

MAKING WOMEN SELF RELIANT

The Ladies Wing of Islamic Gymkhana, located at Marine Drive celebrated Women's day in a unique way by organising a Fashion Fiesta and a Fete. The Fete was from 4pm to 11pm in the night on the lawns facing the blue shimmering waters of the Arabian Sea .It show cased the work and the products (crafts, clothes, food items) of various Women's groups and NGO's.

I went there sharp at 4pm; the place was dominated by women and girls in various attires – women in trendy fashionable and designer suits to women in burqas, hiijab and naqabs. Some stalls had been erected and some were going up. A number of men were cooking food in huge urns in an enclosed area and packages were being emptied from three trucks parked on the lane which led to Marine Lines Station.

I walked over to a stall manned by women – in black burqas and hijabs .The stall was stacked mainly with clothes, gift pouches ,presentation envelopes , hand embroidered and customised linen such as bedcovers , pillow covers , cushion covers, towels etc , being sold under the brand name Huner . The outlet is managed by the Bhiwandi Women's Educational &Welfare Trust (Halai Memon) who has their head office in Foundation Building in Kolsa Mohalla in Bhendi Bazaar. The Halai Memon community has a number of branches all over Mumbai and also in Thana district. The community are very socially conscious and committed to upliftment of women by financially empowering them.

It is to fulfil this objective that they run a number of classes for women in whom they are imparted training in mehendi designs, painting, stitching and sewing ladies clothes, making handicrafts and gift items.



Teacher and girls from Farooq High school Figure 1

The next stall was shared by Farooq Girls High School and the Kolsa Mohalla Halai Memon branch. Farooq Girls High School is located in Jogeshwari .Two teachers and three students were selling items made by the students in the vocational courses .The items were finely embroidered table covers, handkerchiefs, gift pouches and presentation envelopes. Right from 6th standard and up to 10th standard , under vocational guidance ,the girls are taught embroidery ,sewing , stitching, tailoring, mehendi ,envelope making etc, so that they can be financially self reliant.



Figure 2 Gul Bano with her cookery book

The elderly Memon lady sharing this stall, Gul Bano Darvesh is a resident of Nakhuda Mohalla and a member of the Kolsa Halai Memon Jamat. She was selling some embroidered linen; Namaz head covers and cookery books titled Tasty Treats of Memon recipes collected and written by her were for Rs 50. She informed that she had graduated from Sophia college, nearly fifty years back and she had written the cookery book in connection with a programme organised by the Urdu daily Inquilab which had sponsored and published cookery books with recipes from the following groups :Konkani ,Memon ,Bohri and Kashmiri .

A stall by the Rangoonwala Foundation (India) had very attractive handmade jewellery. They also had finely embroidered Kurtas .The Trust has a number of community centres in Jogeshwari and Andheri to enable resource poor communities living in these areas to come together and benefit from the education and health programmes run by the Foundation in these centres. In the vocational training section they ran classes for women in hand

embroidery, beautician, mehendi, massage, jewellery making, paper bag making, phenyl, detergent and incense stick making.



Rangoonwalla Trust stall Figure 3

Though a number of stalls had come up, many selling designer wear clothes and handicrafts, most prominent being Hastkala, which has a number of branches, I didn't visit them. I felt I didn't need to: by now I was convinced that the women's movement was active and focussed in their mission to make the Indian woman self reliant.