



**“Can a woman who is unlettered and from a poor family dare to lead a federation of nearly 5,000 members and create a niche in the rural orthodox male dominated society of Rajasthan?”**



**Meera Bai, a resident of Rampura, a remote village in Rajasthan’s district of Tonk dared and succeeded. She has an inspiring story to narrate.**

**Now in her mid-twenties, Meera was barely 20 when she became a Self Help Group member of Maitree Mahila Mandel –a Self Help Group Federation cum milk producer organization.**

**Meera took the Mandel from few hundred to nearly five thousand women members that are divided into 343 SHGs and composed in 29 clusters. She at present is working as Secretary (Administrator) of the Federation.**



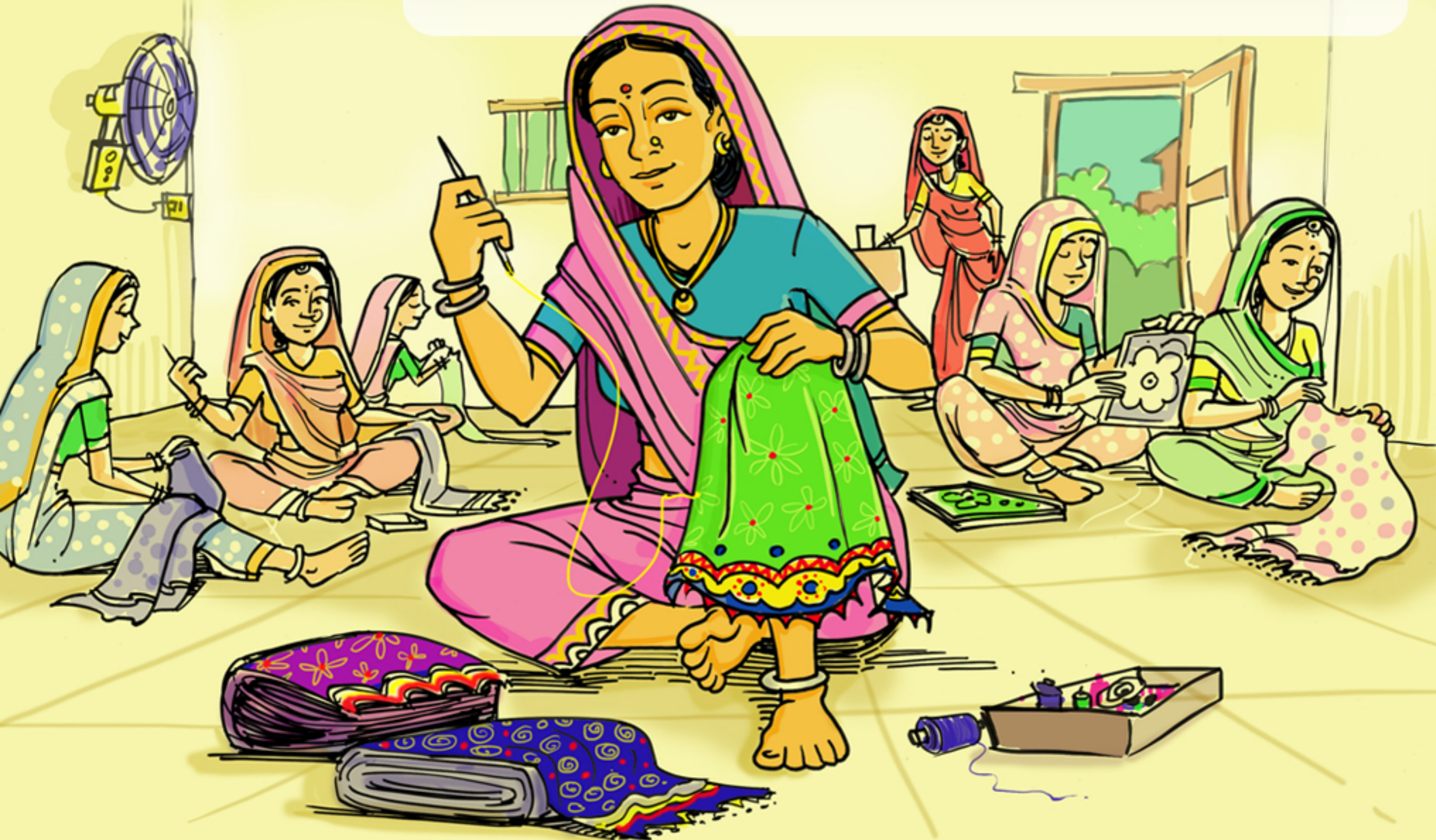
**The Federation is capable of producing 5.5 lakh tons of milk annually. Besides dairy, the Federation also provides vet care service to its member beneficiaries. Many of its members got trained as pashu sakhi or a para vet and are taking care of livestock both within and outside Maitree. Apart from that the Federation is also involved in teaching best agriculture practices to many marginalized farmers in the region. Maitree has also established few small Kasida centers that provide embroidery skills to women in the region.**

**Maitree has the financially asset of around 1cr 43 lakhs rupees. It has also purchased land to establish a complete milk-processing unit in Tonk, where the members would be able to sell all milk products including raw milk, milk powder, cheese, butter and yogurt.**

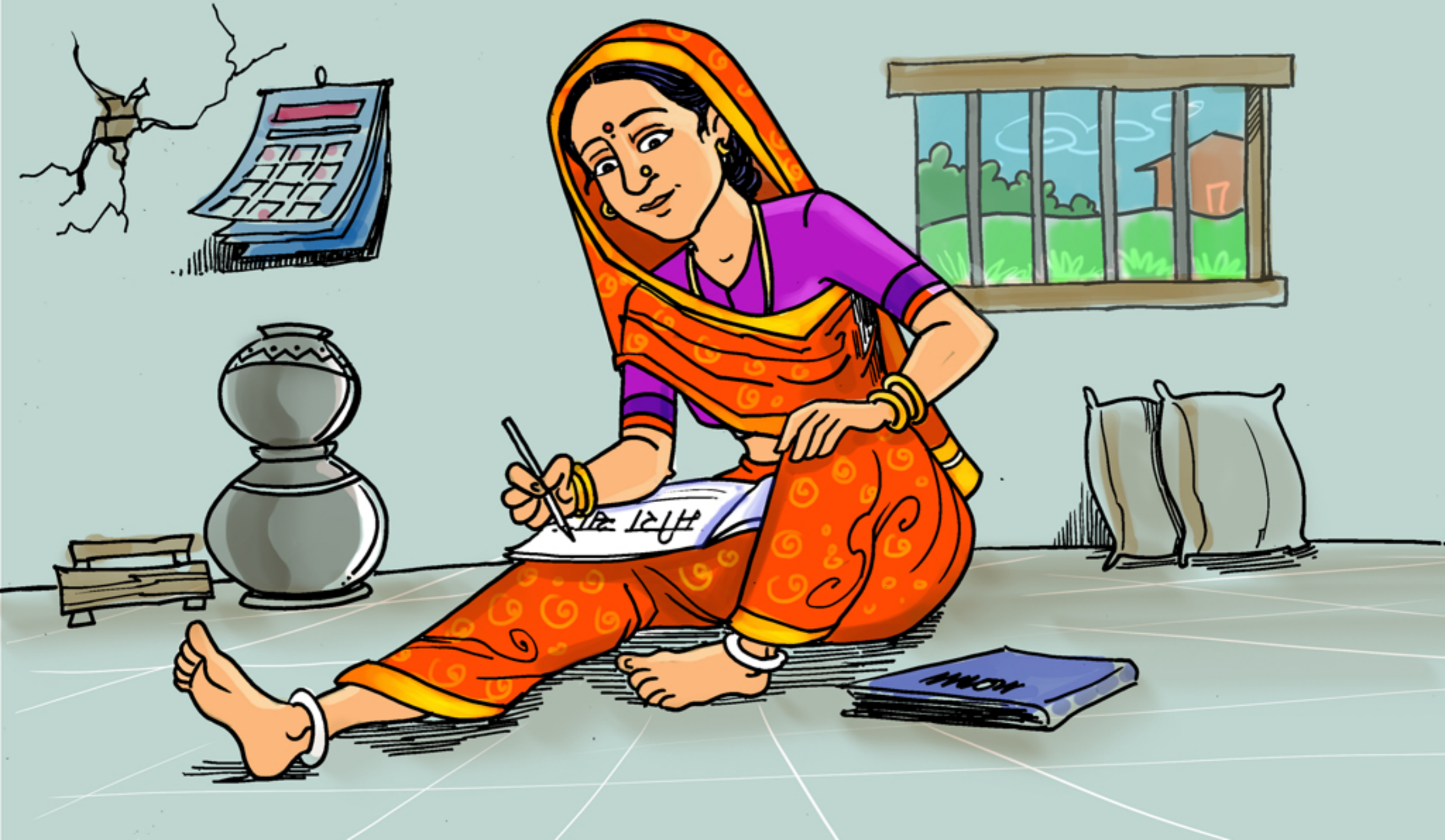
**The Federation in last three years has also released several lakh rupees on its members as internal lending money. Besides that it also received financial support of 1 corer, 78 lakhs and 32 thousands in the form of loan money from several financial institutes that includes both cooperative as well as private banks like District Cooperative Bank of Tonk, Bank of Baroda, BRG Bank, RRP and recently ICIC Bank, that empowered financially some 1,300 poor families. The money has been used in both income and non-income generating activities- like Health, education, livestock and physical assets, opening of new shops or establishing small business centers.**

**“Meera has taken Maitree to new heights, whatever the Maitree stands at present, wouldn’t be possible without Meera Bai, she is the backbone of the Federation” Jitendra Kumar, Team leader Dooni location Srijan.**

Meera Devi, a resident of Rampura, is a Kashida craftswoman used to earn Rs.100 a day before joining Maitree Mandal . Unlike other extremely poor women who became members of SHGs, she didn't understand how saving small sums of money could help her in any way. Yet, a family member coaxed her into joining an SHG. She became interested in the way SHGs were managed and began taking initiative



Though Meera Devi had studied up to class five, she had forgotten how to even sign her name, as she wasn't expected to partake in activities outside of her household. "My father didn't think it was important to invest in my studies. We were raised to lead a domestic life", she says. But, joining the SHG required her to relearn how to sign and do simple arithmetic.



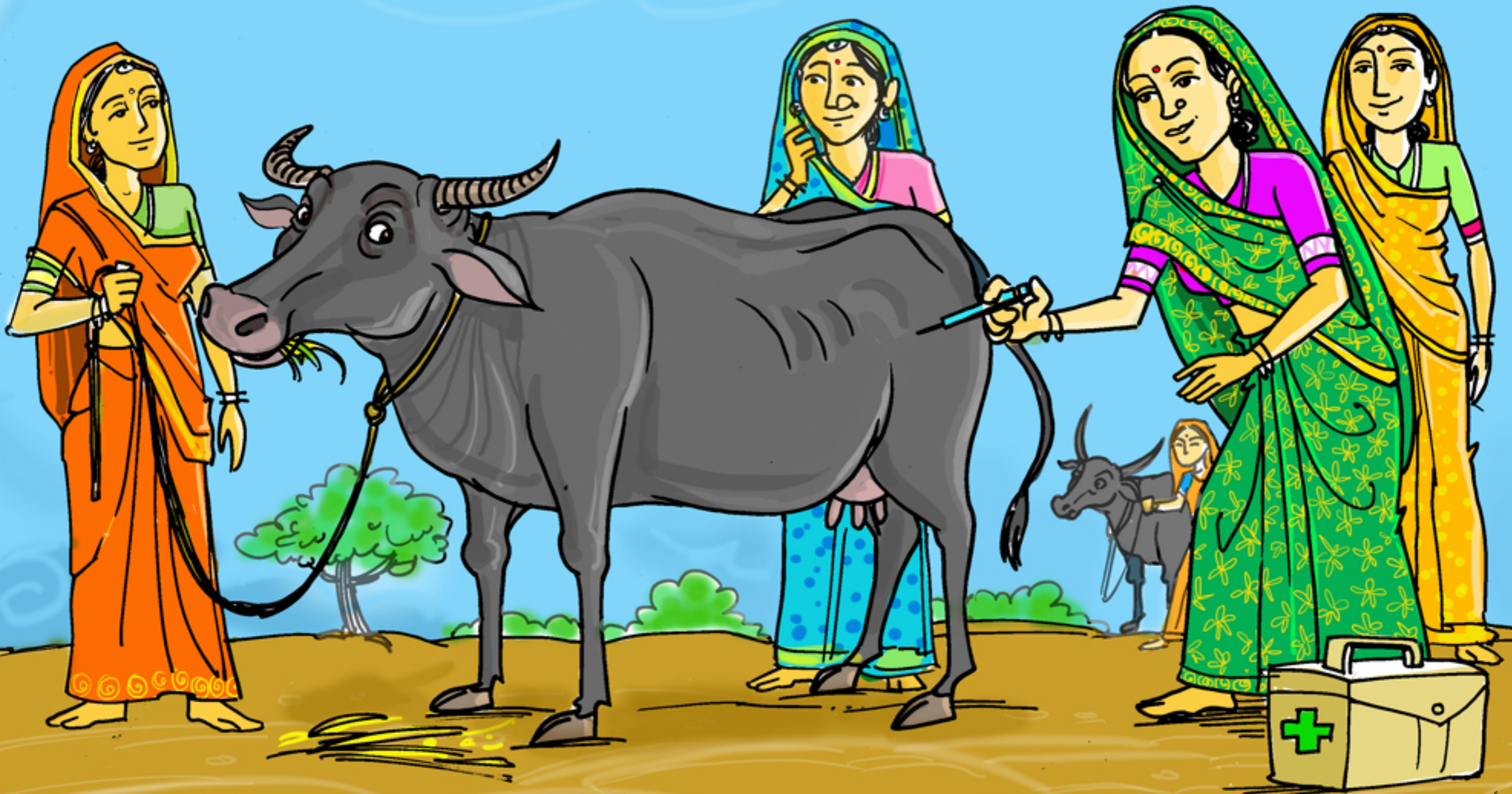
Soon her interest and commitment to her SHG made her a popular figure. She was elected to represent her SHG in the cluster and later she represented her cluster in the Maitree Mandal Federation. This was not the end; Meera Devi at present is the Secretary of the Federation. Her job is to manage the accounts of federation; helps to reach out other socially and financially disadvantaged women. She also takes active role in decision making on the behalf of Federation.



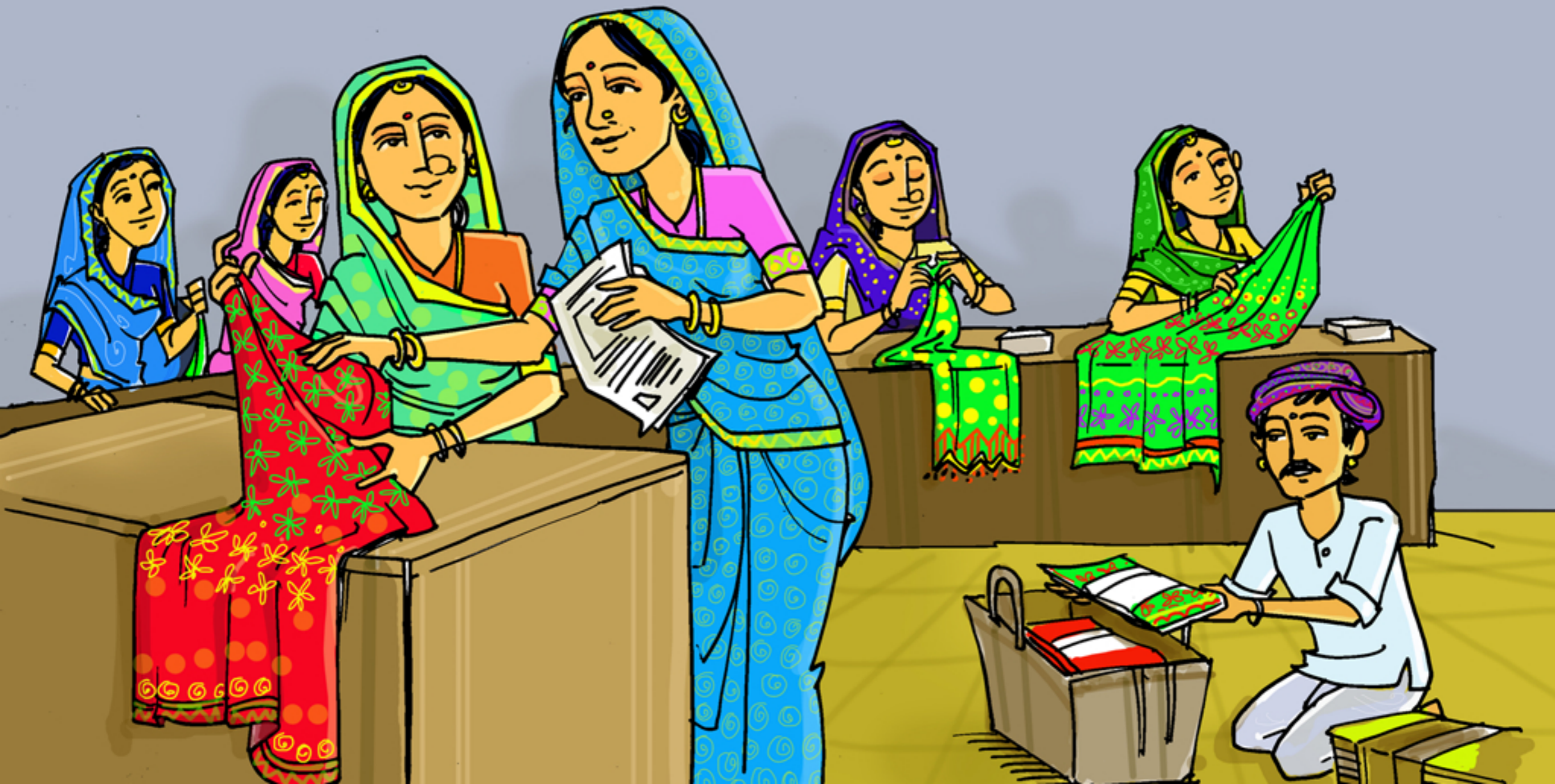
Hailing from a family that didn't encourage its women to go out into the world, Meera has flowered into a committed representative of her people. She also convinced her husband a matriculate to join a nursing course in Ajmer. Meera took a loan from her SHG. Pooling the loan money together with savings from her Kashida business, she funded her husband's study.



She herself works as a trained 'pashu sakhi' a para vet in her cluster of villages. Four years into her marriage and she doesn't have children yet. She says, "My in-laws know the work that I am doing and how important it is. They don't put pressure any more. We will have children once we can stand on our own feet."

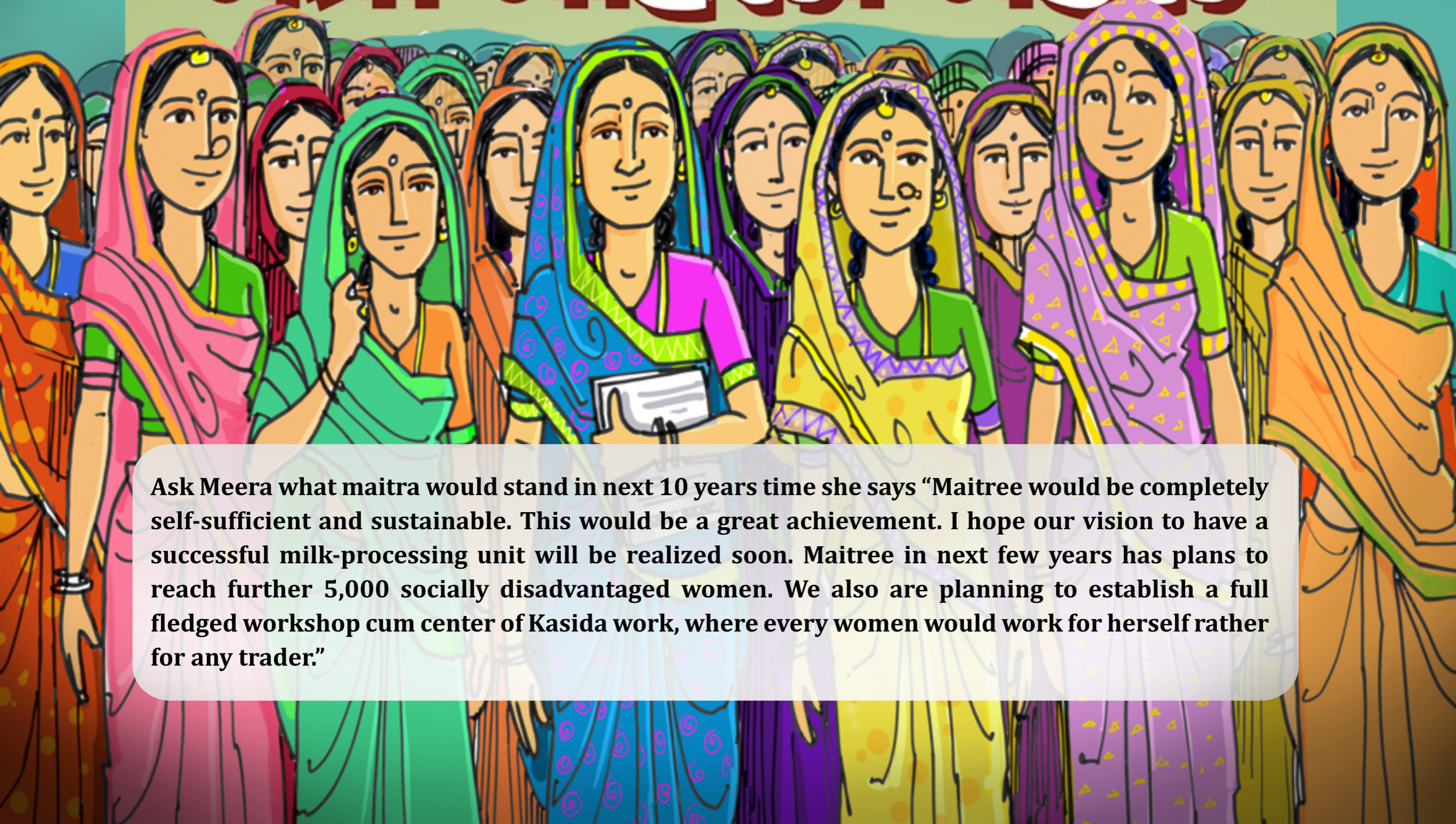


Meera has trained some 60 women as pashu sakhi, besides she also assisted some 23 women venture into the Kashida business. With minimal support from SRIJAN, she organized a Kashida training camp; trained and connected them to the local trader who helps them market their product. Ask her what is in it for her, and she reverts “It is not about money. It feels nice to be able to help my people and be respected in society”.





# मेथ्री महिला मंडळ



**Ask Meera what maitra would stand in next 10 years time she says “Maitree would be completely self-sufficient and sustainable. This would be a great achievement. I hope our vision to have a successful milk-processing unit will be realized soon. Maitree in next few years has plans to reach further 5,000 socially disadvantaged women. We also are planning to establish a full fledged workshop cum center of Kasida work, where every women would work for herself rather for any trader.”**