

A duplex

Stall number 18 at the State Sabala Mela is a duplex. On the one side Sabita Sarkar of Basumati SHG of Gajole Block, Malda flaunts her bamboo products. On the other side you could see Kabita Barman of Trinayani SHG of Bulbulchandi village, Habibpur block of the same district with her posse of artefacts.

'Basumati Self-help Group' has 13 members. Only three of them are engaged in making home decor with bamboo products. The other two were actually trained by Sabita and initiated in the business. For her, the learning came naturally as she watched her neighbours work with bamboo. She started working for others and gradually started her own enterprise.

Making products out of bamboo peels does not bring much economic returns as the products are sold at relatively low cost. However, scale is important and if assured of market, she is ready to scale. Fairs are obviously good places to boost sales. This is her second State Sabala Mela. In 2018, she missed the Sabala, but attended a fair at the Eco Park, New Town, Rajarhat and another one at Sonarpur. Fairs are important



as she could manage follow ups of bulk orders from some of the contacts developed at the fairgrounds.

Kabita Barman came with her son all the way from Habibpur. She is the lone artisan making jute products in her SHG at Bulbulchandi. Some others are pursuing sewing, some more animal husbandry. The group has taken several doses of bank credit, first a smaller one of rupees fifty thousand. The loan amount grew over time and the last one was of rupees six lakh.

Kabita has also brought with her jaggery, 'Bori', 'rice-papad' which added flavour to her merchandise. Back home, Kabita runs a canteen close to the local school and offers home delivery of eatables. The combination of rice-papad, Bori and meals keep her business growing. She has two daughters and both of them provide support to their mother in her endeavour to increase the family income. In an informal chat she was explaining how it is important for the women of the villages to be inspired and get a taste of freedom.