on the *charak* with a pair of scissors. Then she ties a red thread at the beginning and end of the golden thread on the necklace. This process is repeated at the other end of the necklace as well until both ends look alike. It takes approximately three continuous hours to complete one gross and she earns Rs.10 per gross. Another respondent, Vidyadevi Jaiswar (30 years old) also does the same work, but sometimes she also gets an additional task of adding a lobster-clasp hook closure (is loosely called 'lustre') at the end of the necklace. She gets Rs.22 per gross for orders with lustre and Rs. 15 per gross for orders without it. Unlike Chandravati, Vidyadevi involves two of her four children in home-based work. The oldest daughter, 17, is a dropout and is engaged in this task as well as helping with the domestic chores. The second daughter, 14, performs a different task of tying tassels to these necklaces. With all the help, Vidyadevi manages to make one gross per day. In both cases, the women have to pick up the material and drop the processed goods at the middleman's house in the area. Sometimes, orders pour in for half a month and then there is a lean period. This happens throughout the year.

Earlier, the tying of golden thread had to be done manually. The use of a *charak* has made the job a bit easier and faster. The *charak* (see image 7) made specifically for this purpose is a low-cost tool made by an acquaintance. Either way, both women talked of excessive back ache and hand ache. Chandravati complained of perennial cold and cough issues. Her biggest concern was and remains the marriages of her children.

Work similar to the above mentioned task is done by other women on more expensive material as well. One respondent ties the golden and red thread. She gets Rs.6 per gross and manages to complete two to four gross per day. Once completed, she takes the completed bunch to her neighbour who then adds a ball of red thread with a few golden ones so as to provide a length-adjusting mechanism for the necklace (see image 8). She too, gets Rs.6 per gross and can complete five to six gross per day. In the case of the latter, the husband sometimes helps too, while he is not out in the area being a mobile vendor selling *bhel*. Both these women use the space inside and outside of their homes to do the work and sometimes they also sit together in the temple foyer. Once completed, the goods are sent to goldsmiths, one of whom works in the Masjid bunder area of Mumbai.

Sumintradevi Jaiswar, 35, is engaged in what she calls a 'back-breaking' home-based trade. Her task involves tying tassels to the necklace thread. She makes two sub-sets of the same tassel by tying a small thread at its centre, thereby bifurcating it in two parts. The material is of high quality as it goes to the goldsmith. Sumintradevi's task takes considerable amount of time and she requires two days to complete one gross. The payment per gross is Rs.7. She sits at the entrance of her house, so that she can work in daylight, saving her electricity expenses. The lady does not have a ration card, which means that she has to buy all her provisions and foodgrains in black. She does not own her house either. Her husband works as a driver for a private car-hiring agency, and manages to make Rs.3000 per month. This amount is highly inadequate and goes towards paying for the house rental, water, electricity, kerosene and provisions. She says, "There is no money in this low-paid work; yet I go on [doing this work]. How are we supposed to survive if prices keep going up [the way they are]? I wish to stop this back-breaking work, but do I have a choice?"

4. Mantle making

Of the respondents, two were involved in mantle-making (double tie loose ends style). This was the only task where men were involved in home-based work and women helped in the activity as well. Pramod Jadhav (41), with his wife Priyanka Jadhav (31) and Shantaram Jadhav (65) with his wife Hemlata Jadhav (50+), although related, made these mantles separately in the area outside of their homes (see image 9). The material is dropped every seven days by a company in the Malad suburb, which includes processed pieces of mantle cloth made of artificial silk or rayon fabric.

The families sit to work at 10am and finish their day at 10pm. Both families have been involved in the trade for the past 16 years. First, the knotted mantle cloth is opened, then mounted onto metal discs by stretching and pulling the strings so as to tighten the front of the mantle cloth. A mildly warm iron is then kept atop these discs so that the mantle gets its shape while it is still on the disc. After the iron is removed, the cloth is taken off of the discs and kept aside to cool and to take a solid shape. Finally, the mantles are packed in bunches of 200. Pramod and his wife jointly make up to 3000 pieces per day. They are paid Rs.100 when they submit a consignment of 1000 pieces. Since men and women jointly engage in this home-based trade, the women have a slightly less tensed family situation vis-à-vis their work, as compared to the other cases dealt in this area.

4. Keychain assembly

Of the respondents, two are involved in keychain making activities. Their earnings are extremely low. In one case, the per-piece rate is as minimal as Rs.0.09 (not even 1 paise). This is particularly shocking because after the keychain reaches the market, it is sold for a minimum of Rs. 30.

Sneha Subhash Bhojane,
female 26, married, two children

Sneha's task involves assembling the main ring of the keychain with several smaller rings (also called *kadi*). The number of smaller *kadis* depends on the design, and it varies from 1-8. In addition to the *kadis*, the task also involves attaching bells, colourful plastic or metal trinkets such as crucifix, beads and so on. She sits cross-legged on the floor inside her house to do this work. She uses basic pliers to tighten each of *kadis*. On the day of the visit, Sneha was attaching 6 *kadis* each with a bell in each *kadi* and two metal crucifix on the last *kadi* (see image 10). For this particular order (six *kadis* plus bells plus crucifix), she gets Rs. 14 per gross (12 dozen or 144 pieces). In other cases, for instance, when there are 2 *kadis* to be attached, the rate is Rs. 5-7 per gross. Since the work is meticulous and involves multiple steps, she manages to complete 2 gross per day. The material required for this task is provided on a per-kg basis by the middleman, who has an office space at the bottom of the hill. Each loose piece is counted and packed to be weighed and distributed in the several households of the area, including Sneha's.

Sneha complains of excessive back ache and hand ache. She has two school-going children. She does not involve them or use their help in her home-based trade. Her husband is an alcoholic, generally unemployed, but manages to find odd jobs sometimes. This puts considerable strain and pressure on Sneha's household. Her brother-in-law, who works in an office in Wadala and lives in a separate house, supports Sneha's family in addition to his own. Sneha therefore, is the sole earning member of her household and depends on relatives (in this case, the brother-in-law) to support her major household expenses. Sneha was not able to conceptualise or put forth her ideas to improve her work or life condition.

B. Panjrapol, Deonar (West), Mumbai

Introduction to Panjrapol, Deonar

Off of the busy Eastern Express highway of Mumbai, Panjrapol is a quietly tucked away area in the north-eastern part of the city. The area has a large Maharashtrian population. Some people have occupied residences in a cluster of MHADA³ buildings in the same area in 2010, after a patient wait of 7 years. In other words, the allotment was done in 2003, but possession rights were given only in 2010. The recent Mumbai metro rail construction project resulted in demolition of a large part of this area for infrastructure development. Current residents have vague ideas on the relocation site of the displaced persons, even though they know of two prominent ones, namely Vashi Naka and Lallubhai Compound. Further, the new Panjrapol flyover serving to connect Chembur to CST is also under construction.

Brief note on home based trade

Almost all women that were interviewed in this area were involved in the task of rolling *papads*- the crisp Indian appetizer-snack. The market leader in the production of this product is Sri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, also popularly known as Lijjat. The area of Panjrapol was significant for this study because some women in these areas have been rolling *papads* for Lijjat for over 20 years.

Only in one case, it was found that the husband and two sons of the worker were involved in helping her out with her papad-rolling work. Most other women interviewed, were rolling *papads* by themselves, usually sitting in small groups. Every morning, a mini-bus comes to pick them up in batches of 30 to go to the closest Lijjat branch in Govandi. Once they reach the branch, the pre-made dough is weighed and handed to them with specifications on rolling size. There are three sizes; namely; mini, medium and large. Usually the large ones are easier and faster to roll than the small or medium ones.

After the dough has been provided, the women are dropped back to the same point near their residences. The process of rolling starts soon after they reach home. They take breaks to perform domestic chores as well as for meals. On an average, most women start rolling *papads* at 9am. They need oil, thread, a metal rolling board with wooden rolling pin and large baskets as basic tools for their work. These tools and materials are not provided to them by the company.

They first stretch and pull the dough various times over, to make it consistent. By the time the women reach home from the Lijjat branch, the water in the dough gets absorbed. So the stretch-and-pull movement requires a lot more energy. Then, they make thin tube-like cylindrical logs approximately 10-12 inches long. A thread, held partly in the big toe and partly in the fingers, is used to cut through this log to make small even-sized balls. A tinge of oil is spread over the rolling board so that the balls do not stick to its surface. The rolling pin is used to flatten out these balls in the specified size and thickness. For each of these tasks, the person has to sit in the natural squatting position for hours. Once the papads are rolled and ready, they are placed on inverted large baskets to dry in the sun (see image 11).

³ Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority

Each kilogram fits approximately 120 rolled *papads*. The payment differs based on the size and thickness. They are paid Rs. 20 per kilogram for mini *papads* and Rs. 25 for the large size. Of this amount, Re.1 per kilogram is kept by the company as the workers' savings, supposedly for an unforeseen event or emergency in the life of the worker. So they effectively get Rs. 19 (mini) or Rs. 24 (large) per kilogram of rolled *papads* based on the size. Women make varying quantities of papads, some can roll 3 kgs per day, while others can roll up to 8 kgs per day. Some women, who live in tiny homes with a corrugated asbestos sheet as the roof, also climb up on a steep ladder to dry the *papads* on inverted baskets there (see image 12). Others who have access a larger courtyard by virtue of demolition of certain homes dry their *papads* in this open space which also has plenty of other things from their homes, attracting flies and other insets (see image 14).

Even though Lijjat has been in operation as a women's cooperative since 1959, the concerns of its now-diversified workforce hardly get represented. This is a serious concern, because so far we have seen cases of a scattered and unorganised home-based workforce. But in the case of Lijjat, where the concept of 'family' features predominantly in the business model, each worker is supposed to make a wage in decent working conditions. As our cases have shown, a contradiction exists not just in the payment of wages but also in terms of its workforce having a voice.

**Shaila Dilip Ghodake,
female 39, married, 2 children**

Shaila's is a papad-roller in the Panjrapol area of Mumbai. Recently, she moved from her slum home to an apartment in one the MHADA buildings in the same area. Her living conditions have improved tremendously since but she faces a different set of issues. Firstly, there are no lifts in the building. Shaila stays on the fifth storey which involves climbing up and down multiple times every day. Other than the monsoon season, she sits on the terrace of her building round the year to roll papads with four other women, who she has successfully trained. The rolled papads are dried in the sun on inverted baskets on the terrace. Sometimes she also sits in her apartment.

During the monsoon, she has to sit in her apartment to complete the orders. This involves some extra costs. Firstly, she has to keep the fan going while she is rolling the papads. Then they are laid on an inverted basket for drying, but the basket needs to be suspended from the ceiling on a hook (see image 13). A kerosene-lit stove is lit underneath to provide warmth and catalyse the drying process. This means that Shaila's electricity bill goes up in the monsoon, and the expenses on kerosene are incurred separately. The rate for the papads remains the same. This means that Shaila has to incur costs out of her savings to continue doing this low-paid remunerative work. Shaila luckily has a supportive husband. He has a job with the department of 'sewage treatment and disposal' of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. However, he also often helps Shaila with her papad-rolling tasks. Most of the times, he helps by pulling and stretching the dough; a task which Shaila finds particularly painful on her ribs and shoulders. In the monsoon, he monitors the papad drying process through kerosene stove on the inverted baskets. Each drop of kerosene needs to be used frugally so as to avoid wastage and a bigger dent in their personal contribution to performing this task. One of her sons is a class 9 dropout, and the other has completed his undergraduate degree in history. The latter sometimes helps with home-based work. Shaila's husband thinks that if some amount of mechanisation was introduced, it would make the work less straining on his wife's health and would also help in increasing the numbers of papads rolled in a day. Shaila disagrees. She thinks that mechanisation would mean even more expenses (in terms of electricity) and time spent on making papads.

C. Lallubhai compound, Mankhurd (West), Mumbai

Introduction to Lallubhai Compound, Mankhurd

Lallubhai Compound is a Relief and Rehabilitation (R & R) colony located in the Mankhurd area of Mumbai. The area is a cluster of 65 seven-storey buildings, each, tightly packed on a small landmass. On the day of the visit, it seemed as though everyone was out on the roads for some event. However, it soon became clear that it was a typical day in Lallubhai Compound-- people come out of their 225 square feet apartments on to the streets every day. Children played, older ones stood chatting, and some lined up at the ubiquitous medical clinics run by BAMS and BHMS doctors. Even though lifts have been provided in each building, they are used only during special occasions and festivals. This is because the building committees (made up of residents) have unanimously decided that the maintenance costs of operational lifts per household turn out to be very high. The area houses approximately 10,000 families that once resided in several parts of the city and were categorised as Project Affected People (PAP) through MUTP⁴ and MUIP⁵ projects. Some studies have shown that this is a classic example of an urban development experiment gone completely wrong (Rao 2011).

Brief note on existing home-based trade

Not many persons were found to be involved in home-based work in the area. Some women however, re-continued the task of rolling papads for Lijjat. However, the conditions were much more difficult here. To begin, Lijjat does not provide a bus service for this area since there are less than thirty women who perform this work in Lallubhai Compound. So, Viju Kamble (35) and other women like her, start at 5am and use public transportation such as buses and local trains, to pick up the dough from Lijjat's Wadala branch. Their transportation costs and material costs are not reimbursed. The working conditions are slightly better than those of Panjrapol, but less than ideal. Viju works from home with the help of her neighbour's 18-year-old daughter to roll papads. Her children are not engaged in the papad-making process. Her apartment opens to a thoroughfare passage and the passage further opens to an unused landmass with greenery and a polluted water-body (*nullah*). Being on the sixth storey, her house has ample ventilation from this one side. She rolls the papads in her small living room where the fan and television is kept on. She says there is ample sunlight so she does not switch on the lights. She uses the space in her living room as well as that in the passage to dry the papads in the dry months. The buildings do not allow the use of the terrace for this purpose, giving the reason that they cannot accommodate everyone's request, and that if they entertained one person's, other residents too would demand the use of the terrace.

In the monsoon, she too uses the suspended basket over kerosene stove technique to dry the papads. Viju gets the same rate for her papads as the Panjrapol residents, but her personal costs (in terms of time, money and efforts) involved in making these papads are higher than those of her Panjrapol counterparts. Her husband works as a watchman and makes just about enough to make ends meet along with his wife's earnings from papad-rolling. She does not complain of any problems while doing the work, can roll 5 kilos per day and says that since she is used to this work, cannot think of stopping or doing anything else.

⁴ Mumbai Urban Transport Project

⁵ Mumbai Urban Infrastructure Project

Bharti Gadli (30) another home-based papad roller for Lijjat has the same story to tell. Now pregnant, she finds the payment and working conditions particularly tough because she resided in the Panjrapol area earlier. She remembers those times as she benefited from better facilities (such as the Lijjat bus service) and better working conditions mainly because she would sit in a large group of women (her neighbours and other papad-rollers) which made the work seem less monotonous. After shifting to the new area, she has to spend Rs. 12 per day as rickshaw tariff to pick up the material from Lijjat Govandi branch and feels tired even though she rolls the same quantity of 6 kgs per day. She complains of the issues of travelling for someone who is not used to the congestion of Mumbai's public transport, starting from safety of valuables and personal safety. She has been rolling papads for Lijjat for the past ten years, but feels a sense of disillusionment in the cooperative, because in her time of need such as now, they have no system for providing maternity benefits. In the absence of a state-body or an organisation representing the voices of women like her, Bharti does not know which way to go.

Padmavati Chauhan, 50, is another papad-roller in the area, who was earlier a vegetable vendor. She has five children who are either married or are being educated. Originally a migrant from Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, Padmavati has figured a different kind of social network for help in her time of crisis. She is a member of the *Radhaswami satsang*, where her friends and fellow *satsangis* provide financial as well as other help. Her daughter used to roll chapatis in Lijjat earlier, but has now stopped this work. She says, "only if I work all 365 days of a year am I entitled to a bonus [of Rs.8000] which is provided in March, right before *Holi*. I deposit this amount immediately with the money lender, from whom I borrowed many years ago. I don't know when the loan repayment will be over, but until then, I will have to continue working non-stop... I have to spend Rs.4000 monthly towards the school fees for two of my children and support such a large family. Therefore, my *satsang* is the main source of assistance for money, used clothes etc'. Padmavati does not know of any organisations working in her area that represents home-based workers like her. She needs help with petty and big administrative issues such as changing the address on her ration card after she was shifted to Lallubhai Compound, but blames her illiteracy for not knowing which door to knock.

D. Baiganwadi, Shivaji Nagar, Govandi (West)

Introduction to Baiganwadi, Shivaji Nagar

Shivaji Nagar falls in the M ward of the Mumbai metropolitan region, which is known for housing some of Mumbai's poorest slums. The Human Development Report for Mumbai notes that out of the city's 23 wards, M ward stands lowest in Human Development Index. Not only is the Baiganwadi area of Shivaji Nagar found to be wanting in terms of water, sewerage disposal facilities and healthcare, it is also notorious for some of the lowest paid home-based work in the city. Households have to pay Rs. 2 per *handa* of water from the few affluent families who stay closer to the highway. A family of four requires at least 10 *handas* for daily consumption (includes drinking, washing, cleaning purposes). Further, this water needs to be carried on heads or under the arms. Performing this daily ritual multiple times in the sweltering humid heat of Mumbai denotes extreme hardship. There are open sewers everywhere, adding to the frequency and gravity of health problems. Sanitation conditions too, are reported to be deplorable.

Few organisations work in the Shivaji Nagar area, but none represent the struggles of Baiganwadi residents. Respondents are not aware of any of these organisations. Like Amrut Nagar, there are no organisations in Shivaji Nagar mobilising home-based workers in the area.

Brief note on existing home-based trades

The area contributes to sequins embellishment on readymade garments, home-based entrepreneurial tailoring, lace-embellishing on garments and embellishment of sandals.

The field visit brought together women workers that were Maharashtrian Hindus and Muslims, all in the age group of 27-35 years. They reported that almost all of them were at one time engaged in piece-rate sequins embellishment work. A baby frock requiring heavy work would fetch them Rs. 50 per piece, and the same frock requiring light work would get them Rs. 8 per piece. A piece requiring light work could be completed in 2-3 hours, while the one with heavy work required the whole day (approximately eight hours). Some women have also reported getting Rs. 4 to Rs.4.50 for the lightest work on a frock (see image 15), while the middleman got Rs. 12 for the same piece. 20-25 pieces of the lightest work could be made in a day. Women complained of severe back ache, persistent health problems occurring in the family and the depressing remuneration for their home-based work. Most of the sequins embellishment workers had therefore, jointly decided to stop taking orders from the middleman to avoid being victims of such exploitation. Stopping this work has diminished the family income, which in this case, was used for buying water on a daily basis and/or used for persistent health problems.

Fatima Khan, 42, an entrepreneur is engaged in tailoring/ stitching garments. Lately however, she has focused solely on embellishing various kinds of garments with lace with her sewing machine. She gets Rs. 1 per piece for such embellishment and she can complete 100-200 pieces per day. She complains of back ache, fatigue which is compounded by her recent kidney stone surgery.

**Anita Nandgaonkar,
female 22, married-abandoned**

Anita is a soft-spoken young woman whose father passed away due to jaundice and mother is paralysed. She has a younger sister who works in a shoe factory; a job that she got through a distant relative. The sister brings home extra pieces that need work. Anita's task involves two different sub-tasks. Firstly, the material involves a mixture of artificial pearls, tanzanite rhinestone Swarovski-like glass crystals (see image 16), and large size circular crystals. The pearls and crystals come in the form of long chains, which need to be cut so that each crystal and pearl can be removed and singled out. Circular leather discs (also known as 'upper') which are mounted with golden leather come pre-stitched from Anita's sister's factory. Anita's task involves making a 'brooch' by sewing individual crystals and pearls in a uniform pattern on the circular leather disc (see image 17). This task involves hand-sewing of individual pearls and crystals by using nylon thread (popularly known as *tangus*) through a hard material like leather (see image 18). Often extra pressure is required for the movement of the needle and thread. Due to this, the needle frequently pierces through Anita's fingers, wrists and palms. When completed, the brooch is then mounted on expensive sandals back at the factory. Perhaps most of these sandals are sold in the bridal range of footwear. It takes one hour to complete embellishment work on a pair of discs. Each pair fetches her Rs. 20. This means that one completely embellished disc gets her Rs. 10. She manages to complete 5 pairs in a day.

The second task requires that she cuts a 2-metre leather fabric into a specific oval shape (tongue shape cut-out), which is used for pasting on the part of the shoe where the heel rests. She takes a plastic piece and outlines the piece throughout the two metre leather fabric, which takes her three hours. Then she starts to cut each piece individually off of the leather fabric, which takes another two hours.

Anita complains of excessive back ache and hand ache. Constant sitting to perform the first task and bending to perform the second task means that Anita has severe back ache, shoulder ache and eye-problem.

E. Rajeev Gandhi Nagar, Muslim Nagar and Mukund Nagar, Dharavi, Mumbai

Dharavi, at one point the largest slum in Asia, is a hotbed of intense creative activity and industriousness. Spread over an area of no more than 1.7 sq. kms, it is home to roughly 1 million people. It covers parts of Sion, Matunga, Bandra and Kurla. Much has been written about it, films have been made which often refer to Dharavi as 'mini-India', a place which is highly cosmopolitan in character. Although it is most popular for its leather items, several micro and small scale industries involved in garment making, waste recycling and pottery etc too exist in the area. Hundreds of local, national and international NGOs, MBOs, faith-based organisations and art of living organisations working on diverse issues have been present in the area. Despite their efforts, Dharavi continues to be an overly congested shanty, which lacks even the most basic infrastructure and civic amenities.

Brief note on existing home based trades in Dharavi

The core trades found through the study were sequins and beads embellishment on garments, supplying home-based meals (also tiffins), clay lamp-painting and belt-making.

Most LMKS members in the informal sector are engaged in multiple types of employment. For instance, domestic workers also are home-based workers (engaged in tasks like *zari* embroidery, garment making, thread cutting and finishing of garments, clay-lamp painting etc). Home based work in this area is in fact, outsourced work from *not only* medium or small scale enterprises in Dharavi, but also big brands like Chirag Din (shirts) and Baggit (bags), which lands up in the homes of these women through a series of intermediaries. What is particularly startling about Dharavi is the number of children, especially the females, involved in this kind of work.

1. Garment Embellishment

Several types of garment embellishment tasks are performed by home based workers in Dharavi, but they are all broadly in the area of sequins and beads embroidery on pre-embroidered fabric. In Rajeev Gandhi Nagar, Saroj (30), Pramila (30), Premadevi (35) and Bimladevi (40) are involved in sequins and beads embellishment work on garments. The task involves hand-sewing of sequins and beads in a pattern specified by the middleman. In case of light work, which means when the number of sequins and beads is less, the rate varies from Rs.2-3 per piece. When it is heavy, the rate per piece is Rs.5. In the case of the former, 20-25 pieces can be made in a day, while in the case of the latter, 10-12 can be completed. Individual capacity and speed, as also pressure of domestic chores vary, and some workers can make half or double this quantity in a day. It is no coincidence that all four workers share the same last name *Jaiswar*, which indicates a group of scheduled caste workers from a specific village in Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh. While husbands of two of the women are taxi drivers, the third is a security guard and the fourth is a porter. The women complain of the dismal sanitation facilities and water problems, adding to their plight in performing a task that serves to cause head aches, leg pain, frequent fevers, common colds and severe strain on the eyes.

In Muslim Nagar area too, hordes of women and girls are involved in garment embellishment related work (see image 19). Farzana Shaikh, 18 and Sunita Sahoo, 17 who are both studying in class 12th (commerce stream) are involved in sequins embroidery as well. While the piece work fetches them Rs.5-8 per piece, they can make no more than 15-20 pieces per day, trying to balance studies, coaching classes, cooking, cleaning

and grappling with issues of domestic violence. Farzana is further involved in preparing a line of sequins on a thread which is used by the other micro industries in the area. The middleman drops a 100 gm packet at her place, which can be of two types. One has a plain flat round shape and the other has a slightly inverted shape (popularly known as *katori tikki*). The plain flat shape does not require as much processing as the *katori*. A needle and thread can directly be pushed through the flat sequins and a long running thread filled with these sequins is made. The *katori* sequins on the other hand, undergo a series of steps before sitting on the thread. Firstly, they are emptied on a fine so that the dust and other minute garbage strands can be separated from the sequins. Then some drops of water are splashed on them while they are still in the strainer, so that the sequins can collect or come together. While they are still damp, the needle and thread are pushed through individual sequins. The flat variety may take up to 1.5 hours to make, while the *katori* variety takes five hours. The payment for the flat sequins is Rs.10 for 100 grams, whereas that of the *katori* or inverted sequins is Rs.20 for 100 grams. The long continuous lines of sequins on the thread made by Farzana and others like her, are used by other micro and small scale industries within and outside Dharavi.

2. Home-based meals

In the working class areas of most cities, we find women— usually destitute women— who prepare food in their homes for migrant workers or bachelors. In local terms, they are referred as '*bhishi*' or 'mess workers', though it should not be confused with the 'mess' as an eating place in hostels and eating clubs etc. In Dharavi, the mess workers make meals for all kinds of migrant workers. This is a sound example of the mutual sustainability and interdependence these industries. Due to space constraints at workplace, most workers choose to go to the mess worker's house to get their daily meals. Of the 330 LMKS mess working members in Dharavi, 210 members serve meals at home, in addition to sending tiffins, while the rest of the membership engages solely in the tiffin service to the workplace. A baseline survey done in 2010 by one of the group leaders of LMKS indicated the plight of these cooks. One problem is the high expenses involved in buying ration provisions to feed their customers, which, as of today, gives them no margin after the sale of these meals. They end up feeding themselves off of whatever provisions are bought and cooked for the day. The difficult and physically strenuous task of making the dough for chapatis from wheat flour leaves them tired. The police harassment is beyond doubt the biggest problem, where they are required to pay Rs.250-500 (depending on their financial capacity) per week, and despite this weekly payment, they are sometimes taken to the police station and beaten. In addition, those workers who use the services at the cook's house default on payments, and then move on to the next cook, and so on.

The mess workers who feed the city's labouring poor face a number of hardships, and are in turn treated with malice instead of acknowledging their great service at affordable costs. LMKS group leader heading the department of mess workers has a concrete plan of action, devised in consultation with her members to address some of these issues in 2011. Firstly, it is most important to unite all the cooks, then devise a system for identifying the defaulters and not let them continue eating meals for free from any of them. This will help reduce the incidence of defaulting on payment of weekly/ monthly fees. Secondly, in order to reduce the strain while making dough, the possibility of buying electronic dough makers through LMKS was discussed. Third, since the ration is very expensive, it was decided that the LMKS mess union members would take turns at getting supplies of these provisions from the Vashi APMC wholesale market in groups themselves. Finally, a peaceful protest is being planned to the police station and office of the concerned authorities to bring up the issue of police harassment.

3. Clay-lamp painting

Dharavi has been known for its potter's village, *Kumbharwada*. Clay pots, *matkas*, big and small lamps (also called *diyas*), wall hangings, flower and plant pots etc are made in this area. What is lesser known is the painting, decoration and embellishment of some of these clay items happens in the homes of Dharavi residents. Procuring and dropping orders is simple, as it is right there in the same area, which saves the potters transport costs. Yasmeen Khan, an 18-year old Muslim Nagar resident and a class 4 drop out, is a master artist when it comes to decorating clay lamps/ *diyas* (see image 20). She begins by providing useful details on the various shapes and sizes in which these lamps come to her. These include regular lamp shape, heart, tear-drop, diamond, *tulsi-vrindavan*, eight-petalled flower among others. Yasmeen picks up the lamps and the embellishment material such as colours, golden powder, kerosene, adhesive, golden lace and in certain cases, also sequins from the potter across the street. In each bunch of lamps, there are some extra pieces, some broken, some damaged, which Yasmeen keeps for herself.

In case of the regular lamps, she directly uses the paint provided by the potter. In those cases where sequins are required, she first starts by pasting them with an adhesive such as Fevicol. If a golden base is demanded, she starts by mixing the golden powder with kerosene. She uses a brush for the first basic coat. This is a quick drying mixture, but she is fast at this job and cannot wait until it is completely dried. She rests the first painted side (which is almost completely dry) on another lamp and starts using other colours. The wet colours are perhaps acrylic paint and are provided in small polyethylene bottles with a precision tip dispenser. Yasmeen makes tiny plastic cones out of used transparent plastic bags. These cones are mounted on the dispenser so that the dispensed colour can be as thin or thick a line as required. Once all four sides are painted, Yasmeen moves to rubbing the adhesive on the edges of the lamp and pastes the golden lace on top, which she has cut and prepared earlier. The final step in the process is packing of the lamps in plastic bags and delivering the packets to the potter. She is paid at the rate of Rs. 0.6 per piece, even though each piece may require more or less work. Yasmeen is helped also by her sisters; 13 year old Nazmeen who is a class 8th student and 12 year old Reshma who is in class 6th. Yasmeen is also responsible for domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and washing; in addition to her remunerative work. Along with her sisters, she is part of an adolescent girls group in the area which she and her friends have fondly named the 'Grand Group'.

4. Belt-making

Twelve years old and barely 2 feet tall, Rita Mallesh can easily be missed in a crowd. But the crowd goes mum and watches when she magically weaves belts at lightning fast speed. The middleman drops off straps of leather and/or plastic, which are pre-cut by machines in a manufacturing unit within Dharavi. Girls like Rita and women like her mother from Mukund Nagar, first tie three to four strands to a nail or hook on a wall or on a pillar. This is followed by building a base with the strands (also called a *mool*) and then continuing to weave systematic intricate patterns repeatedly. No needles or threads are required for this complicated plaiting exercise. It requires concentration, dexterity and intensive eye-hand precision-coordination. Once ready, these belts are used not only as belts for the waist, but also as straps for handbags and shoes/ *chappals*. At her age, Rita can make 15 pieces per day, and gets paid anything between Rs.3-5 per piece, while the older women in the area can make 30 pieces per day. Most workers stand and perform this task, while others use a chair to ease the stress on their legs.

F. Uttam Nagar (CIDCO Ambad) and Shivaji Nagar (Satpur), Nashik

Traditionally known as a pilgrim town and the wine country of India, Nashik district has steadily come to be recognised for its industrial potential as well. Located in the north-western part of Maharashtra, and offering a dry cool climate most parts of the year and proximity to the major metro city of Mumbai, it was and is viewed as a conducive spot for industrial investment. The two areas examined for the purpose of this study, Ambad and Satpur, are two of the five designated 'industrial zones' in the district. Contrary to the cases in Mumbai and Solapur, ration cards are not such a burning issue in this district, as most people have them either in the district or in the villages where they were born. The most pressing issue in Nashik is therefore securing means for earning a livelihood.

Introduction to Uttam Nagar and Shivaji Nagar

The Uttam Nagar area of Ambad is part of the larger City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) and Shivaji Nagar area of Satpur is part of the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). Ambad is the area categorised by domestic and international companies mainly involved in manufacturing electrical goods, while Satpur, the largest industrial zone in the district has all kinds of industries. Given these location specifics, it is obvious that the residential areas around both Satpur and Ambad house mainly industrial workers.

It is crucial to mention here that almost all the workers interviewed in the study were members of the Learn Mahila Kamgaar Sanghatana (LMKS), a union of informal sector women workers in Mumbai, Nashik and Solapur districts of Maharashtra. Secondary sources indicate the existence of an NGO named Disha Foundation, which works on migrant labour's access to public health and other social and economic issues. However, interviews with workers and key stakeholders have indicated that prior to the entry of LMKs in the area, there was no specific organisation representing the voice of the unorganised sector workers.

Description of home based trades in Uttam Nagar and Shivaji Nagar

Broadly, the home based trades in Nashik can be categorised under the heads of remunerative piece-rate work and entrepreneurial work. The former includes industrial assembly, ballpoint pen assembly, cardboard folding, food processing, making cotton wicks and lottery-chart making. It was found that two of the largest groups of workers that sat together were involved in industrial assembly and cardboard folding. Entrepreneurial work on the other hand, includes tailoring, making aluminum foil cups, making plastic mugs and ironing clothes.

1. Industrial assembly

Sharada Kulkarni, 30, is a class 4 pass-out. This is hardly believable when one sees her assembling complicated electrical parts. On the day of the visit, Sharada was involved in making a piece called 'main', which is a three phase contactor or a four pole AC contactor used for stabilising electrical load in the main switch board. As stated earlier, the Ambad area has many large and small electrical manufacturers, and companies like Schneider outsource the assembly of the smaller parts to other smaller companies in the area like Akash Udyog, who in turn outsource the assembly to home based workers. Sharada and her two children Pooja (14) and Omkar (10), had a vague idea about the name of this piece and its use. However, among them,

the assembling task was highly systematic. Sharada's children were joined by their friends in the neighbourhood too (see image 21). At first, the black plastic moulds are cleaned of any dust and the extra edges of the mould need to be removed with a small pocket knife. On the one side, Sharada starts to insert aluminum contacts in each of the four slots of the piece. She then inserts a small black plastic stick across the four contacts. Next, she lifts the aluminum contacts vertically and inserts springs under each contact slot. Then she brings back the vertical aluminum contacts back to its horizontal position. Finally, she puts a cover on top of the mould. For the next step, she is helped by her son. The piece that she has made goes to her son, where he fixes and tightens screws at the end of each of the four slots. He uses screws that are simultaneously pre-fixed with fasteners by his sister and her friends. It takes roughly 5-10 minutes to make each piece and she is able to make 150 pieces per day for which, she is paid at the rate of Rs.0.75 per piece. Sharada says that she does not allow her children to take part in performing these tasks when their school is on, but only when they have vacations. Her only recommendation to improve her work life concerns having an electronic screwdriver to expedite the process of making the pieces. Sharada's husband owns a catering business and when he needs urgent help, he calls on her to supervise and work at the site. Sometimes this work involves chopping vegetables or serving guests. It is interesting to see the versatility of these workers who sometimes are engaged in assembling sophisticated electrical parts and at other times are engaged in managing a catering business, in addition to performing domestic chores.

Once Sharada's pieces are completed, she takes it across the street to her neighbour Alka Patil's house. Alka's home looks like a micro assembly industry of its own. There are different types of electrical materials, moulds and sacks of ready material all in one central room. She is helped by her 20 year old daughter Ashwini, and neighbours; Priyanka (40) and Meera (35). Sharada, and others like her in the same area, who have finished assembling their electrical parts, send them to Alka's house, where Ashwini has a challenging task to perform. She has to check each piece individually before approving it and then packing it in batches of 25. In the formal industry language, her task would be categorised as 'quality control' (see image 22). The packing job is a tedious one, and therefore, one woman can sit to pack no longer than an hour, after which the next one takes over. In addition to parts made by Sharada's family, Alka and the other three women in her home also make parts for servers, generators and battery backups. Alka's husband has a shop in the industrial area and gets these pieces for assembly. His wife brings them home for this purpose. Ashwini says that the forward linkage of the parts they make, eventually leads one to ABB Company in the Satpur area. Meera, their next-door neighbour is seen to be involved in a highly intricate task. She sits cross-legged on the floor with a machine in front of her. She has to pick up tiny screws and place them in two holes on a small metal plate. Using one hand to arrange these items, her second hand is engaged in turning pressing mechanism on a riveting machine in a semi-circular motion (see image 22). Her three-year old son roams about the work area as the women continue their work. Alka says that they are paid Rs. 60 for eight hours of work, in which they can complete the processing, quality control and packaging of 1200 pieces among four of them. During Diwali and other festivals, when the demand for electric and electronic goods is higher, they need to make larger volumes. They require a larger space so that more women perform these tasks together, thereby increasing their speed and the number of pieces made per day.

2. Cardboard folding

Six women sit in one of the worker's homes with thousands of cardboard boxes lying around them. The flat cardboard cut-outs neatly kept in a corner of the room need to be folded along perforated lines and the two

edges need to be pasted with an adhesive. Finally, they are packed in bundles of 50 pieces each. The box thus prepared would be used to package cooking oil in the manufacturing unit nearby. One of the six women is Devkibai Tavde, 45, who owns the house where the other women gather. Her husband works in a cardboard making unit and he brings 5000 pieces back home every day for folding. Other than Devkibai's daughter, Sheetal who is 24 years old, all the other women are over the age of 35.

The smallest size fetches the workers Rs.40 for 1000 pieces, the medium size fetches Rs. 50-60 for 1000 pieces and the largest size gets them Rs. 70 for 1000 pieces. Each worker can complete up to 1000 pieces per day. All of them say that space is the biggest issue and that they would like to include more women in this activity, but cannot do so for the want of space. Their necks, backs and hands ache from all the work and wonder if there are tools to facilitate mechanised pasting of these cardboard boxes.

3. Food processing

Suman Durgude, 65 and Kanchan Ingle, 38 stay not so far away from each other. They are both involved in cleaning and chopping/ dicing of vegetables which perhaps goes for food processing to a unit in the Ambad area. These vegetables include okra (ladyfinger/ *bhindi*), onions, bitter gourds, *gavar* beans, garlic and chillies among others. While the middleman drops the material in Suman's area by a tempo to be picked up by her and other individually, Kanchan has to go to another middleman's shop nearby to pick up the material. She brings home 15 kgs per trip. If there is urgency, the middleman too sometimes drops the material home, but that happens rarely. Either case, the middleman gives instructions on what needs to be done to the vegetables—chopping, dicing or slicing. For instance, in case of chillies; the top and bottom part need to be broken by hand as in the case of smaller okra, but the bigger okra need to be cut into rings. Kanchan keeps a small part of the vegetables daily, which she cooks for her family. While Suman is paid Rs.2.00 per kg, Kanchan is paid Re. 1.00 per kg. Even though the reason is not known, it is assumed that this might be the gap created by the difference in remuneration paid by the middleman to those who provide him the finished goods. The material is weighed by the use of stones that denote certain weights, and since there is no way to verify, the worker has to take the middleman's word for the weight quoted. Suman further added that sometimes when she submits a completed consignment of, for instance seven kgs and gets paid for that much, the middleman writes in his book of a payment made for eight kgs. Both women have complained of frequent cuts and bruises as the regular occupational hazard.

Elsewhere, a different kind of food processing activity is taking place. Hirabai Sonavane (40) and her 18 year old daughter Sunaina are busy cleaning up cashewnuts (see image 23). Pre-roasted cashews mixed with plenty of garbage are dropped off by the middleman at their place. Their task is to segregate the waste from the pile, coarsely pound the good ones with a stone rolling pin, sieve the heap bit-by-bit to clear most of the shells, remove the remaining shells by hand, separate the good ones from the mediocre and bad quality ones and group them, roughly break all the groups by hand and finally pack them in plastic bags. The entire process requires sitting and slouching combined with intensive pressure on the fingertips and distal edge of the nail plates. The TV is kept on but the lights and fan are kept off. Both Hirabai and her daughter complain of a round-the-year body rash and itching due to this work. For all these detailed steps involved in their work, they are paid Rs.6 per kg. If Hirabai sits to work alone, she can complete 5 kgs per day and with the help of her daughter, she can complete 7 kgs per day. She however, engages the daughter in this work only when her school is off during the vacation period.

In all the three cases related to food processing mentioned above, the women have to pack not just the completed, cleaned finished food products, but also need to return the garbage. This includes the tops and bottom parts of the chillies and other vegetables as well as the trash from the cashewnuts.

4. Tailoring

In one of their negotiations, LMKS leaders in Nashik have been able to provide livelihoods through tailoring work for their home based workers. They were in talks with Vijay Plast, a company that gave the members orders for stitching bags. Earlier, they were paid Rs.0.50 per bag, which was increased to Rs. 0.75 after their first attempts at negotiation, and the efforts in 2010 have resulted in an increase fetching them Re.1.00 per bag since 2011.

In Satpur area, Vijaya Patil, 35 is an entrepreneur who has put her tailoring training to good use. She gets orders for stitching 3-4 different types of cloth bags (see image 24). She buys the material from the main road area, cuts it on the floor as per order, stitches them on a sewing machine sitting on a chair and women go to her home to buy these bags. All costs included, one small bag comes to around Rs.35 and she sells it for Rs.70. In the absence of a middleman, she is able to keep the selling price lower than shops and still make a reasonable profit from the sale of each bag. Vijaya's husband is a rickshaw driver and she supplements his income and together, they run the household. In terms of physical problems, she complains of leg pain due to the sewing machine. She thinks that the problem with her trade is that of inconsistency of orders, since men and women place orders right before they have a travelling schedule. She therefore wonders if the state could help with some amount of marketing of her home made bags so that there is a steady inflow of orders not only from those whom she knows personally but from a larger market.

Another tailoring entrepreneur is Vandana More, 26, who takes orders for making saree blouses and ladies' [Indian] dresses, hemming and related sewing work. She was trained by a lady in the same area four years ago and soon after the she training started tailoring from her home, like 4-5 others in the area. Word-of-mouth publicity has helped Vandana in getting orders from relatives, friends and neighbours. People bring the material to her and she designs and stitches them according to their preferences. In a day she can stitch three blouses or one dress. For a blouse, she charges Rs.90 per piece and for a dress she charges Rs.100 per set. Her husband, who works as a driver, sometimes helps in putting hook and clasps on the stitched material. Vandana feels that if she has a better quality sewing machine, she could gets more orders and employ assistants to handle the increased order volumes.

5. Ironing clothes

Ratna Suryavanshi, 44, irons clothes at home. Her task involves standing at the table and pressing the clothes with a hot iron. She presently owns a heavy iron which needs a lot of energy to move around. She can complete ironing 9-10 sets of men's clothing (1 shirt and 1 pair of pants) and 9-10 sets of women's [Indian] clothing (1 blouse and 1 saree). She charges Rs. 6 per set of men's clothing and Rs. 15 per set of women's clothing. The demand for ironed clothes is much higher during festivals like Diwali. Her hands and legs ache from the standing and constant movement of the hands, but she takes frequent breaks to rest and then get back to work. Her husband works as a security guard and according to Ratna, is highly supportive of her home based work. Ratna's daughter works as one of the clerical staff at the LMKS office in the area.

6. Dron-making

Two of the respondents are involved in making *Drons*, or aluminium foil cups from their homes. They bought the machine required to make these cups, which cost Rs. 15000 (see image 25). Sangeeta Kajale, 33 and her sister Jaya Patil, 22 from one household and Manda Bansode, 40 are engaged in the process of dron-making. The task involves picking up the raw material which includes silver paper and coating paper. In the case of Sangeeta, the coating paper has some printed advertisements on the back, while Manda's coating paper is stronger and plain white in colour. They both have to buy the raw material. Sangeeta mentioned that she buys 10kgs worth of material at the rate of Rs. 465 per kg. The two kinds of paper come in large continuous sheets, which need to be marked and cut in accurate matching squares. Then, both pieces are kept on top of each other and placed under the mould bump of the machine. The lever at the bottom needs to be pushed by a foot for the mould to come down on the papers. This motion is backed by the heat generated by electricity and the two pieces are fixed together. The heat creases the edges of the dron/ aluminium foil cup and it is ready (see image 26). Finally, packets of 100 are made for sale. Sangeeta and her sister Jaya perform this task together, wherein one passes the square papers and the other places them under the machine and creates a *dron*. Every 30 minutes or so, they switch places, as the one near the machine has to sand continuously. In the case of Manda however, all the sub-tasks are performed solely by her.

Sangeeta gets Rs. 160 for making 1000 pieces while Manda gets Rs. 250 for making the same number of *drons*. Sangeeta and her sister Jaya complain of hand and wrist burns while inserting and removing the material in addition to pain through the spinal cord and legs. Manda however, has a more serious problem. She recently underwent a hysterectomy and has been asked to be away from the machine for at least six years, but due to the pressing financial situation at home, she has had to resume *dron*-making activities within six months of her surgery. She has two daughters, one of whom is being educated at an engineering college in Nashik. Manda has glorious dreams of her daughters earning a decent livelihood and a dignified life, all built on a strong foundation of specialised education. She says, 'I will make sure my daughters do not have a shortage of any facility when it comes to education. I want them to pursue higher education so that they never have to do the kind of work I have had to do and live the kind of life I have led.' Manda also feels that if there was an option of performing an easier home based task, it would be better, as it would at least mean relief from the persistent knee pain and leg pain for a task that pays so little. Sangeeta on the other hand, wishes to continue this kind of work and wants to build direct links with employers or sellers of her goods.

7. Plastic mug-making

Sadanand Amrutkar, 41 is one of the few male home-based workers one has met. He is an entrepreneur, whose entire family of five is involved in the production of plastic mugs (see image 27). Sadanand buys 500 kgs of broken plastic raw material from Natwarlal market in Mumbai at the rate of Rs. 55 per kg. The material usually consists of coarsely pounded discarded plastic items such as pens. The material is separated colour-wise. When he brings this material to his tiny cluttered home in Ambad, it goes through four steps of basic clearing and processing. The the material is first strained through a large rectangular filter (generally used on construction sites for filtering mud). It is then washed to remove any dust and other garbage. Then his mother, wife and 15 year-old mentally-challenged son help in segregating some undesirable plastic or metal pieces. Once this is done, he provides the coloured material with white recycled plastic beads to a factory in

Satpur area which has the moulds to make mugs. Each kilo of cleared raw material makes 20 mugs. Sadanand sells these mugs at the wholesale Crawford market of Mumbai at the rate of Rs.66 per dozen. Sadanand's 65-year old mother Sulochana wonders if there is a state pension scheme which would cover her and her now-paralysed husband and also some social security for the mentally challenged child. Sadanand wonders about procuring a loan from a bank which could act as capital for expanding his entrepreneurial activity.

8. Ballpoint pen assembly

In the past year, LMKS members in Shivaji Nagar managed to procure orders from Linx pen company. The task involved inserting the refill inside the pen, packing the end and turning and fixing the plastic nozzle at the top. Ranjana Jadhav, 39, used to pick up the separated material from the company located near her home, which had material that made 10,000 pens. She would keep some material for herself and distribute the rest to other women in the neighbourhood interested in doing this work. With the help of her two sons and one daughter, Ranjana was able to make 4000 pieces per day in approximately eight hours. She would get Rs. 30 upon completion of 1000 pens and therefore Rs.120 per day. Since she had dropped all the material in the neighbourhood, she would also collect the finished goods and drop them back in the company. She says that she paid the other workers in her area the same amount that she received per piece. Interestingly, the company would not provide pen-caps along with the rest of the material, for the fear that the workers would not bring them back and sell them directly. The orders from Linx have now stopped but Ranjana remembers a time when her thumbs and palms would get stiffened and there would be blisters all over her palms and fingers. In order to avoid stiffness of the shoulders and ankle, she would use a table and chair to sit and perform these tasks.

9. Cotton wick-making

Many women in the same area as Chitra Kshatriya's (38) are engaged in making wicks out of cotton wool (see image 28). These wicks are generally used for lighting lamps before deities and idols of worship. The task involves making tiny balls out of a big bunch of cotton wool, then squeezing the tips to make a wick-head. The middleman drops off the cotton wool and tapioca water required to perform this task. In order to make the wick-heads stiff, Chitra uses tapioca water. In the same area, Ratna Kothawade, 42 uses ash for the same purpose instead of tapioca water. She mentions that others in the area have issues due to the cotton lint floating around, but she does not. Chitra can make approximately 3000 cotton-wicks per day, in which she sets aside 2-3 hours only for this work. She is paid Rs. 10 for 1000 pieces. She realises that this is extremely low, but says she is doing it because she is 'needy' and 'wants to be self-reliant'.

10. Lottery chart making

Gaya Satav, 35 and Manisha Pawar, 26 are involved in an unusual activity. They paste coloured bits of paper on a lottery chart while sitting inside Gaya's house (see image 29). Each of these tiny coloured papers must have in it a smaller square paper denoting a picture of one of the images indicated on the chart. For instance, a tiny square paper may carry the image of a bird or a sun. Gaya and Manisha spread some glue on their fingers and pick up this tiny square, paste it inside pink or blue coloured paper which is carefully folded and then pasted on to the lottery chart. Gaya uses a steel pan for keeping the glue and an old discarded toothbrush to spread the glue on the lottery chart. She walks up to 10 minutes every day to pick up around 30 charts and these materials for the day. It takes her 15 minutes to complete pasting on an entire chart of

240 empty fields. Manisha, on the other hand is new to the trade and requires 30 minutes to complete one chart. They are paid Rs. 1.50 upon completion of one lottery chart. Both complain of severe neck and back aches, but they work at super fast speed as they speak. They think that the per-chart rate needs to be increased.

E. Saibaba Chowk, Ashok Chowk, Solapur

Located in the south-western part of Maharashtra, this city has in its vicinity some of the most frequented pilgrim sites in Tuljapur, Akkalkot and Ganngapur. For the longest time, Solapur has been known locally and globally for its top quality *chaddars* (thin blankets), bedsheets, towels and napkins. There is also a large workforce that is engaged in *beedi-making* (locally made cigarettes) in this district.

Introduction to Ashok Chowk

Ashok Chowk area of Solapur is part of the larger textile cluster of the district. It is a classic example of the interdependence of formal and informal sectors. It is also an example of one informal sector worker involved in various trades at the same time. For instance, a home-based worker is also a part time street vendor or a domestic worker. Rhythmic sounds of textile powerlooms fill the air. Poverty is an all-pervasive phenomenon, captured best in the words of Sarojini Tamshetty of Learn Mahila Kamgaar Sanghatana (LMKS), 'here people have homes, but nothing to eat'.

Organisations in Ashok Chowk

At the outset, it must be clarified that the home-based workers interviewed in Solapur were all members of LMKS. Before the organisation's foray into the area, no other organisations existed to represent the workers' voices. More recently, the NGO Jai-Jui headed by a powerful political family of Maharashtra, working towards empowerment of women and youth in Solapur had proposed that LMKS be included in the ambit of Jai-Jui's activities. LMKS refused this proposal and are continuing their activities independently. Today, LMKS has approximately 350 members, with the largest concentration in home-based garment workers (160).

Brief note on existing home-based trades

Of the 20 interviewees, the largest majority were directly involved in some type of garment work. Surprisingly, a large number of senior citizens were found to be involved directly or in a supportive role in some type of home based work in the area. The home based tasks in Ashok Chowk included stitching, spinning (thread-making), finishing, embellishment (of garment and carpets) and knitting. The second largest cohort was involved in entrepreneurial food processing such as *shengachatni-bhakri* making, vermicelli making, frying various kinds of wafers, papad-making, edible *rukhwat* pieces. Others were involved in *beedi*-rolling, broom making as well as making black-magic dolls out of disused garage material (such as inner tubes of tyres and discarded rickshaw seatcovers). Two of the respondents have been counted twice as they are involved in two home-based trades at a time. One of them was involved in two activities within the garment trade, namely, stitching and finishing and the other was involved in garment embellishment as well as food processing (*shengachatni bhakri*). LMKS also reported of workers who make wooden articles such as rollers and pins from home. Almost all the respondents clearly voiced the need of a 'yellow ration card' meant for households that are categorised as below poverty line, in addition to owning a home.

Description of trades in Ashok Chowk

1. Textile and Garment

Five kinds of stitching activities are undertaken by home based workers in Ashok Chowk, namely, towel stitching, night gown stitching, *satranji* knotting, decorative woollen knitting and quilt stitching.

- **Towel stitching**

Jayshree Burkule, a 26 year old married woman with a kid, describes the process. She walks to pick up the material from a towel manufacturing unit approximately 10 minutes away from her home. The material essentially includes a long running piece of pre-stitched towel cloth, which has perforated marking throughout (see image 30). Jayshree's task involves cutting the long bundle of cloth at the designated marking with a pair of scissors. Usually it takes two people to complete this task, which takes a full day (approximately eight hours). Once the cutting is completed, she has to hem all four sides of each piece on her rented sewing machine. This too, takes another full day's work. The hiring charges for the sewing machine are Rs.100 per month, and she has to incur expenses also for the thread required for hemming. The next step is to remove the extra loose threads on each piece so that it is ready for despatch. Each piece has to be neatly folded so that a pack of 100 sits edge-on-edge. Each bundle needs to be packed with two thick cotton straps for ease of picking up. The entire process of completing one long stretch containing 200 towels therefore takes four full days. Jayshree is paid Rs. 42 for 200 pieces and four days of work. Other than the cutting part where her mother-in-law helps, she does each of the steps by herself. Jayshree's husband is a brick-kiln worker and earns Rs.2500 per month. Her work takes a toll on her back and legs and she complains of constant head ache.

Sunita Burkule, 36, too is engaged in the same task as that of Jayshree, with the only difference that the pieces come pre-cut to Sunita. She starts her home-based work at 8 am and goes on until 10pm, with a single two-hour break from 12noon to 2pm, because those are the load-shedding hours. On an average day, Sunita completes hemming 300 pieces. She takes the help of her daughter for folding each piece neatly and pays her Rs.30 per week for her help. Sunita's doctors have claimed that due to the swelling on her uterus, she should not perform arduous tasks such as constant foot-work required on a sewing machine. She also suffers from persistent back ache due to constant sitting and slouching. Her husband works as a driver, but she does not know how much he earns. He gives her Rs. 300 per month as his contribution towards home expenses. She has high hopes from her son's engineering education, for which she took a loan of Rs.10,000 from her SHG through LMKS. In order to repay that and continue to keep the home fires burning, she has to keep working, despite her serious problems.

- **Night gown stitching**

Another area of garment work involves stitching of night gowns, performed by two of the interviewees. The task involves picking up of pre-cut pieces from a shop, adding the lining at the bust area, piping at the neck area, adding hook and clasp, sewing the label, stitching the sides lengthwise and finally adding a stitch at the end to sew the two different cloth materials together. It is assumed that these pieces are sold in the low-end markets of the district, mainly because the finished piece of night gown is an assembly of two to three different pieces of cloth (see image 31). For Jyoti Burkule, 25, each piece takes about 20 minutes, excluding

the commuting time to pickup and drop the material. She gets Rs.2 per piece. If she makes a mistake while stitching, in that, if the stitch indicating two different cloths turns out to be in the front side of the garment, she either does not get paid for it, or has to open the stitches and re-sew it. Her legs, lower back and head ache constantly. Another lady by the same in a different area, 29 years of age, now has shifted to this task. Previously, she was involved in spinning cotton yarn, but the lint floating around about her made her sick round the year. She has recently taken to stitching night gowns and finds it a “cleaner” option and hopes that it won’t be as taxing on her body as the previous trade.

- **Satranji tassel knotting**

Satranjis or local Indian carpets too are major textile item manufactured in Solapur. In Ashok Chowk, one worker was involved in tying knots of tassels at the rim of both ends of each *satranji* (see image 32). The manufacturer drops around 100 pieces per day. Each piece requires approximately 18 knots on either side (36 total). With the help of her three sons and at times also mother-in-law, Rekha Jadhav, 28, can complete around 50 pieces a day. In case of smaller *satranjis*, she gets Rs. 50 for 100 pieces and in case of larger *satranjis*, she gets Rs. 100 for 100 pieces. On most days, they work from 12pm until 1am, with frequent breaks. These breaks are required for Rekha to fill water from the public tap two hours per day, cooking, washing, cleaning and performing other domestic chores. The children go to school in this time. The work is resumed once they are back from school. The television is kept on while the work is being performed. The eldest son dislikes this strenuous work, but is afraid that his father might hit him if he sees him playing rather than tying the knots on the *satranjis*. Rekha’s husband used to be a daily wage porter, but now has an inconsistent job as a delivery agent of oil cans, acid cans and chemicals from one manufacturing unit to another in the area. He uses a bicycle to do the deliveries. In addition to back aches, Rekha complains of a huge sleep deficit emerging out of the long nights she and her entire family need to put in to complete orders.

**Drakshini Jaladi,
female, 78, widow, 2 children**

Drakshini Jaladi, a 78 year old Kannada lady, is the only respondent engaged in spinning cotton yarn. In her tiny home with walls made of corrugated aluminum sheets, she has a small cot, a miniscule kitchen and the little empty space starting at the entrance is fully occupied by her *charkha*, bundles of uncombed cotton and empty spools. Sunlight is the only source of illumination, which too is partially blocked by the cloths drying on a rope inside her home. In order to make neat spools of cotton yarn, she has to first begin by opening the uncombed cotton bundles (see image 33). This process involves thrusting both hands in the bundle and then dusting and stretching the bundle on all sides so as to open it up before mounting on the wheel of the *charkha*. It releases lint about her house, but she does not see this as a problem. After mounting, she has to keep holding the loose end of the uncombed cotton bundle between the thumb and index finger of one hand while she spins the *charkha* with the other. 12 spools of cotton yarn fetch her Rs. 30 and it takes her one hour to complete one spool. Upon asking for recommendations that could potentially help her, she mentioned that at her age, she should technically be entitled to a pension, which so far, she has not received. Her husband, now deceased, had taken a loan shortly before he passed away and now the burden of repaying that has fallen on her shoulders. She does not have a ration card which means that her access to affordable foodgrains and provisions is inexistent. The union is helping her with the loan issue, but her overall working and living conditions remain pitiable.

- **Decorative woollen knitting**

Yamuna Birajdar is an orthopedically challenged 30-year old unmarried woman. She has had polio ever since her childhood. She is involved in creatively knitting woollen items such as *toran* (door hanging), curtains, dish covers (also called *Paavad*), phone covers and bags. So far Yamuna has been knitting for one person who further sells her items to shops in the city. In a day, she can complete knitting of 1 *toran* or 3 dish covers. The half-curtain requires 7 days to complete, while a full curtain may take up to 15 days. In case of a *toran* she gets Rs. 10 per piece (see image 35), for a dish-cover/ phone-cover (see image 34) she gets Rs.6 per piece, a half-curtain fetches her Rs.10 while the full curtain brings in Rs.20 per piece. Yamuna has to limp 30 minutes every day to pick up the material and know what to make. The material includes only the uncombed bundle of woollen yarn. Upon her return, [she has to separate the woollen bundle and make it into a tangle-free ball](#), which she uses for knitting several items. This task takes about two hours. Then she starts the actual knitting work. Sometimes when Yamuna's mother goes to pick up the material, it takes her half the time to bring it back. Yamuna's fingertips and the distal edge of her nail plate are cracked and particularly hurt due to the knitting work. In addition, she suffers from tearing eyes, shoulder pain and severe back ache. She is consumed by the workload at some points, and at other times there is nothing to do. She feels that she does not make even the basic minimum out of this work and wants a desk job in some office instead.

**Yellava Chavan,
female, 35, married-abandoned, 7 children**

Yellava is a single mother with five daughters and two sons. All of her children go to school. Her husband is a truck driver in Mumbai who lives there with his second wife. In the absence of the head of the household, the burden of running such a large family has fallen on Yellava's shoulders. Aware of her desperate situation, four of her seven children help her in making ends meet. Yellava is a home based garment finishing worker, involved in cutting loose threads from cut-outs of shirt materials supplied to her by a shirt manufacturing factory near her home. Earlier, she used to go to the company herself to pickup and drop the material, but now two of her daughters Bharti (12) and Kirti (11) do this work. The task involves using a cutter to cut off the loose threads and removing pieces of newspaper from the back of the embroidered side. The surprising fact is; her remuneration is not based on the number of pieces, but a weekly lumpsum. No matter how many or how few pieces she cleans, the amount per week is set at Rs.200-250 if the order is big (consisting of 200-250) pieces. If the order is small (100-125) pieces, she is paid Rs. 180.

But that's not all. Yellava is also a domestic worker. She works in three households washing clothes, while one of her accompanying daughters washes utensils. For their joint efforts, they are paid Rs. 250 per month per family. Her 9 year old son, works part time in a shirt factory, where his task is inserting buttons in their corresponding buttonholes. He leaves for school at 7am and after his school ends, he comes home for a quick lunch. He reports to the factory at 1pm and works there until 7pm. In a day, he manages to complete one bundle, which he says has approximately twenty shirts. He is paid Rs.20 per bundle.

In a situation of such a grave financial crisis in her home, Yellava's husband's remittance of Rs.2000 every six months, pays for very little. She does not have a ration card and has to buy provisions at an unaffordable price and kerosene in black at Rs.40 per litre. There is also a problem of accessing water, and her daughters walk to a government tap further away from their home to avoid daily fights with the neighbours at a nearby tap. She feels dizzy, has low blood pressure and her hands go numb often. Both her daughters complain of headache, handaches and leg pain. Since this interview was the first time someone listened to her story, she could not control her tears.

- **Quilt making**

By Yamuna's side quietly sits her sister-in-law Bhauramma, who is now 25 years old. She is a quilt-maker. Women in her area come to her with old sarees that she transforms into warm comfortable quilts (see image 36). The task involves placing four sarees of the same length on top of each other, edge-to-edge. The four sides are coarsely sewn together with the help of a big needle and a weak thread. Once they are patched together, Bhauramma puts the single piece under a sewing machine and a quilt is ready. The finishing work includes removal of weak threads used in the beginning to make the sarees into a single piece of quilt. She has monthly expenses for performing this work, which include a rental of Rs. 250 for the sewing machine and Rs.70 for the thread. She manages to make two quilts in one month and sells each piece for Rs. 80. Her mother-in-law helps her and Yamuna with additional help required in making these items. Her father-in-law used to be a mill worker but after retirement, he now performs odd jobs. Her husband used to be a wireman/ electrician, but after a near-fatal accident, he has been unemployed. Bhauramma and Yamuna are therefore the sole earners in the family, helped and supported in their trade by the mother and small contributions from the father, depending on the jobs he gets. Back ache, shoulder ache and eye pain are her constant complaints, but in the absence of alternatives, she chooses to not voice them out.

2. Food processing

Food-processing is found to be the second largest cohort among the respondents of Ashok Chowk. Women workers were involved in diverse activities, namely, vermicelli-making (*seviyan*), *papad*-making, *supari*-cutting (betelnut) and frying snacks. Almost all of these activities, other than the *supari*-cutting were entrepreneurial.

- **Vermicelli making**

Kashibai Pujari, approximately 60 years of age makes vermicelli at home (see image 37). Her cluttered house has walls made of corrugated aluminum sheets and hardly any space to stand or sit. One of her three sons and his wife live with her in this tiny space, which has a cot and a kitchen. She also owns two goats. Kashibai buys all the material required for the vermicelli and recently bought a vermicelli-maker (machine) for Rs.17000. She proudly talks of using nobody's help or favours, but pouring her life-savings in buying this machine. The process of making vermicelli involves mixing of semolina (cream of wheat) with water and salt and passing it through the machine. She needs to stand near the machine and keep pouring the dough while the machine produces thin lines of wet vermicelli at the bottom. She requires the help of another person in collecting the vermicelli as it comes out, for drying on ropes and long wooden sticks. These ropes are tied to different hooks in the house, and the wooden sticks are rested on a large aluminum container, normally used in Indian households for storing food items.

Once the vermicelli is dried, it is weighed using a basic Indian weighing scale. Kashibai then inserts 500 gm in plastic packets and they are ready for sale. She also buys uncooked papads from papad entrepreneurs in the area so that she can sell both items to her customers. Her logic is, people do not buy only one item, so it is better to have at least two items to sell. Carrying a basket on her head, she goes door-to-door with packets of home-made vermicelli and *papads*, and in effect, she becomes an ambulatory vendor. She charges Rs.20 for a packet of vermicelli. The son who lives with her works in a *chadar* manufacturing unit while his wife cuts and

hems towels at home. Kashibai complains of no other health problem other than the strain on her eyes. She wishes that at her age, she got some financial help from the state per month and pointing to the congested household space, also wishes for special aid towards better housing facility.

- **Rukhwat making**

Rukhwat, a specialty of Maharashtrian and Kannadiga weddings, involves a display of a series of items, which are traditionally meant to be a bride's trousseau. These may include clothes, food items, accessories and decorative display items. One special *rukhwat* item is called *Nakolya or Pardi or Botve*. These are food items made with a mixture of semolina and white flour. The laborious process of making these items involves pressing and rolling the dough in tiny shapes one-by-one. These shapes include rose, spiral, flat circle, shell, deer antler, semi-circle, dots and *katori*. One of the palms is used for laying the tiny balls of dough and the palm and fingers are used for pressing or rolling it, depending on the design order. Basic tools such as comb-teeth, matchstick heads, shells are used to help with the design of each piece (see image 38). Once the shapes are rolled out, they are left for drying in the sun, after which they are packed in different quantities (250gm, 500gm, 1kg). Sridevi Hanugunde, 35, a mother of six children is involved in making these items along with all the women in her family, which include two sisters-in-law and mother-in-law are involved in making these items. They charge Rs. 100 per kilo of these items when all these women jointly produce them.

- **Fried snacks making**

Not far away from Sridevi's home is Lohmani Devar's household. A 42 year old home based food-processing entrepreneur, she engages her entire family of two sons and a daughter-in-law in frying and packing snacks. Lohmani buys unfried packets of snacks from a factory nearby. These are in the shapes of pipes, nets, squares and small balls. One of her sons engages in frying while the other son and daughter-in-law pack the fried snacks in plastic bags (see image 39). Lohmani incurs costs in buying the unfried packets of snack, cooking oil, kerosene and wood-shavings. Further, the monthly rental on her home is Rs. 2000 and electricity bill is Rs. 400. She has a *pucca* house where she ties large bundles containing packets of unfried snacks to the ceiling on hooks. Incidentally, the mosquito net protecting her grandson is tied to the same ceiling hook as well (see image 40). The outside area has a shed made of corrugated aluminum sheets. Local music is constantly playing on a tiny music system in this shed. At one corner of the shed is the frying area, which is fed with wood-shavings. A large wok sits atop the burner and snacks are fried in it by one of Lohmani's sons. They are emptied on a large floor mat, where the other son and his wife rapidly pack a specified number in thin plastic packets. Hawkers and shop-keepers pick them up from her shed at the rate of Rs.65 for a dozen. In a day, she manages to sell 15 dozens. Lohmani complains of cough and cold issues persisting throughout the year. The shed too, gets warm and stuffy, because it has poor ventilation, especially in the frying area. She says that one of her sons does not like to do this job, but he does not have an alternative employment plan. Lohmani wishes that her son gets a better job elsewhere, and she gets a home she can call her own.

- **Shengachatni-bhakri making**

Shengachatni-bhakri is a popular dish in the Solapur region. *Shengachatni* is a mixture of powdered groundnut, cumin seeds, garlic, sesame and chilli powder. *Bhakri* is a thick Indian bread made of different kinds of millets such as jowar or bajra or ragi. *Shengachatni* is usually served as an accompaniment with a

Bhakri. The groundnuts need to be roasted and which eases the removal of its outer cover. The sesame is roasted too. These two ingredients are then pounded in a heavy mortar-and-pestle made of stone. Finely ground, they are then mixed with the rest of the ingredients. Usually *Shengachatni* has a long shelf-life. The same is not the case of a *bhakri*. Finely ground millet is mixed with water and tapped gently on hot iron plates to make flat breads or *bhakris*. They can stay in an edible condition up to 2 days in areas with a dry climate, whereas in humid areas they can stay fresh no more than a day. Seema Tamakey, 28, is engaged in making *Shengachatni-bhakri* which she sells directly to shops. She incurs expenses in buying the ingredients for both. She is able to make 50 *bhakris* per day and sells them at Rs. 4 per piece, while the price for the *Shengachatni* varies. In addition to being a food-processing home based worker, Seema is also a garment embellishment worker. For embellishing a cloth sling bag with beads and sequins, she gets Rs.1.6 per piece, which takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. While her hands are involved in heavy work in case of the *Shengachatni-bhakri*, and precision-work in case of the garment embellishment work, she only wishes she had access to a yellow ration card.

In addition to the above trades in the area of food processing, there are women involved in cutting betelnuts with a betelnut cutter and making *papads*.

3. Broom making

Two women, Tukubai Kunchikurve (60) and Akawwa Kadaar (65), sit outside their homes in an open area making small whisk-brooms (see image 41). Also called *shirayis* in some parts of Maharashtra, these brooms are made from reed-like dried grass. Either they get the dried grass from the jungles themselves, or buy it from farmers in the nearby rural areas at the rate of Rs.25 per bundle. The process begins with the clearing the grass bundles. The basic cleaning of rotten parts is followed by fine-combing or ‘polishing’ to remove any uneven layers. A special handmade tool is used for polishing. This tool is a piece of wood, mounted with approximately 25 nails with the pointed side upward, atop a taut velcro. This is a customised order made specifically for this job by the local cobbler for Rs.150. After cleaning and polishing, the grass is cut with a heavy iron knife. After neatly laying one streak on top of the other, the base of the broom is tied individually with the use of an iron stick in the ground. Each whisk-broom is sold by these women at Rs.3. They carry these brooms on their heads and go shop-to-shop to sell them. On a good day, they end up selling 20-25 pieces. The trade requires constant sitting, which stiffens their lower-back and creates tension in the shoulder area. Further, thorns pierce through their hands and arms while cleaning the grass. Their fingertips and palms have rashes and blisters most part of the year, which are only aggravated while performing additional domestic chores. After the brooms are ready, they carry them on their heads in the hot sun, walking several miles in order to sell most of their items, if not all. Their only idea to ease the burden is that of procuring a yellow ration card. Several women in the area are involved in making these whisk-brooms.

4. Beedi rolling

Even though the CPI (M) under the leadership of MLA Narasayya Adam (also known as Adam Master) and the NGO Jai-Jui work for the *beedi* workers’ cause as one of the central issues, their organisations’ presence was not felt in the areas examined. Vimla Seral, 40, is a *beedi* roller in the Ashok Chowk area who works from 8am to 8pm to roll 1000 *beedis*. She gets Rs. 94 for every 1000 *beedis* rolled, which marks her per *beedi* remuneration at Rs. 0.094; which means she gets nearer 1 paisa per *beedi*. This is extremely low, given that

the process of rolling is elaborate and her living conditions are dismal too. Most days she operates in very low lighting. She gets leaves, tobacco and thread from the factory. The leaves have to be cut in rectangular shapes based on a mould and soaked overnight. The next day, she keeps a sieve in her lap with the soaked rectangular pieces of leaves, coarsely torn tobacco leaves and a roll of green silken thread. Her legs are in this stretched position for a long time, while she rolls each *beedi* and ties it at a fast pace (see image 42). Her hand back and neck are permanently aching, and even though she doesn't mention it, it must be particularly difficult to work in a congested household with corrugated aluminum walls, low lighting and inhaling of tobacco all day.

5. Black-magic doll making

Who would have thought that the discarded pieces of tyre tubes and rickshaw seat-covers could be used once they were thrown away by a garage? Nirmala Sutar, 60, talks of her neighbour Sharada Jhaveri, 50, who scouts such material from a garbage dump near a garage. Most times, she gets lucky, but at other times, she asks the wastepickers in the area to provide her with these materials, provided they are all black in colour. She pays the wastepickers Rs. 25 to bring her the black rubber or foam material. Further, she buys discarded shreds and strips of cloth material from local tailors at the rate of Rs. 4 per kg. Sharada cuts small and big pieces of the black rubber based on a mould designed to make black-magic doll. Once the cutting is completed, Sharada sends the cut-outs and the cloth shreds over to Nirmala who does the stitching by hand. Nirmala starts stitching from the bottom and as she makes her way up, she keeps filling the doll with cloth strips, before finally sewing all ends (see image 43). She is paid Rs.2 for stitching the smallest piece, Rs. 10 for stitching a medium size piece and Rs.20 for sewing a large piece. Once the pieces are completely sewn, they go back to Sharada for painting the face of the doll. It is not known how much the selling price of these pieces, but this is a great example of recycling of waste by home-based workers and its re-use in creative ways.

Concluding remarks

The mapping exercise brought to light the fact that women form a large majority of those involved in home based work in Maharashtra. No matter which task, it tends to be extremely low-paid, with often the workers incurring extra costs to perform the tasks. In Solapur, many senior citizens performed a number of home-based tasks and had no relief from the state in this age. On the other hand, in several slums of Dharavi, adolescent girls were found to have a large involvement in home based trades. One also came across some physically challenged workers engaged in home based work. In Solapur workers were found to cross boundaries of trade, in the sense that they were home based worker and domestic worker at the same time, or home based worker and street vendor at the same time, or engaged in two different kinds of home based trades at the same time. Even so, they found it difficult to make ends meet.

Size of the houses was smallest in Mumbai and the congestion was only made worse by miserable civic amenities such as access to proper water, sanitation, and sewage disposal and healthcare. In areas such as Amrut Nagar, these conditions had a more profound impact. This is because the local elected representative had little say in the matter regarding water, for instance; while the internal division president (*vibhaag pramukh*) was the prime decision maker in all aspects, including the distribution of resources. This kind of local power dynamics has a far-reaching impact on the lives of people, and therefore, the work and life of also the home based workers.

Almost all the workers complained of severe upper and lower back aches, hand aches, leg pain, and some specifically mentioned eye-irritation and diminishing vision. Continuous standing and/or sitting position is required and very few workers did not slouch. Children in almost all cases were school-going, and also helped in home-based work. If the children were small, childcare and supervision happened right alongside the work. In the absence of a crèche or a child day-care centre facility, this was the only option available.

Hardly any organisations were found to represent home based workers in most of the areas. This is an important issue because the increasing numbers of home based workers have not had any voice over the past several years. One of the respondents was overwhelmed by own narration of her difficulties and broke down. This indicates that all their absorbed deprivation and desperation which has so far been bottled up, requires venting out. This is only possible if workers come together and are organised. With the exception of SEWA, national federations of trade unions too have largely ignored this large cohort of workers. In order to realise the ideals enshrined in the ILO (1996) C177 Home Work Convention, it is important that workers are identified through mapping exercises and organised. This would help in identifying both general and specific issues and taking concrete steps towards resolving them by use of various strategies, one of which could be the convention.

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Annexure I

Questionnaire

1. Name, Age

2. Place of Work: Home/ Outside/ Other

3. Type of Work:

4. Whether picked up by them or dropped by someone (like a middleman)

5. Posture:

6. Problems: Health related/ Trade related/ Other

7. a. Involvement of other members: Y/N

b. If yes, who? Children (whether studying or not)/ family members/ extended family/ neighbours

c. Exact role

8. Spouse's occupation and income?

9. Main earners of the family:

10. Suggestions for improvement:

Annexure II

Photos



Image 1: Dupatta Tassels



Image 2: Childcare around home based work



Image 3: Rakhi tassels



Image 4: Necklace Golden thread



Image 5: Red Thread



Image 6: Necklace Tassel Red Thread



Image 7: Charak



Image 8: Red Adjusting Mechanism



Image 9: Gas Lamp Mantles



Image 10: Keychain assembly



Image 11: Papads drying in the sun on inverted baskets



Image 12: Drying Papads on shanty roof



Image 13: Hook used for drying papads in monsoon



Image 14: Papads dried in courtyard



Image 15: Sequins, beads embroidery on frock



Image 16: tanzanite rhinestone Swarovski-like glass crystals



Image 17: Brooch for fancy footwear



Image 18: Nylon thread is used to sew the brooch on leather discs



Image 19: Garment Embellishment with sequins, beads and stones



Image 20: Clay-lamp painting



Image 21: Assembly of three phase contactors



Image 22: Riveting (L) and Quality control + packaging (R)



Image 23: Cashewnut clearing



Image 24: Cloth handbag tailoring



Image 25: Dron making machine



Image 26: Dron/ aluminum foil cup making



Image 27: Plastic mug-making



Image 28: Cotton-wick making



Image 29: Lottery chart-making



Image 30: Perforated marking on towel bundle



Image 31: Night gown stitching



Image 32: Satranji tassel knotting



Image 33: Spinning Cotton Yarn



Image 34: Woollen knitting- Toran



Image 35: Woollen knitting- Toran



Image 36: Quilt-making from old sarees



Image 37: Vermicelli making



Image 38: Rukhwat making- shell shape



Image 39: Fried snacks-making



Image 40: Childcare around home based work



Image 41: Broom making



Image 42: Beedi-rolling



Image 43: Black magic doll-making from discarded tyre tube and rickshaw seat cover