

## Home-based Worker's Oral History



### Feeding migrants in the city, yet hand-to-mouth herself: Mumbai's Rafiya

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Rafiya, 35 years, engages in two types of home-based work; a home-based catering business, and sequins-embellishment on garments. Rafiya hails from Sitapur village in Uttar Pradesh. Her husband works in a shop that makes ties. She is a mother of four children.

Originally, Rafiya's home-based catering service provided meals for 25 customers. When she had the time, she would take up orders on embellishing garments with sequins. She was able to support herself with these two home-based occupations. But, disaster struck when Covid-19 pandemic entered our lives. Rafiya's catering business came to a grinding halt, and the sequins embellishment work disappeared. Not having any savings to fall back on, Rafiya had to borrow money from her family members and other sources to cover her daily costs as a result of her complete loss of income. She was able to resume her business when the lockdown was lifted, but only 15 customers remained. She is doing her best to retain her customer-base, but it is harder because a majority of her subscribers were migrant bachelors in Dharavi, who were

forced to return to their villages when their factories in the slum closed down. This is continuing to impact Rafiya's income three years after COVID first started. She is making every effort to repay the debts she received from several sources. The sequins embellishment work has resumed, though at lower capacity too. She embellishes *dupattas* and other garments, for which she receives Rs. 2 per piece and Rs. 7 for bigger pieces. Apart from this work, Rafiya also embroiders flowery motifs on sheets and other fabrics.

Rafiya recalls the time when she got married twelve years ago, *"I had a lot of difficulties giving birth to my first child. I now experience back and stomach issues when I sit down for this work. Due to pre-natal complications, I am also not allowed to move heavy items..."*

Rafiya and her family live in a rented house in Dharavi which is divided into two parts. The upper section of the house is rented by another family. Her electricity costs are extremely high at about Rs. 1,500 per month, and they pay Rs. 4,500 a month as rent. While these expenses of the electricity bill should have been split between the two families, Rafiya pays the whole amount. She realised this during a field visit by an LMKS leader, who explained that she need not bear the expenses of electricity alone. Her landlord in turn finally cut her rental charges when she complained against it, with the support and information provided by her union.

