

Home-based Worker's Oral History



From child-bride to an independent woman: Radha's quest for dignity

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Radha, 63 years, runs a small home-based laundry shop with her husband. She was married as a child, when she was just 8 years old. Now Radha lives with her husband, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. Her grandson is studying in 8th grade and her granddaughter is in high school.

Radha's husband earned a very low salary at a local company after they got married. However, the business closed, and he lost his job. He couldn't find another job. As a result, they started a little store in their home, providing ironing services. This would become their main source of livelihood for the rest of their lives.

Radha collects clothing from her customers by going door-to-door. After returning home with a pile of clothes, she assists her husband in ironing them. She then begins her journey again, this time to return the well-ironed and carefully folded clothes back. She earns around Rs.2000-3000 per month from the home-based laundry shop. They use a traditional coal iron for the best quality of service, but it ends up creating irritation and burning of the eyes. She complains, *"Coal prices are growing steadily... One kilogram of coal costs me Rs. 35, which lowers my earnings and renders all that work futile."* As she ages, Radha and her husband also complain of excruciating knee pain and hand burns.

Radha lost her only son to cancer a few years ago. Radha, a regular and active participant in the LEARN informal women workers collective, resorted to the group for assistance and support during those trying times. She went to the leaders with her daughter-in-law to seek their assistance. Her daughter-in-law registered for the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Pension Scheme¹ with the union's assistance and started receiving a monthly pension of Rs. 1000. Her daughter-in-law also started working as a domestic worker to support her family and pay for the schooling of her kids. The union's support has made Radha and her daughter-in-law more confident.

The incident not only serves as an example of the benefits of effective linkages to relevant government schemes like the Niradhar Pension Scheme, but it also emphasises the function of grassroots women workers' unions in facilitating government-supported financial inclusion for the working poor. Due to lack of knowledge, as well as holes and delays in bureaucratic procedures, women workers in the informal economy are often unable to get financial support from formal institutions. Women like Radha may overcome these barriers and utilise their social security entitlements to live with dignity. Her union supports her in this very endeavour.

¹ This scheme was introduced to provide financial assistance to destitute persons, blind, disabled, orphan children, persons suffering from major illnesses, divorced women, abandoned women, women freed from prostitution, outraged women, Transgender, etc. The persons below the age of 65 years and annual family income upto Rs. 21,000/- are eligible to apply for this scheme.