

“Jobless and Helpless”

By Lalitaben Shankarlal Rana
(Diamond Polishing)



I was very happy, when I got work as a diamond polisher with Sonal Diamond, in 1988, in Ahmedabad city. Prior to this, I had undergone a 3 months training course in diamond polishing from Mahalaxmi Diamond Works, Ahmedabad.

But – the recent financial crisis has brought an end to my happiness!!!
DIAMOND FACTORIES HAVE CLOSED DOWN.

I am 48 years old and have studied up to class 12. I got married at the age of 17, in Mehsana District, Gujarat. My husband was a construction worker in Mehsana. As his earnings were not sufficient, we moved to my father’s house, in Ahmedabad. I started making Agarbatti (incense sticks) in a factory in Ahmedabad and was earning Rs700 per month (USD14.50)¹. My husband worked as a security guard and was earning Rs1200 per month (USD24.80). We have four daughters who are 24, 20, 18, and 12 years old.

¹ <http://www.rbi.org.in/home.aspx#>

Exchange rate, RBI reference rate – INR/1USD; 48.3500

Initially, I was able to earn Rs75 per day (USD1.55) as a diamond polisher. We were paid on piece rate basis. Later, my earnings went up to Rs100 per day (USD2.07). After working as a diamond polisher for 7 years, we were able to purchase a house. My monthly earnings had increased to Rs5000 (USD103.40).

My husband was addicted to alcohol. He succumbed to T.B at Bhavnagar, Gujarat where he was undergoing treatment. After his death in 2005, things became very difficult for my family. Still, I could manage to meet the household expenses on the basis of my earnings from diamond polishing.

ANOTHER SETBACK – THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

The financial crisis was another big blow, after my husband's death. The existing situation due to financial crisis has affected the entire diamond polishing and finishing industry. So many factories have shut down in my city and, thousands of people are without jobs. My factory too has shut down. My eldest daughter was making around Rs15per day (USD 0.30) from embroidery work but now she is married and, her income has stopped.

In order to survive, my younger daughter and I are trying to meet our household expenses through embroidery work but we are unable to make the ends meet.

So many women workers like me are in a helpless situation. The financial crisis is affecting our diet, children's education, health. We want to work – but there is no work for us.

I am mentally tired and exhausted. I do not know what to do. I am feeling helpless.