

Making of a master crafts person

Lakshmi Mondal Biswas of Netaji Para, Pares Mitra Colony, Jalpaiguri has added diversified products in her portfolio over the years. Jute is her primary object of craft. However, she excels in developing artefacts in cane, bamboo and kantha stitch as well. Ashalata Pal Choudhury, a master trainer certified by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India initiated her in jute handicrafts. Her forays in cane and bamboo products were with the help of her mother who got training from the central government.

She has been working in this field for the last 27 years and the first fair she attended was 25 years ago. In her first exposure itself she could register sales figure of Rs. 25000 with a budget of rupees 5000 only. She has been able to develop contact with the State Rural Livelihood Mission through the District Rural Development Cell, with the District Industries Centre, with NABARD and with the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. Way back in 1999 she received President's Award for her excellent jute handicrafts. The State Government is always generous in awarding her and she received the State Award for 14 times.

She formed Shraddhanjali Self-help Group in 2009 with 14 members. The group took a loan of Rs.2.5 lakh once and the loan is repaid on time. She also got SVSKP assistance





twice, both with loan amount of Rs.2.4 lakh. She received a total amount of Rs.1.5 lakh as subsidy.

Apart from participation in numerous state fairs, her association with the DCH gave her opportunities to participate in several fairs organised by the Divisional Commissioner in different cities of the country. Thus she attended fairs in Chandigarh, Punjab, Ludhiana, Haryana. In 2015, she visited Switzerland, thanks to the support provided by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. Her products sold to the tune of Rs. 7 lakh in a fair at Surajkund, Haryana.

Sabala is her favourite fair and she had been attending the State Sabala Mela from the very first year of its inception. It always gives her excellent returns and a satisfaction of being connected with the people. She finds numerous repeat buyers at her stall at the State Sabala Mela.

Mr. Apurba Roy Chowdhury of the Jute Products Development & Export Promotion Council, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India visited her stall this year. He was speaking about the association of Lakshmi with the National Jute Board which developed her as a master trainer and designer of jute diversified products in collaboration with the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Kolkata. The products identified are non-traditional - jute bags, jute clocks, slippers made of jute and jute floor mats. Forty women from Jalpaiguri were trained by her at Jalpaiguri along with a designer from NIFT. Handsome remuneration as trainer apart, the satisfaction she received from the assignment is matchless.