



Sewing a success story

■ Far left: Munira Bharmal takes a break to enjoy the view of Mumbai's harbour area from her transit home.
■ Left: Rukaiya Khanjiwala who now lives in a transit home, has started her own business making Rida, the traditional dress worn by Dawoodi Bohra women.

Pamela Raghunath/Gulf News

Bhendi Bazaar's women move to transit homes and a new life

MOVING TO RELATIVELY DECENT ACCOMMODATION HAS HELPED THEM SPREAD THEIR WINGS

MUMBAI

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Living in the midst of Bhendi Bazaar, a densely populated borough of South Mumbai, is hardly pleasant or easy as you are confronted each day by the dilapidated conditions of buildings and shops, chaotic traffic, noisy, unsafe roads crammed with hawkers, beggars and swarms of people everywhere — in fact barely an inch of space to take a deep breath.

However this ancient quarter in the city is getting a massive facelift. A huge redevelopment project by the Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (SBUT) — an initiative of the Dawoodi Bohra Muslim community — will touch the lives of 20,000 people (3,200 families and 1,250 engaged in business) living in this overcrowded Muslim-dominated locality. And the impact of this is already showing in the lives of women and their families who have been shifted to transit homes. Women in their 20s, 30s, 40s and even above have been on cloud nine ever since they moved from their cramped dwellings to the well maintained transit buildings with modern amenities in Mazgaon and Sewri.

Grateful to leaders

The women told *Gulf News* they were grateful to their spiritual leaders who had the vision and farsightedness to believe in women's empowerment and who believed women needed a conducive environment to contribute to society. In this context the meal a day concept by Faize Mawaid Al Burhani that is offered to Dawoodi Bohra family worldwide goes miles in giving women that extra time to engage in constructive activities beyond household chores.

In the next 2-3 years, the women and their families would shift back to Bhendi Bazaar, becoming owners of their new self-contained 32 sqm flats in high rises with even better amenities. But till then, the women are not willing to let time go to waste.

The new environment is so "encouraging," they say, that many have already embarked on ventures like fashion designing, tailoring, catering, managing businesses of their husbands as well as their own, sale of imitation jewellery, organising travel groups. One woman has even made teaching yoga a satisfying, lucrative career. And all have drawn on the social media like What-



Rex Features

Getting a facelift

■ A huge redevelopment project is set to transform the lives of 20,000 people living in the overcrowded, predominantly Muslim, Bhendi Bazaar.



Pamela Raghunath/Gulf News

Lives transformed

■ Batul Khanchwala, 32, with her daughter Rashida, 6, learnt stitching after shifting to the transit home.



I have peace of mind here, have learnt dress-making and started stitching my daughter's and my own clothes... The best part is meeting other women who inspire me."

Batul Khanchwala | Bhendi Bazaar resident

sApp and Facebook to pull together a network of potential customers.

Rukaiya Khanjiwala, mother of two daughters aged 20 and 18 and a teenaged son, says with a big smile how she now has time to focus on her hobby of painting and more so in designing the 'Rida,' the attire of Dawoodi Bohra women. In her former Bhendi Bazaar home that was smaller than the present one-room self-contained dwelling, she would rise at 5am

to fill water and then begin her domestic jobs. "Now, in this comfortable home with security and lifts and open spaces for young and old on the ground level, it's like a dream come true," she beams.

She has been surprised how her new enterprise has attracted inquiries from India and abroad after photographs of the Rida outfits were uploaded on social media. "Whenever my daughter Zahra is free, as she is studying pharmacy, she

In the next 2-3 years, the women and their families would shift back to Bhendi Bazar, becoming owners of their new self-contained 350-sq ft flats in high rises with even better amenities.

helps me in the colour scheme of these outfits as I have also started making Bohra wedding 'jodis.' I'm very pleased with how my newfound career is turning out."

Nostalgia

When Vasai resident Batul Khanchwala, 32, came after marriage to live in Bhendi Bazaar where her son, now 11, and daughter, 7, were born, nostalgic memories of her own carefree-childhood in the cosmopolitan suburb haunted her. "I always wanted my children to enjoy that same happy childhood that I had." But that was only possible after coming into the transit home in Sewri where her kids get the space that they deserve to play.

"I have peace of mind here, am socially active, have learnt dressmaking and started stitching my daughter's and my own clothes," she says.

"The best part is meeting other women who inspire me," she says.