

# Weaving tales through painting

Consider an entire village specialising in a particular art form over generations, an art form dating back more than 2500 years. Naya in Pingla block of Paschim Medinipur is one such village and all the households in the village have 'Chitrakars', painters specialising in canvas painting. It is not just painting stories on folded canvas, but also singing those stories in their mesmerising tone, the Chitrakars are a class in themselves. Some of them have sold their canvas in the national and international markets, some even won national awards and one of the achievers was felicitated by the President of India. But for most of the Chitrakars it is a hard struggle to make both ends meet with 'Patachitras' only. Once the citadel of male painters, girls entered the domain and excelled. The women Chitrakars formed themselves into self-help groups and went forward to initiate joint ventures. At the State Sabala Mela 2019 one could meet Madhumita Chitrakar, one such lady from 'Masjidwala Pirbaba SHG'. A new





member in the group, she is still not quite at ease with the data pertaining to the collective.

Madhumita was initiated in the art of patachitra in her early childhood by none other than her own mother, Ruma Chitrakar, an accomplished Chitrakar. Ruma runs a stall at Srishtishree, the SHG shopping complex developed by the State Rural Livelihood Mission (Anandadhara) near Dakshinapan, Dhakuria. Initially accompanying her mother, Madhumita started selling her products in her early teens. The mother-daughter duo did impressive sale in the State Sabala Mela, 2017. This year, there is some marginal decrease in sales. However, the fairs always give her new hope for the promotion of their traditional art form. She participates in several fairs including handicrafts fair, Saras, fairs organised by the Indian Chamber of Commerce. She also sells online. Saras offers the best platform for sales. Her husband, who had a business of ornaments, is now learning Patachitra.

At the Karigari Haat on the mela ground, one could meet Bhatu Chitrakar from Basudebpur village of Ghatal. His mother, Gauri Chitrakar won President's Award in 1985 for her creations. Chitrakar for generations, Bhatu also won several state and district awards. State Government has also allotted two decimals of homestead land to Bhatu. Sales at Sabala Mela are usually good. However, this year the competition is steep and sales are somewhat down.