

## Disability never stopped her from reaching out to others

S Lenin | TNN

Madurai: 'The only handicap is to depend on others' is the driving motto of S J Amuthashanthy (36) from Madurai, who was born without a left forearm. However, her disability never prevented her from reaching out to help other disabled persons, especially women, by empowering them with computer training and teaching them tailoring.

Her journey was not easy. Being a girl child with a disability, she continued her education from a children's home in Tirunelveli till graduation. Her prolonged frustration with her disability saw temporary relief when she secured a state-level prize in essay competition in the seventh standard, and was felicitated by then chief minister MGR.

"At that particular moment, I felt that I could also rise up to heights if I worked hard," Shanthy says with a radiant smile. She went on to complete her masters in banking management and got a job in a communication centre in Madurai. She later joined as an accountant with the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in Madurai and worked there for five years.

"Even when I was working as an accountant in 1998, I always had the urge to help other differently-abled persons. I used to visit neighbouring villages in the district, looking out for people like me. I used to help them get identity cards and other beneficial schemes.

Later, it dawned on me that even among these beneficiaries, not many are women," she says. She started to look out for differ-



**STITCHING A SUCCESS:** Amuthashanthy empowers differently-abled women by giving them computer training and teaching them tailoring



ently-abled women but to her shock, many families did not cooperate, and instead ridiculed her about her disability. "I had to put in a lot of effort to convince the families and women to come out and seek benefits," she recalls. She initially started free tailoring classes along with her sister and a friend with four sewing machines with just five disabled women. Later, she started a trust exclusively for differently-abled women.

V Rutitha from Puliankulam says Amuthashanthy came like an angel into her life, instilling

confidence despite her disability. She had undergone computer training provided by her trust and was working as a data entry operator. Now she is pursuing B Com through correspondence. "Even my family has not encouraged me to study further," she said.

J Pothumponnu, another differently-abled woman from Manikulam, says she learnt tailoring and embroidery. "I thought I could never learn anything with my disability till I met Shanthy," she said.

"The pain I had undergone as a physically challenged person and my family circumstances motivated me to dedicate my life to the welfare of differently-abled women. I was eager that they not face the struggles and pain I faced in life," Amuthashanthy says.