A training programme-cum-workshop on “Making of Traditional Sal leaf plates” among the Sabars of Sarasbedia village was organized by Eastern Regional Centre, Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata during the period from 3rd August to 10th August 2015. Sarasbedia is a remote village of Dheko Gram Panchayat under Raipur Block of Bankura District. The village has two hamlets – ‘Adibashi para’, comprising of the Santal families and ‘Sabar para’, comprising of only Sabar families. Altogether 35 Sabar families are staying at Sabar para of the village, of which 35 participants of both males and females, from each household were selected in this training programme. Besides two expert teachers from Sarenga area imparted training on making of the sal leaf plates following different stages – (i) collecting of the green sal leaves from the jungles, (ii) preparation of kathipata, selaiipata, chabapata and thalapata.

This training programme was an endeavour to generate an alternative source of income to the Sabar people of this village, because they are basically landless labourers, and whatever economic pursuit is available they try to accept it. At the beginning of the programme, it was informed that during the month of September-October the Sabar female-folk use to go to the jungle along with their Santal brethren to collect green sal leaves from the surrounding outgrowth of the Sal trees and bring it to the respective houses. On keeping the smooth surface of the leaves at the top, seven or eight number of leaves are arranged in opposite direction to give a circular shape. Each overlapping edge of these leaves is joined with very small sticks of neem or babool tree. The process of initial stage of plate is called as kathi-pata. The green kathi-pata is then dried up in the sunlight for a few days to turn into brown colour. Master craftsman plays an important role to fix how many green sal leaves are required to make a kathi-pata. Sometimes the kathi-pata is brought into weekly market for sale. The local market price of one thousand kathi-pata varies from Rs. 130/- to 150/-. According to the teachers one person can make 300 numbers of kathi-pata in a day.

This training programme also imparted one step further to the Sabar participants. They learnt how the kathi-pata is further stitched with cotton twigs and give an actual shape of a final plate (thala-pata). For that, first of all the participants were trained in the sewing machine for stitching the kathi-pata. It has observed that a pair of kathi-pata is attached together by stitching, that makes the plate more durable with finishing touch. A few participants trained themselves in sewing machine with utmost interest and care. On the other hand, few participants took interest in the training on dice machine to heat up the stitched plate (selaiipata). Except all male participants, four female participants got the training of cutting the edge of the plate successfully. According to the teachers, work on dice machine and cutting of the edge of the final
plates (*thala-pata*) is usually done by the male members. Generally twenty eight numbers of final plates (*thala-pata*) in four sets of seven plates each are packed together for selling.

The training was conducted into various phases –

I. All the trainees were first trained up in the sewing machine to get acquainted with the paddling of the machine.

II. Simple *kathi-pata* was provided for mock sewing without using of threads.

III. Once they trained, two numbers of *kathi-pata* are stitched together to make a *selai-pata*.

IV. A bunch (*jankh*) of *selai-pata* was heated up one after another in the dice machine to give shape of a plate which was termed as *chaba-pata* plate. Seven such plates were heated up together with pressure in the dice machine.

V. Bunch of *chaba-pata* plate’s edge was cut according to the size of the dice with the help of a sharp knife and thus make a final sal leaf plate (*thala-pata*).

VI. Twenty eight numbers of final plates (*thala-pata*) were then packed with polythene wrapping.

VII. Ten number of such polythene wrapping (containing of 280 number of *thala-pata*) were then kept in gunny bag for marketing.

On the concluding day of this training programme, the participants expressed their eagerness to get such types of training programme in future, so that they can be able to find out an alternative source of livelihood intermittently as and when necessary.

**Photographs:**

1. Inauguration of Training programme
2. Stitching Sal leaves with sticks (*kathi-pata*)
3. & 4. Sewing the Sal leaves for preparing plates

5. Arranging the sewn leaf plates

6. Heating up of Sal leaf plates to give shapes

7. Cutting of finished leaf plates for packing