

Home-based Worker's Oral History



Inner Beauty: Home-based worker Anita from Nashik

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Anita, 29 years, runs a beauty parlour from home. She has two children in kindergarten and third grade respectively, her husband works for a local company, and her in-laws also live with them. She has to look after the entire family.

Anita was married at 18, and one year later, she finished her cosmetology training. The year after that when she turned 20, she began to take lessons on tailoring. After the birth of her first daughter at 21, Anita opened her small beauty parlour, and also started sewing clothes. She was doing two home-based jobs, and looked after her newborn, performed all domestic chores, and did care-work for her ailing in-laws. This shows the range of tasks and responsibilities

shouldered by urban poor home-based workers in India's slums. Neither does their effort get recognised, nor do they ever get any visibility from the government and society.

A beauty parlour is a business run by a woman that offers all types of women services including facials, make-up, and hair styling. There are two categories in the sector: formal and informal. In India, the majority of beauty salons are in the informal sector. Women have had several employment opportunities in this field. Anita's beauty salon brings in between Rs.200 and 250 every day. She requires a monthly expenditure of Rs. 3,000–5,000 to buy the beauty products. After gaining seven years of experience and modest success in her home-based beauty parlour business, she has recently rented a tiny shop close to her residence and runs her parlour from there.

During the lockdown, Anita provided free training to 15 young girls. She is one of the youngest members of the LEARN Mahila Kamgar Sanghatana in Nashik. Her participation in the union has helped her get a deep understanding of the importance of collectivisation. The women members and leaders of the union support each other as they advance in their lives by empowering them to speak up for themselves and for one another.

Taking lessons from her life experience Anita shares her thoughts, *"Every woman should develop her own unique identity and be able to stand on her feet. Women are capable of caring for both their children and their professions. I want women to unite and support one another. Only when we stand up for each other, and alongside one another, can we make progress."*

The informal sector gives scope for women such as Anita to establish their own beauty parlour business, and also undertake students for training. Anita did not stop at just that, but also had the courage to share her knowledge with the members of her community. Furthermore, her story highlights the non-material benefits of participation in union's activities, which are often more meaningful in the long-run and serve as the glue that keeps the solidarity of their collective intact. Active members such as Anita actively participate in group meetings and mobilisation activities and feel enriched and empowered through these experiences. It motivates them to further contribute to the movement and involve the women in their community through knowledge sharing, collective action and solidarity.