

Sanatan Maity: A supporter of the Laban Satyagraha Movement



In the historical city of Paschim Midnapore, West Bengal lives Sanatan Maity. He was born in 1931 in Katina village of the undivided Midnapore. Maity ji is a 91-year-old master trainer of Taant and Charkha at the Mat and Babui Grass Craft Cluster. He got inspired by the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Noakhali in 1944, which is in present-day Bangladesh, and underwent training in Gujarat to operate Taant (handloom) and came back to promote self-reliance through art amongst the village youth. Over the years, he has trained over 600+ artisans in the Mat craft.

The Mat and Babui Grass Craft Cluster is one of the Indian Micro Enterprises Development Foundation-Scheme of Funds for Regeneration of Traditional Industries clusters (IMEDF-SFURTI), wherein artisans are engaged in promoting rural handicraft through the production of home-office-fashion accessories and various utility items from a locally grown natural fibre known as Babui or Mat Grass and cotton yarn. Madhurkathi grass, which is abundantly available in West Bengal such as in the Paschim Medinipur area, is used in weaving traditional mats. The strips of woven mat are joined together by stitching with cotton fabric, which forms folds and gives a particular colour to various products.

Maity Ji's journey is a pledge towards 75 years of Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) of upholding craft and economic independence for not only his family but also the hundreds of families in his village. He preaches Gandhian philosophy and has composed poems and songs on the art form of Mat weaving, which are fondly sung by other Mat weavers.

Natural dyeing is practised in the Mat and Babui Grass Craft Cluster, where diversified mat-weaving loom sets and sewing machines are introduced. They produce fairtrade products that are natural, eco-friendly, bio-degradable, and handmade. Each hand-crafted product tells a saga of rich cultural heritage and legacy of primitive craftwork.