

Mushrooming delicacies

Asannagar village - close to Krishnanagar, Nadia has earned fame for the Baul singers it produced. Every year a Baul fest is organised in the village. This Asannagar is also home to an interesting experiment in mushroom production. Ma Karunamoyee Swanirbhar Goshthi where Pranati Biswas is an organising member has made it possible for more than 170 women members of 17 self-help groups of the village to grow mushrooms at scale and to market their products.

Starting its journey in 2012, Ma Karunamoyee SHG with ten members took bank credit in four instalments so far, the amounts being Rs.1.5 lakh, Rs.2.5 lakh, Rs.3.5 lakh and Rs.4.5 lakh. All the first three loans have already been repaid and the last one is continuing. The group did not go for mushroom cultivation from



the very days of group formation. They were adept at Kantha Stitch. Later, close to the end of 2017, the group received training on mushroom cultivation at Jayrambati and early next year received advanced training at Chunchura. The varieties that they produce are Oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*), which can be cultivated year-round and Milky mushroom (*Calocybe indica*), which grows only in summer.

They have received further training on spawn making at Chunchura. This advanced skill involving sterile technique is very important for independent and sustainable mushroom businesses. Apart from growing spawn for own use, they can also be sold to other cultivators. Spawn is sold at a nominal price of Rs.30/kg to 16 more SHGs in the same village. Their production line has 2000 bags/cylinders at a



time, which yield 35-40 kg of mushrooms per day. There are nine workers who are presently paid Rs.300 to Rs.400 per day.

Local sales are meant for individuals, households and wholesalers in the vicinity. If not sold, the mushrooms are made into pickles, papad, dried and preserved (later sold at 600/kg wholesale and 1000/kg retail rates). Fresh is sold at the rate of Rs. 200 per pack (wholesale).

In recognition of her skills and efforts, Pranati has been made a block level trainer, training many other women in the production and business of mushroom cultivation.