

The Changing Roles of Women: South Asian Women and Work

Source Sheet

Source 1

Excerpt from an oral history interview conducted with Najma Mirza. Najma was born in Kanpur, India in 1947 and arrived in London in 1967.

"I worked for the United Dairy, because I did a degree in science. So I got the job with the United Dairies and they had a laboratory ...so I worked there for 5 years. I was quite happy there... And that was my first job; I never had to work before in Pakistan."

Source 2a

Excerpt from an oral history interview conducted with Jamila Qureshi. Jamila was born in Delhi, India in 1930 and arrived in London in 1960.

" [I did] sewing... I worked there [at a company], and they really liked my work. So the owner, Mr Grove, he made me an offer to go into partnership with him. I was excited, even though I couldn't even speak English properly. So I took my husband with me to meet him and he asked, why, in such a big factory, out of all these people, did he make an offer to work with his wife? So Mr Grove said because 'she's talented' and he was planning on opening a factory to make leather coats, so that's what the offer was for. But my husband refused. Then Mr Wolman, he had a coat factory, offered me a partnership, told me not to stay at home, because I was talented but to work with him. But my husband refused that too, because there was no one else to manage the house and the children were growing up too. [...]

So I started thinking...I've already had two serious offers, why can't I [start a company] myself...We lived in the upstairs flat and I worked in the ground floor flat. So when I started doing the work, my kismet was good and I started getting big orders. And I thought what can I do? So then we shifted to Bishopsgate.

My son, Zafar, he would get orders. He would go to stalls at the Sunday market, show my work and give prices. And people would come and give orders. Income was good then...In Bishopsgate we had one floor. One room was an office, one was a cutting room and one room had all the machines.

[...] The company was registered in my name as Jaz and Co. We had an accountant. My son ...bought a van, got the company logo written on it [and] had it registered. We hired two cutters, we had one driver, a good number of people. Ten to twelve people worked in the factory and outdoors about thirty-five people."

Source 2b

This is a photo of Jamila Qureshi in front of the company van with her husband taken in the late 1960s.



Source 3

Excerpt from oral history interview conducted with Nusrat Syed. Nusrat was born in Kanpur, India in 1943 and arrived in London in January 1967.

“I did whatever I could with my three kids, because there was no help. My husband use to go [to work] in the morning and come in the evening...So I have to do whatever I could do for my children. It wasn’t easy. I did work at home [making] curtains, made to measure as well as teach - supply teaching...Because I couldn’t [work] full time.”

Source 4a


Excerpt from oral history interview with Zahida Mughal. Zahida was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1952 into a South Asian family. She arrived in London in 1973.

“I was the first woman to teach Asian cooking and Asian dressmaking... I used to do dressmaking, I used to charge, but I used to feel so guilty taking their money and I said, why don’t you learn? And they said there is no place [to learn]. And all these things mounted up and we started this class. [...]By that time we [her husband and her] had a shop on the high street and we

used to sell Indian and West Indian food... I had to go do the deliveries, banking, cash and carry...I had a very, very busy life."

Source 4b

This is a document of employment sent to Zahida Mughal stipulating the details of her job.



London Borough of Waltham Forest
 E.A.Huntley, M.A., Chief Education Officer
 D.P.Wynne, Organizer for Adult Education
 Grayline House, 324 High Road, Leyton, London, E15 6QE
 Telephone: 01-539 0547

Please quote ref.
 Your ref. **AE/0124**

Date: 4th May 1985

Mr. Mughal,
 [Redacted]
 [Redacted]
 [Redacted]

Dear Mrs. Mughal,

I have pleasure in offering you appointment as a temporary part-time tutor to the Adult Education Service on the terms and conditions set out below. The appointment becomes effective when written acknowledgment and acceptance of this offer is received.

Terms and Conditions of Appointment:-

- The specific task(s) for which you are being offered appointment is (are)

WALTHAMSTON YOUTH CENTRE	ASIAN STYLE COOKERY	MON.	10am - 12 noon.	6 wks.
WALTHAMSTON YOUTH CENTRE	ASIAN STYLE DRESSMAKING	WEDN.	10am - 12 noon.	6 wks.
- Your continuous service will start from 6th June 1985
 The leaving date is 13 July 1985
- Salary... £1.79 per hour
- The appointment does not carry entitlement to sick pay or leave.
- The employer reserves the right to terminate the appointment without notice.
- In the event of closure of classes for whatever reason the appointment will be deemed to be terminated for the period of closure.
- The appointment is subject to a sufficient number of students enrolling for the class and their subsequent attendance.

/Continued....

Source 5

Excerpt from an oral history interview conducted with Navid Akhtar who talks about his mother who arrived in England from Pakistan in the early 1960s.

“My mother was a housewife, so she never worked. She worked a few times in her life because my father actually had two road accidents over his lifetime and in those times my mother definitely went off to work. She worked at Britain’s Toy Factory which I think was around Seven Sisters, North London somewhere and I remember her bringing toy soldiers back. She also worked at Maynards sweet factory for a period of time...so she didn’t do it all the time but she worked on odd occasions. And then from about the late 70s for a couple of years there was an industrial sewing machine in the house as was normal in those days. A lot of women who were from Pakistan were taking home piecework and supplemented the income.’