

## Women craft change, one stitch at a time

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: Applique dresses, *kantha*-stitched shrugs, crochet hairbands, and much more were on display at a spring fair last month.

The work of women from a village near Santiniketan and girls from the streets in and around Southern Avenue was showcased.

Everything on display had been handcrafted over the past few months.

In just two days, they sold items worth nearly ₹1 lakh, with only a handful remaining.

"They are not asking for help; they are asking for a chance," said Mitrobinda Ghosh, founder of Tollygunge Ramdhanu Social Welfare Society.

Ghosh works with women from Murgabani, a village about 25km from Santiniketan, and girls living on the streets in and around Southern Avenue.

"Most of the *kantha* and applique work is by the women. It is a struggle for



Handcrafted items on display at the fair

existence for them," said Ghosh.

It takes months of patience to complete such detailed work that would have to compete with others in the market, said Ghosh.

"When people buy, they do so if they like our product, and so we endeavour to make it worth their purchase and not something one would do out of benevolence," said Ghosh.

They don't want it to be a one-time purchase, but something that one would buy for friends, recommend to relatives and return for more, said Ghosh.

Ramdhanu pays a certain amount to each member of the core group in Murgabani and something to all those who contribute to the fair.

"What we earn in the fair sees us a long way because we don't receive govern-

ment funds or CSR funds. If we can make a little more money, it means the women would get a little more, or the girls who get a meal would maybe get an extra item on their plates. We don't pocket the profit," said Ghosh.

On the first day, they sold goods worth ₹49,000; on the second, around ₹45,000.

"To the credit of our women and their hard

work, only a few items are left. This is a great encouragement for them," Ghosh added.

The women use their earnings to send their children to school, buy books and stationery, or occasionally treat themselves and their families.

Ramdhanu was invited to participate in the fair, while many others had to pay for a stall.



Visitors to the spring fair last month