

A woman with her steely resolve

Behind every successful Self-help Group there is one enterprising woman, usually developing a firm resolve through trials and tribulations to do something positive. “Mahulara Alo”, the SHG of Mahulara Village in Bolpur Sriniketan Block evolved through the initiatives of Munjima Khatun, a woman with a steely resolve.

The story of Munjima goes back to 1982 when she got support from Ambedkar Yojana and guidance of Shri Pannalal Dasgupta and Amlan Dutta of the Tagore Society for Rural Development. The craft form that she got trained in was weaving kantha stitch sarees and different varieties of dress materials. In 1987 she received training at Viswa Bharati as well. Unfortunately when she was still learning the skill, she fell ill and her dreams of self-reliance took a hit. It was even difficult to purchase medicine for her treatment. She used to receive monthly allowance of rupees five hundred from her brother-in-law to purchase medicines. One month she





skipped her medicine and jumped headlong in the business. She recalls the days when she had to traverse knee-deep mud to reach the town.

Mahulara Alo, the SHG was formed with 14 women in 2005. They are quite consistent in using the credit facilities available under the livelihood mission. In fact she could recount taking bank credit for 15-16 times.

The group took SVSKP support under 'Atmamyada' where term loan for a project amounting to rupees eleven lakh could be secured. She has been attending several fairs in Kolkata and adjoining areas, leaving apart the fairs at Shantiniketan. The product range included saree, sal, blouse piece, stoll, churidar, dupatta, panjabi, bedsheet, jacket - all using kantha stitch as an art form.

She and her compatriots have been attending State Sabala Mela for the last seven or eight years. Sales are always impressive. It is not her group alone. In the stall taken by the district for display and sale, products have been brought from eight SHGs. In fact her village itself boasts of ten SHGs, all involved in kantha stitch and all trained by her. Participation in fairs is always attractive because of the sale it results in. However, these are often tiring experiences.

Back home, Munjima has a differently-abled husband to support. But she is unfazed. When she started, Muslim women were not allowed to move out of home. She did go out and took other women of her religion along. She could make it productive for her, for her neighbours and has become the face of the enterprising rural women.