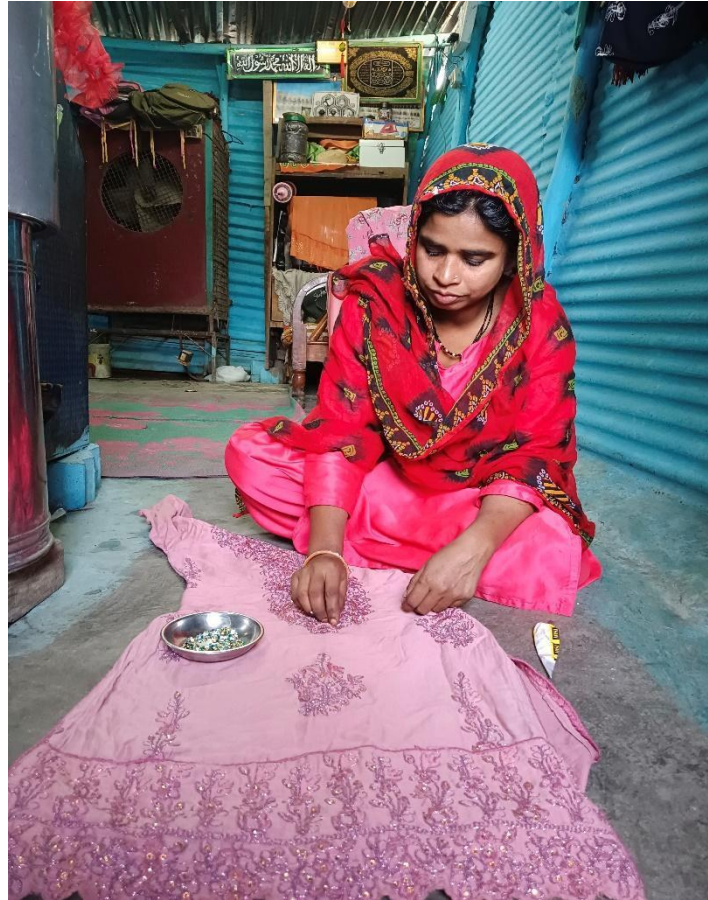


Home-based Worker's Oral History



Nagpur's Sequins-embellisher shares her trials and tribulations

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Rizwana, 32 years, is a home-based sequins embellisher, from Malagi Nagar in Nagpur city. She has completed schooling up to 9th grade.

When Rizwana first started embellishment work on garments, she earned Rs. 2 per piece for extremely intricate work that took very long hours to complete each piece. Her school-going daughter has been supporting her in this laborious exercise, who does not get paid anything extra for her additional hours and effort. It is commonplace to find unpaid family labour—particularly children and seniors—contributing to home-based work across India. Initially, the mother-daughter duo earned Rs. 50 per day together. As years passed and their experience grew, the piece-rates increased to Rs. 5 per piece. The tedious work is performed in their small one-room home, where cooking, cleaning, embellishing, and drying of garments occurs in close quarters.

Rizwana's husband is a rickshaw driver. Opening up about life-changing events, Rizwana says, *"The first few years of my marriage were turbulent. After dropping out of school due to restrictions at home, I enrolled in a tailoring class. Within 6 months, I was married off by my*

parents. My husband did not work, so there were no earnings. My in-laws started pressuring and torturing me. At a young age, I was forced to bear the entire responsibility of running the household, while also facing complete constraints on mobility out of the house. Things took a worse turn when I was pregnant with my daughter. One day, my husband and in-laws physically abused me and threw me out of the house. My health started to deteriorate. When my parents found out about my situation, they approached the local police station. My case got registered, and I was directed toward the Mahila Sampudeshan Kendra (Women Support Cell) for redressal. It was resolved that my husband and I should move out of my in-laws place, and live separately so as to start our family life away from them.” Then they got a one-room house, where Rizwana began the sequins embellishment work.

Rizwana also complains of chronic back pain. She says, “*Tikli chipkane ke kaam mein mehnat bahut hain, par daam kum he jisse humara mehntana bhi nahi milta he... meri bachhi bhi yeh kaam karti hain, par ab mein usse rokti hoon ki woh ye kaam na karein... mein chahati hu ki mujhe jiss tarah se shareer me dikkat ho rahi he woh dikkat mere bachhi ko bhi na ho... Sarkar ke pass humare liye koi yojna bhi nahi hain jiss karan se hum vanchit hain*” (There is a lot of hard work in sequins embellishment work and you get dismal piece-rate... we (home-based workers) do not even have a monthly salary. My daughter also does this work, but now I stop her so that she does not continue it... I do not want my children to suffer from body ailments like I do. The government does not have any policy for us, so we remain precarious.).

Rizwana sees the piece-rate embellishment works as a means to support her household, but also acknowledges the limitations and challenges posed by this type of work. While it is a viable livelihood option, home-based work is unable to fetch a decent income and is characterised by dismal working conditions for the poor in the urban slums. These limitations percolate deeper into the lives of home-based workers and may lead to larger problems of multigenerational poverty. With no safety net and social protection, home-based workers are hanging by a thread and find themselves constantly in a vulnerable position.