

Home-based Worker's Oral History



"Because only the wealthy are allowed to dream..."

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Translated by Shreeya Joshi.

Naseem, 40 years, is a home-based sequins embellisher in Nagpur city's Taj Bagh area. She studied until class 10th, and didn't consider continuing her education: *"I didn't see the point of studying further. Even to complete class 10, the family had to work hard. My mother paid for our education by washing dishes at people's homes. My father was an alcoholic so it was very hard on my mother... it led to great financial hardship."* Reflecting a bit more on her memories of her mother, Naseem critiques and questions the social order in which only the rich can afford to have dreams that they can realise: *"Because only the wealthy are allowed to dream... but how about us? My mother got married when she was very young. Once she got married, there was no time left for dreams, therefore I had never witnessed someone dreaming about their future."*

Naseem has been married for 23 years and has two children. Her husband previously worked as a daily-wage worker. Through his savings from that job, he purchased a rickshaw. Now he is a rickshaw driver. Naseem and her family live in a self-owned house in a nuclear family.

Naseem has been involved in home-based sequins embellishment work consistently for the last ten years. She acquires the materials from a contractor in Pardi area in Nagpur city. She brings 60 pieces at a time, earning between Rs. 2 and 5 per piece. She then distributes the material to about 10 women home-based workers who embellish garments with the sequins. Every day, she makes about Rs. 100. When asked about more information about the sequins embellishment supply chain, Naseem says, *"I never tried to find out more information (from the contractor); he merely provides me the materials and I pass them on to other women workers. I never questioned him about where he got the materials."*

Naseem works on home-based sequins embellishment work for 4 hours in the afternoon from 1 to 5 pm. Naseem is proud that despite applying sequins to clothing for the past ten years, her eyes have not got worse. To see up close, she started using glasses. Naseem reveals the key to her good health: *"I am aware of how to do my job well, but many women who work for a long time choose to remain in the same sitting position, which causes back issues. I don't sit for long hours attaching sequins; instead, I regularly stand up, which hasn't yet contributed to my back issues."*

Frequently, the women who pick up materials from Naseem are in need of cash, so she offers them some help because the payment for this type of work is given when the job is finished. *"No one can predict when someone will need anything, so if I don't provide for their needs, then our relationship will also suffer. As a result, I have to take care of these things; frequently, women's husbands will ask and harrass them for money to buy alcohol. Women leave their earnings with me for a month to two months because they know that when they need it, they will find their money safely saved up with me for the hardwork they do for months."*

Following the inspection of the well-made materials, Naseem is also responsible for their delivery, with assistance from my husband. Speaking about reasons she chooses home-based work, Naseem says, *"My husband lends a great deal of help, which makes my job easier. I've never considered doing other jobs because I can do this one whenever I choose and it includes taking care of my house. It is a dry job that doesn't involve getting wet (avoiding sickness). Many women who have husbands who forbid their wives from leaving the house can work from home with this job; for these women, the only thing accessible for a livelihood is home-based work."*