

Enhancement of Marketing of Rural Crafts through SARAS Mela: An SGSY Initiatives



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Moutrisha Ganguly
Sudipta Sarkar

University of Kalyani, West Bengal
(moutrisha.ganguly@gamil.com)

During 1999-2000 to cope up with the effect of globalization and industrialization the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) took an initiative under Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme through SARAS mela to bring a revolution in the strategy of marketing of rural crafts for promoting rural products, building the capabilities of swarozgaris and opening up of income opportunities of rural artisans involved in the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme.

The present paper, based on the secondary information, gives an overview and present situation of SARAS Mela and its importance in marketing of rural products and improving the livelihood opportunities of rural artisans.

Keywords: Rural Marketing, SARAS Mela, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Ministry of Rural Development (MORD), rural crafts.

1. Introduction

India's industrialization and participation in the modern world economy is decades old. Nevertheless, millions of Indians still depend on indigenous modes of production, traditional skills and techniques to make a living based on handmade products. Craftspeople or artisans are the backbone of the non-farm rural economy. One of the biggest issues in India is that our markets do not recognize the true value of its own craft. When this value is recognized, and if people are willing to pay a higher price for craft-based products, this should translate into higher wages for weavers and craftspeople and act as a boost to millions of rural-based livelihood opportunities associated with this sector. Thus there is an urgent need for philanthropy to realize the economic potential of the crafts sector by investing in high impact scalable models that have the potential to strengthen livelihoods in a sustainable manner.

Since independence, the Indian Government and now the private sector and non-profits have played and continue to play an important role for this sector's development, although their efforts remain isolated and thus limited in their impact. In this regard SARAS Mela is a landmark decision taken during 1999-2000 by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) of Government of India for promoting rural products and building capabilities of swarozgaris. Besides opening up of income opportunities of rural artisans involved in the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development, SARAS mela opened up new visions for marketing of Indian traditional handicraft by creating a platform of interaction between buyer and seller.

2. Marketing of Rural Products

Markets are of fundamental importance in the livelihood strategy of most rural households, rich and poor alike. Rural marketing is a developing concept, and as a part of any economy has untapped potential; markets have recently realized the opportunity to make rural market as an income generating processor and also think that marketing of rural product may increase the existing income position of rural poor faster and provide them a better livelihood opportunity because of proper marketing and justified prices for rural products. Among the rural products, prepared by rural artisans craft items occupies the major portion.

3. About Handicraft

The term 'handicrafts' encompasses a wide range of artifacts. Handicrafts are rightly described as the craft of the people. In India, craft is much more than an industry; its produce is viewed as a creation and work of art. As the Craft Council (1995) points out, no Indian craft is ever purely decorative. Most of the handicrafts while fulfilling a positive need in daily life of people, also act as a medium of self-expression.

Task Force on Handicrafts for the Eighth five year plan defined the term handicrafts in 1989 as: "*Handicrafts are items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and are generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration.*" In India, rural craft is not merely an industry but a creation symbolizing the inner desire and fulfillment of the community.

4. About Artisans

India may be 'incredible' but the people who toiled hard to give the country a place in the world map are however not 'shining.' An artisan or craftsman is a skilled manual worker who makes items that may be functional or strictly decorative, including furniture, sculpture, clothing, jewellery, household items and tools or even machines such as the handmade devices of a watchmaker. Artisans practice a craft and may through experience and aptitude reach the expressive levels of an artist. Craftspeople form the second largest employment sector in India, next to agriculture. The artisans are an important factor in the equation of Rural Indian Society & culture. The uniqueness of India's craftspeople has been their ability to work across religious, caste and cultural divides. Such a meeting of distinctive traditions has fostered dialogue, social inclusion and an extraordinary creativity.

Artisans are divided into the following categories with a rigid hierarchical division of labor between more and less skilled artisans in a particular craft:

- Skilled master craftsman
- Wage-worker
- Fully self-employed artisan
- Part-time artisan

The 'handicrafts' sector accounts for around 17-18 percentage of total employment in the unregistered manufacturing sector. If employment level includes both full-time and part-time artisans in the handicrafts sector, their number was 58.41 lakhs up to the Ninth Five Year Plan (as estimated by the Working Group of the Planning Commission) (*Source*¹)

5. Major Categories of Craft in India

- Khadi (cloth that is woven from handspun yarn)
- Cotton handlooms
- Silk handlooms
- Zari (silver and gold threadwork) and embroidery carpets
- Miscellaneous products made of wood, bamboo, cane and grass
- Leather manufacture
- Earthenware plating/polishing/ engraving metals
- Jewelry and related products
- Making of musical instruments

6. India's Major Handicrafts

The Indian states have a wide range of crafts, which have attained commercial proportions not only in India but abroad as well. They make excellent souvenirs for tourists and are sold through various handicrafts emporium. Craft making is an ancient tradition in India, which has withstood the test of time, and the tradition has passed on from generation to generation. The Indian craftsmen still adept at making the traditional crafts, which have attracted the attention of connoisseurs of craft all over the world. The famous crafts of each Indian state are as follows,

- The crafts of *Andhra Pradesh* are known for their aesthetic and utilitarian value and the crafts are also rich and flamboyant.
- The crafts of *Arunachal Pradesh* are wood carvings, weaving, carpet making, pottery and jewelry making.
- The crafts of *Assam* bring out the artistic caliber of people living in the state. Weaving and embroidery are the chief crafts of Assam.
- The crafts of *Chhattisgarh* speak of the skill and artistic bent of the mind of the people living in the region.
- The crafts of *Bihar* have their own patterns, styles and manifest the rich cultural heritage of the state. The crafts of Bihar include, stoneware, carpet making, glasswork and wood inlays.
- The crafts of *Goa* are a commercial success and reflect the perennial glory of Goa. The chief craft forms in the state are pottery and terracotta, woodwork, brass and metal work, crochet and embroidery, bamboo craft, fibre craft, batik prints and metal embossing.
- The crafts of *Gujarat* have been deftly passed on from generation to generation and are replete with vibrancy. The major crafts of Gujarat are fascinating textiles, elaborately carved wooden and stone jharokhas, bandhini and intricately carved silver jewelry.
- The crafts of *Haryana* have never been widely acclaimed and more than artistic showpieces they are utilitarian in nature.
- The crafts of *Himachal Pradesh* have a relatively good demand in the market and some of the major crafts of the region include textiles, woodcarvings, carpet making and pottery.
- The crafts of *Jammu and Kashmir* are varied and diverse which range from woolen textiles, carpets and delicate designs worked on paper- mache.

¹ *Development Report of Planning Commission, GOI, Vol.2*

- The crafts of *Jharkhand* range from woodwork, bamboo works, pitkar paintings, tribal ornaments and stone carving.
- The crafts of *Karnataka* bear testimony to the dexterity, and decorative abilities of the craftsman. The crafts of the state include woodcarving, ivory carving, kasuti embroidery, durries, pottery and cheennapatna toys.
- The crafts of *Kerala* bring alive the rich cultural tradition of the people living in the state.
- The crafts of *Maharashtra* flourish mainly because of the royal patronage it received in the past. The state is famous for crafts like, bidri ware, lacquer ware, toy making, weaving, printed textiles and Kolhapuri chappals.
- The crafts of *Madhya Pradesh* have attained commercial proportions and are sold in emporiums and shops around the country.
- *Manipur* is a storehouse of crafts and the people here are known to take a lot of interest in make new innovation in the craft.
- The crafts of *Meghalaya* are unique in style and design and one of the famous craft of the state is weaving cane mats.
- The crafts of *Mizoram* are made from locally available materials artistically and efforts are being made to promote the crafts.
- The various crafts of *Nagaland* are woodcarvings, bamboo work, pottery, and black smithy, which have a commercial demand in the local and international market.
- The crafts of *Orissa* are a rare combination of utility and beauty and this makes Orissa one of the leading states in craft making.
- The crafts of *Punjab* are distinctly colourful which speak of the vibrant spirit of the people in the state. The range of crafts in Punjab include phulkari, woodwork, wood inlay, lacquerware, leather craft, and floor coverings.
- The crafts of *Rajasthan* have received patronage from royal dynasties in the past. Today, the craft industry is a major source of revenue in the state.
- The crafts of *Sikkim* are as beautiful and magnificent as the scenic beauty of this mountainous state.
- The crafts of *Tamil Nadu* include paper - mache, stone craft, pottery, woodcraft, embroidery, durries and metal ware.
- The crafts of *Tripura* range from cane and bamboo crafts, handlooms and basketry.
- Craft making is integrally related with the lives of the people living in *Uttar Pradesh*. Each city in Uttar Pradesh specializes in one type of craft. The crafts of Uttaranchal include woodcarvings and ornaments making which have their own distinct style.
- The crafts of *West Bengal* are so exquisite that they have a huge demand not only in the local market but abroad as well.

Some World famous India's Handicrafts are

- Wood Work – from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh
- Paper Mache – from Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir
- Ceramic – from Jaipur, Rajasthan
- Semi-Precious Jewelry – from Mumbai, Maharashtra
- Home Furnishing – from Kalamkari, Andhra Pradesh
- Stone Inlay / Undercut – from Agra, Uttar Pradesh
- Ajrakh - Block Printing – Gujarat
- Annibuta Sari - Andhra Pradesh
- Applique & Patch Work - Goa, Orissa, Gujarat
- Applique – Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh
- Arani Silk Sari Weaving - Tamil Nadu
- Baluchari Saris - West Bengal
- Batik, Terracotta – West Bengal, etc.

7. History of SARAS

SARAS Mela is a landmark initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Govt. of India, for promoting rural products and building capacities of swarozgaris, under SGSY scheme. It was organized for the first time, during 1999- 2000 in the India International Trade Fair (IITF) at Pragati Maidan New Delhi, with a view to give exposure to rural artisans/entrepreneurs/officials dealing with SGSY to a major international event in the country to develop markets for products manufactured by beneficiaries of programmes of the ministry; and, to create awareness amongst urban consumers of Delhi and surrounding areas about rural products.

Since 1999 it has become a regular annual event and has been able to elicit wide participation by the beneficiaries of the SGSY from all over the country. The participants bring an impressive range of rural products, which include handicrafts, textiles, artwork, furniture, items of daily use etc. In addition to the direct sale, bulk orders for the products are also received directly by the rural producers during this exhibition, which eliminates the role of middleman in marketing of rural products. Recently, besides participation in every year in the IITF, Delhi, and regional Saras fairs are also organized on regular basis.

SARAS has opened up opportunities for the rural artisans who are deeply involved in the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development. SARAS has been a regular annual event for every year since

1999. This exhibition-cum-sale fair displays a wide range of products manufactured by the rural artisans, craftsmen and beneficiaries of SHGs across. The MORD in collaboration with the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) organized the SARAS Mela during the India International Trade Fair (IITF) for the first time in India in 1999 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. Actually SARAS was promoted as an umbrella brand for promoting all the rural products.

The '*All India Handicrafts Board*' assisted the state governments in setting up their Design and Technical centers in **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Kashmir, Rajasthan, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Manipur, Tripura, Haryana, West Bengal and Goa**. Particularly in these states SARAS Mela occurs in every year & not only these 16 but all the states of India join SARAS through their unique Handicrafts.

Though Indian handloom and handicrafts are very precious for export but due to lack of adequate Inputs, information asymmetry, fragmented value chain, low productivity etc. it could not cope up with the demand. Thus the need to redefine and rediscover a status for craft was keenly felt, and awareness for protecting skills was accentuated by Government of India through SARAS Mela, an exhibition cum sale mela showcasing the skillfully crafted rural products by the Below the Poverty Line (BPL) artisans.

SARAS - An Avenue for Promoting Rural Handicrafts, Generating Employment & Developing Income of Artisans

The SARAS Mela portrays the skills of people residing in different corners of the rural sector. The products are directly displayed in the mela and the visitors purchase directly from the rural artisans. The products have a large popular appeal and people from all across the country participate in the SARAS Mela.

MORD organized SARAS Mela -

- With a view to give exposure to rural artisans/entrepreneurs/ officials dealing with SGSY to a major international event in the country to develop markets for products manufactured by beneficiaries of programs of the Ministry.
- To create awareness amongst urban consumers of India and about rural products.

SARAS Mela has generated confidence of the stakeholders in the development of rural products and craftsmen. SARAS has been playing a key role in connecting these artisans with various markets. This mela aims at creating a unique platform for developing linkages with customers and providing an opportunity for artisans to interact with the buyers directly and facilitating the SGSY beneficiaries, rural artisans, craftsmen and SHGs to exhibit and sell their products. It also provides them the opportunity for additional income as well as wide scale interactions and significant exposure. (*Source*²)

Present Scenario of SARAS

SARAS is a well-established brand name among urban as well as rural consumers and connoisseurs of rural crafts.

1. **Marketing:** The SARAS Fair at India International Trade Fair (IITF) has been an annual event for the past many years, benefiting a large number of rural artisans. With this event, CAPART has also taken a step towards being a Fair Trade Facilitator for Rural Products. The products mainly displayed in SARAS Mela were –
 - Metal work products from Madhya Pradesh,
 - Sambalpuri Sarees from Orissa,
 - Wood carving work from Andhra Pradesh,
 - Bamboo Craft from Tripura,
 - Madhubani paintings from Bihar,
 - Terracotta from Chhattisgarh,
 - Shawls and Carpets from Jammu & Kashmir,
 - Handicrafts from Uttar Pradesh,
 - Batik, silk, tater saree, different kinds of flavored rice from West Bengal etc.
2. **Capacity Building:** SARAS has been able to demonstrate the capacity of the rural poor to produce goods for sale in urban, metropolitan and international markets. The participation in these exhibitions has given a fillip to the confidence and enthusiasm of rural artisans and officials dealing with the self-employment programme. Workshops are also organized during the mela to teach participants about some of the important sales and marketing aspects of their businesses and to enrich their capacity, capability, accessibility on Handicrafts. The workshops were organized during the SARAS mela at the RD Pavilion about packaging of products, design and quality of products, different aspects of exports etc.
3. **Institution facilities:** Government efforts have channeled an estimated Rs. 752 crore into the crafts sector during the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007- 2011). A number of institutions have been involved in funding and implementing development work for artisans through different schemes. Such as:
 1. *Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology* (CAPART)
 2. *Khadi and Village Industries Commission* (KVIC)
 3. *Small Industries Development Bank of India* (SIDBI)
 4. *National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development* (NABARD)

² *Grameen Bharat, Vol.8 Issue 77*

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With the 12th Plan's objective to achieve faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth, the strategy under the 12th Plan for the Handicrafts sector aims at creating world class globally competitive environment, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities to the artisans and thereby resulting in balanced socio-economic development and inclusive growth. Total financial outlay for 12th plan period (2012-2016) is proposed as Rs. 4519.06 cr.

Livelihood Promotion through SARAS

The crafts sector in India has vast potential to improve livelihood opportunities, generate additional income and strengthen the purchasing power of rural communities. For this potential to be fully realized, the gaps, overlaps and challenges in the value chain must be overcome to create an ecosystem that enables crafts to thrive. The different stakeholders involved need to come together to build what we call the four cornerstones of artisan sustainability. Nonprofits have a particularly important role in such a program. Based on Dasra's research, crafting a Livelihood suggests four key actions with the potential to transform artisans' livelihood in India, viz. –

- Handholding the Artisan through the Value Chain.
- Increasing Demand for Crafts and Strengthening Market Linkages.
- Strengthening the Decentralized Production Model.
- Building a Multi-Stakeholder Approach.

The number of stalls and participatory states in SARAS Mela gives the evidence in this regard.

Around 195 SHGs representing 22 States and different parts of the country are participating in this SARAS Mela at Dilli Haat, Pitampura in 2009. In 2010 a total of 834 participants belonging to 444 SHGs from 26 states, 26 CAPART supported NGOs, and 2 participants from the Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs International (CWEI) participated in the mela. Around 352 Stalls and 704 artisans from 23 States had participated in the SARAS Mela 2013 at Dilli Haat, New Delhi. (Source³)

Something more through SARAS Mela

Apart from opening up new avenues for potential talents of craftsmen and playing a key role in connecting these artisans with various markets SARAS mela have also generated confidence of the stakeholders in the development of rural products and craftsmen through the followings.

- **Cultural Programmes:** The Songs and Drama Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi was engaged for performing cultural programmes to attract visitors of SARAS mela in New Delhi. Apart from this, every state during SARAS mela a cultural programmes are held with the help of regional peoples of participating states in the *mela*.
- **Publicity:** The publicity for the *mela* was done through the Media Division of CAPART and advertisements were inserted in national and local newspapers both in Hindi and English and also in regional languages. Hoardings and display boards were also placed at various strategic locations inside mela.
- **Prize Distribution:** To provide encouragement to the artisans and coordinators and thus to create mass willingness to participate in SARAS Mela a committee was constituted by MORD with some members as jury to decide on prizes for the following categories:
 - *Best artisan*
 - *Best product*
 - *Best decorative stall*
 - *Best State Coordinator*

The committee visited in all the stalls and interacted with the stall owners/ SHGs/ NGOs/State Coordinators. The prizes were distributed to the above mentioned categories as decided by the jury. And also some Cultural Programmes is organized by MORD/ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting/others to attract visitors.

8. Conclusion

Craft is the standard mark of creativity and the essential differentiator for a country in the sweeping wines of globalization. SARAS Mela turned out to be a success. The artisans and SHG members were given an opportunity to understand the market trends and customer preferences. They were also exposed to a large variety of the products of other artisans. Investing in the crafts sector today presents a tremendous opportunity to shape the prosperity of those engaged in India's non-farm rural economy. Both SARAS Mela and marketing of Handicrafts include stable employment and income generation opportunities, the ability to capture a greater share of a significant global market, and preservation of unique cultural assets. Moreover, crafts are a powerful tool to create catalytic impact on the lives of women, marginalized communities and social outcomes of entire families engaged in the sector.

³ www.capart.nic.in

Ultimately the success of the SARAS fair lies in the wholehearted participation of the artisan community from all parts of the country.

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