



Ms. Sofiya

Jewellery Artisan from Tara Projects, New Delhi

I am Sofiya. I live not far away from Tara office. My home is 4 kilometers from here. I am happy that, a year ago I was able to buy my scooter to commute between home and office. My mother is not too well. The scooter saves me precious time so that I am able to spend more time with my ailing mother. Ten years ago, my home was in urban slum across the Yamuna River, where I lived with 6 family members consisting of my parents, brother, two nieces and myself. In fact we had a large family and I had my five elder sisters but fortunately they were all married and settled. Otherwise, it would have been awfully difficult for everyone to live in a small house. My father (late Abdul Jabbar) had a rag picking work. He picked up and collected old rejected goods like newspapers, plastic, wooden, bottles etc. to sell to dealers. He could earn enough to take care of the large family. He was very dedicated to his job and worked very hard. Unfortunately, my mother became blind, when one of my elder sisters was born. It was an irony and a very sad fact of my life that she has never seen me and my brother. Today I and my brother live with her. Due to ill health, my father had to leave his work and move to Batla House, where we live now. We purchased a small house on the fourth floor of the building. It gave us some stability. In 2005-06, I left the school when we shifted, so I had to leave my studies. I could attend the school only till 8th standard. I had heard a lot about Tara Projects and Moon di. I had heard about her activities and I longed to be her co-worker. I admired the way she was leading her life and I wanted to follow into her footsteps. Then with the help of my brother-in-law, I approached Tara for work and got the opportunity as a packer. I was lucky. Since I come from a Muslim orthodox family, my relatives opposed the idea of me working, but strangely my Late Father and mother accepted my wish to work. It was a turning point in my life. Now I was earning my own money.

Today, I have more confidence. I became more aware about the fact that we can change our life for the betterment. I also believe that every woman has the capacity to work at par with man. With the first salary, I helped to paint my home just before the EID festival. After that, I also installed the water meter in my home to give us tap water. I take care of my mother and the household expenses. At my work I joined the self-help group. In my group we are twelve members. The group began saving rupees 200/- per month. I also got attached to a health and saving schemes. I believe that my future is secure. The good aspect is that I get paid the state wages. Many of my friends working in other places earn far less than me. They are still the victim of exploitation.

Working at Tara, I have become more aware about the difference between the right and wrong. I participate in women's meetings. Life is more meaningful now than before. At home life was naive as we only ate and slept. At Tara, I was trained to become an artisan as it was my wish. I enjoy making jewellery. I have a social network. I know more people. I also learned how to speak in a better way. I did not know it before. I can also travel now. I feel that I have more self-respect and dignity here. Even I was able to rescue and save other women in need. I could achieve my self dependency. I do not have to beg for money from others. I feel more aware and strong, that is also my empowerment. As a young woman, I have become a good example for other girls in my community who are still far away from empowerment. My sister died leaving seven children behind. I am able to support one of these nieces for her education.

I hope I can learn to design crafts in future. I hope to open a jewellery workshop myself and provide more work for those who are in need. There are more girls who need support and work. Many of the girls still do not attend the school due to their weak economic situation. There are more girls than boys and they are unable to go to school due to their unstable financial conditions. **Fair Trade gave me stability to my life. It made me feel more confident. Today, we are in position to help others. Even we fight against evils in our society. Recently, I warned my neighbour, who was violent with his wife because she gave birth to her fifth daughter and no son. He got the message and stopped being violent with his wife. I was also instrumental to collect rupees 10,000/- from my community to support the wedding of a girl from a poor family. I learnt the value of social work and helping others at Tara.**