

Fulmani Barman Mandal: From a Life of Boundaries to Empowerment



In the quaint village of Nikasi, nestled within the Moyna block of Purba Medinipur District in West Bengal, lived a young girl with big dreams. Fulmani Barman Mandal, born into a humble farmer's family, always had a keen interest in education and an unspoken ambition to carve her own path as an entrepreneur. But life had other plans.

At just 16, Fulmani's dreams were abruptly put on hold. Her family arranged her marriage, a decision that meant the end of her education and the beginning of a life of dependency. With no choice but to

conform, she entered a new household, where her days soon became a blur of household chores and caring for her child, who arrived just a year after her marriage. The vibrant aspirations she once held began to fade into the background, overshadowed by the weight of her daily responsibilities. For eight long years, Fulmani's life followed this monotonous routine.

Her dreams of higher education and financial independence seemed more distant than ever. Yet, somewhere deep within her, a spark remained—a faint hope that one day, she might reclaim the dreams she had been forced to set aside.

That hope found its opportunity in the form of the SFURTI project. This initiative, supported by the Ministry of MSME and implemented by the Child & Social Welfare Society (CSWS) with IMEDF as the nodal agency, offered Fulmani a lifeline. She joined the CSWS Mat and Babui Grass Cluster, an entrepreneurial initiative that provided her with the skills and training she needed to turn her life around.

Through this project, Fulmani learned the intricate art of mat crafting. With newfound skills and access to advanced machinery, she began creating a variety of utility items—yoga mats, table mats, floor mats, bags, and fashion accessories. For the first time in years, Fulmani earned her own income, bringing in between ₹8,000 and ₹9,000 each month. The transformation was not just financial; it was deeply personal.

As she started contributing to the household income, Fulmani noticed a change at home. Her family, initially resistant to her involvement in the cluster work, began to see the value in what she was doing. Their scepticism turned to support, and soon, they were not just encouraging her but actively helping with her craftwork. This shift in attitude marked the beginning of Fulmani's journey towards empowerment.

Today, Fulmani Barman Mandal is not just a skilled artisan but a beacon of inspiration in her community. She has gained the confidence to make important decisions, both within her family and in the cooperative society. Leading a Self-Help Group (SHG), she motivates other women in her village to step out of the shadows and earn their own living. Fulmani cherishes her financial and social independence, and she feels a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity that allowed her to fulfil her long-held dream of becoming the breadwinner of her family. Fulmani's story is one of resilience, transformation, and empowerment. From a life confined by societal expectations to a journey of self-discovery and leadership, she has emerged as a true example of what it means to reclaim one's destiny.