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MARKETING CHALLENGES FOR MSMES IN INDIA *A Study on the Terracotta and Pottery Craft Cluster of Asharikandi*

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Abstract:-Terracotta Art in India has been flourishing since the time of Indus Valley Civilization. Various excavations at 'Mohenjodaro' and 'Harappa' have unearthed several terracotta items in the form of various figures and figurines. In India this art is considered mystical as it incorporates the five gifts of the mother nature- air, fire, water, earth and ether. In a number of states in India, such as, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Assam, the terracotta figures still have a lot of prominence and represent the historic and cultural significance of this traditional art. In India, the single largest cluster where both Terracotta and Pottery crafts are found and practiced in traditional way is Asharikandi (Madaikhali) craft village which is also known as Terracotta Craft Village. The cluster is registered under the MSME- DI, Guwahati, Assam. But as a result of various marketing problems and inadequate marketing initiatives, the commercial potential of the unique art of this cluster still lay untapped. Hence, the study attempts to bring into light the various issues and challenges in marketing of the products manufactured in this cluster. The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Keywords:terracotta, pottery, cluster, marketing challenges.

INTRODUCTION:

The term 'TERRACOTTA' has been derived from the words 'Terra' and 'Cotta'. 'Terra' means 'Earth' and 'Cotta' means 'Baked'. An object of art made of a composition of clay and sand and baked with earthen colour, a brownish red, is Terracotta. Terracotta is one of the oldest crafts that human civilization has ever introduced on earth.

Terracotta Art in India has been flourishing since the times of Indus Valley Civilisation. Various excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa have unearthed several terracotta items in the form of various figures and figurines. In a number of states in India, the terracotta figures have a lot of prominence. For instance, the impressive Ayanaar horse from Tamil Nadu represents the largest terracotta sculpture ever made and is constructed from coiling and beating, the same techniques used for making vessels. Although votive terracotta is made by members of the Hindu potter caste, the customer is often a member of the Tribal community. The relief plaques depicting images of Tribal deities are made in Rajasthan and the varied styles of horses and tigers recorded in Gujarat are also made for Tribal clientele. Madhya Pradesh is represented by the highly embellished elephants offered in forest shrines and also by women's wall decoration. This involves using clay pigments and decorating techniques similar to pottery creation and modelling processes. In West Bengal the Snake Goddess Manasa is worshipped through a terracotta tree shrine constructed from multiple thrown and modelled parts. Another major form of West Bengal terracotta finds its artistic channel in the horses. They are famous almost all over the country for their handsome looks. In Gujarat and Rajasthan terracotta panels and storage jars painted in white are famous. In Orissa and Madhya Pradesh the roof tops depict profuse terracotta works. Besides, the terracotta and pottery of Madhya Pradesh is well known for their artistic excellence.

In India, the single largest cluster where both Terracotta and Pottery crafts are found and practiced in traditional way is Asharikandi (Madaikhali) craft village. The main raw material for pottery and terracotta craft is Hiramati, a special type of soil. The reserve of Hiramati, lies nearby areas like Silairpar, which is only four kilometers away from the village. The unique artistic skill of the Kumbhakars (potters) of Asharikandi, have created a separate identity for Asharikandi- style of Terracotta. HATIMA doll nationally and internationally acclaimed unique masterpiece of Late Sarala Bala Devi, has brought much repute for Asharikandi- style of Terracotta.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A highlight of some research works that were being reviewed before undertaking the present study are as follows: Zaidi.(2013), "Problems affecting the growth of small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in India". The study presents an analytical description of the role of MSMEs in Indian economy, challenges facing them and government initiatives to promote SMEs in India.

Satpathi (2011) undertook a study on "Teracotta Craft of Panchmura: Problems and Possibilities" under which an overview of the nature of Panchmura terracotta craft items, production and marketing system, government initiatives for the promotion of the craft in the concerned region and possibilities for future growth and development have been given.

Foundation for MSME Clusters (2007), "Policy and Status Paper on Cluster Development in India". The paper presents up to date facts regarding the growing relevance of MSMEs in India and emphasizes on the need for an appropriate policy framework for the regulation and development of MSMEs, challenges for the policy makers and the possible future policy governing the potent MSME clusters.

However, in course of the review no research work has been found emphasizing specifically on the factors inhibiting the efficient marketing of the terracotta and pottery products of Asharikandi Cluster. The paper, thus, attempts to fill this gap in the existing literature and make an addition to the existing knowledge base relating to the marketing challenges for MSMEs in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To identify the problems hindering efficient marketing of the terracotta and pottery products of Asharikandi cluster;
- ii. To suggest measures for improvement.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is confined to the Asharikandi (Madaikhali) village of Dhubri District, Assam. The population for the study comprises of all the artisans who are engaged in terracotta and pottery craft in the study region. Out of the population size of 500 artisans, a sample of 40 artisans has been selected by adopting Simple Random Sampling technique in order to collect the relevant data. Both primary and secondary data sources have been resorted to for the purpose. Primary data have been collected from the sample respondents (artisans) through schedules and unstructured personal interviews of the experts and officials, whereas secondary data have been collected from various internet websites, Office of the District Regulatory Development Authority (DRDA), Dhubri, NECARDO Office, Dhubri, etc. Further, the primary data have been analyzed with the help of percentages to draw meaningful and relevant inferences. The study has been undertaken during the months of August to October of the year 2013.

PRODUCT RANGE OF THE CLUSTER

Terracotta: Until recent past, idols of various Hindu Gods and Goddesses, Dolls, Toys and various other types of decorative products were produced by the artisans of Asharikandi cluster. There were no utility products. Efforts have been made in the past few years to upgrade the products and the product lines, as well. A remarkable step has been taken jointly by DRDA- Dhubri and NECARDO through which some newly developed and designed Terracotta prototypes of various categories, types, and sizes have been added to the range of products of Asharikandi cluster. A good range of utility products like -Fish Type Pen Stand, Folding Table, Terracotta Water Filter, Decorative Casket, Terracotta Photo-frame, Pancha-Pradeep Hatima, Naba-Pradeep Hatima, Hatima Pradeep & Child, Fish Type Candle Stand, Peacock Type Tub, Duck Type Tub, Fish Type Tub, Frog Type Ashtray, Fruit Container, Coaster with container, etc. are now a common display of the wonderful art of this cluster. Besides, new lines of decorative items include show pieces like- Flower Vase with Stand, Fachu, Full Curving Motka, Partial Curving Motka, Lady and Lamb, Horse, Assam Rhino, historical and cultural items like Axom Sarai, Goddess Durga, Crucified Jesus, Three-part Palanqum, Mayurpankhi Boat, Pankhiraj, idols of Mahadev, Ganesha etc.

Pottery: Traditionally, the artisans of the village have been dealing in pottery items like- pitcher, jars, water containers, earthen utensils, low-cost toilet rings, earthen pipes for water supply, parts of musical instruments like tabla, mridang, khol etc.

Raw Materials used by the Artisans:

Hiramati, a special type of soil is the principal raw material for terracotta & pottery products. Besides Hiramati, water, catechu, red-soil, firewood, sand paper, hay etc. are some important ingredients/ inputs for the terracotta and pottery products of the cluster.

MARKETING MIX FOR THE PRODUCTS OF THE CLUSTER: ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

Product related problems:

The main product related constraint pertains to the production process itself. The artisans in the cluster still resort to the traditional methods, as inherited from their forefathers, for preparing and designing the craft. Traditional methods like manual Hiramati conditioning, production and designing of terracotta and pottery products with bare hands and through big hand-driven wheels (charki), firing of items in traditional kiln, traditional packaging by common hay are the common features for producing the various items mentioned in the product range. Such production process warrants a high time and labour consumption per unit of an item produced and thus affects the efficiency in production. Also it limits the variety in product lines and product designs.

To do away with the limitations inherent in the traditional production methods and to improve productivity the government through District Rural Development Authority (DRDA), Dhubri along with some prominent and active NGOs like North East Craft and Rural Development Organization (NECARD) have organized a few training programmes in recent past. The results of the sample survey regarding training of artisans are presented through a table, as follows:

Table No. 1
Distribution of respondents on the basis of training undergone (n=40)

Status of respondents	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Trained	07	17.50
Untrained	33	82.50

Source: Self- compilation during field survey

Thus, it is evident from the table above that despite the joint efforts of government authorities and NGOs, majority of artisans in the cluster are still untrained and alien to the improved methods of production. Hence, more of such training programmes for the artisans of the cluster and on a larger scale is the need of the hour.

Price related problems:

Due to the low productivity of the artisans, caused by the application of traditional methods of production, the cost of production of the terracotta and pottery items tend to be high, leaving very small profit margins for the artisans. The selling prices of the items manufactured by all the artisans tend to remain more or less uniform due to the competition among them.

While undertaking the survey, the respondents were enquired whether their products fetch satisfactory price in the market. Their responses are tabulated below:

Table No. 2
Distribution of respondents on the basis of satisfaction on selling price (n=40)

Satisfaction on selling price	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Satisfied	33	82.50
Not satisfied	07	17.50

Source: Self- compilation during field survey

Thus, as depicted by the table above, majority of the artisans of the cluster are, perhaps, satisfied with the selling prices that their products fetch. Perhaps, an important reason for such high level of satisfaction on selling price is that almost all the artisans in the cluster sell their products personally to various tourists, customers in fairs and also to the local customers. Besides, the low profit margin obtained by way of selling the products through agency, low level of awareness relating to the popularity of the craft outside the region and low level of literacy of the artisans contribute to such high level of satisfaction.

Table No. 3
Distribution of respondents on the basis of selling methods used (n=40)

Selling methods	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Direct selling	09	22.50
Through intermediary/ agency	01	2.50
Both	30	75.00

Source: Self- compilation during field survey

Thus, it is evident from the table that very few artisans in the cluster sell their products exclusively through intermediaries or agents. This is perhaps due to the relatively low margin of profit obtained by way of selling through intermediaries/ agents.

PLACE RELATED PROBLEMS:

Work Place: The artisans don't have proper studio or work place, most of them either using open bamboo shed or a place within their homes. Bad lighting and improper ventilation deteriorate the working condition to the worst. Working inside the house, besides reducing the productivity of the artisans, creates a lot of health issues, especially for the children, which is a big concern for the craftsmen.

Storage: The artisans of the cluster don't have any storage place where they can store their produces and so most of the time the finished products are left out on nearby open space. Many of them keep their finished goods out in the verandah of their houses due to the lack of suitable space. Naturally, shortage of space is quite responsible for lesser production of this craft. Shortage of space, as a consequence, leads to high amount of wastages by various ways such as breakage, destruction by rain water and thunderstorm, etc. Specially, in times of flood the lack of proper storage leads to mass wastage of all kinds of stock – raw materials, work-in-process, finished goods resulting into huge losses for the artisans.

Sales-cum-display outlets: Besides the dearth of organized & systematic work space and place for storage, there is lack of proper place to display the finished products. Under the “New Country Programme 2003-07” sponsored by “United Nations Development Programme”, the Deputy Commissioner of Dhubri district inaugurated a new project entitled “Rural Tourism Project on Terracotta Craft Cluster of Asharikandi in Dhubri District”. As the project is in the initial stage, not much of the proposed developments have been realized. However, to do away with the working conditions, storage and sales-cum-display outlet related problems, two huts to showcase terracotta products, one work-shed cum show room to demonstrate works to the tourists, one community hall to facilitate the artisans to perform community works etc. have been constructed. But still there is a lot to do in this regard. The facilities so provided have created convenience for some artisans indeed, but majority of the artisans are still deprived of the benefits. The result of the sample survey is presented through the following table:

Table No. 4
Distribution of respondents on the basis of access to show room facility (n=40)

Show room facility	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Obtained	04	10.00
Not Obtained	36	90.00

Source: Self-compilation during field survey

CHALLENGES IN PROMOTION:

Perhaps, one of the most influential causes inhibiting the popularity of the products manufactured in the cluster is the lack of effective promotion. Not much has been done yet in order to promote the unique craft items of the cluster. This is probably in line with the low level of literacy among the artisans of the cluster that they are yet to discover the idea of promotion and related benefits. Only a few, among the respondents interviewed, have arranged for display racks at their respective points of sale, which clearly indicates their level of awareness regarding product promotion. Moreover, among those who belong to the fairly literate category are often restricted by financial constraints to undertake planned measures for promotion. Very few craftsmen from the cluster can make it to the various national and international exhibitions and trade fairs because of their financial position and subject to financial aids from NGOs and government. The office of the Development Commissioner (Handicraft), Ministry of Textile, Govt. of India provides dearness allowances for the artisans when they participate in any state or national level exhibition, trade fair and expo. This allowance is up to an amount of Rs.270 and Rs.370 (for national award winner) per day and the artisans also receive a travelling allowance of Rs.7000 per person to take part in trade fairs and exhibitions organized within the country.

As a promotional initiative on the part of the government under the “New Country Programme, 2003-07” sponsored by “United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)”, the Ministry of Tourism, GOI, has taken up a Rural Tourism Scheme under a new project entitled “Rural Tourism Project on Terracotta Craft Cluster of Asharikandi in Dhubri District”. The project is presently being implemented through the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Dhubri District and Asharikandi Terracotta and Pottery Development Committee (ATAPDC). Along with various other developmental initiatives the project agenda also provides for constructing two numbers of huts to showcase terracotta products and also one work-shed cum show room to demonstrate craft items of the cluster to the tourists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A few suggestions based on the findings, as presented above, are as follows:

- i. The government and NGOs should organize training programmes to facilitate the implementation of modern methods of production, improved tools and latest technology for fast production of goods as well as quality control;
- ii. The government authorities should take steps for aggressive market promotion of the craft which would enable better publicity and thus, revival of the craft which has reached the edge of extinction;
- iii. There should be proper infrastructure facilities like road transport, communication and power supply to the artisans of the cluster;
- iv. The financial assistance provided by the bank should be increased so that the artisans of Asharikandi style of terracotta and pottery craft are relieved from the chronic problem of insufficiency of capital.
- v. Government should take steps to increase the number of showrooms within and outside the craft village i.e. in nearby towns for better exposure of the products.
- vi. The Govt. should promote exports of these products to provide access to these remote but extraordinary art and culture to international market.
- vii. The government authorities and NGOs in the concerned region should take steps to ensure that the artisans get proper price for their products and protect them from exploitation made by the middlemen.

CONCLUSION

Through the present study an attempt has been made to portray the basic and ground level problems affecting the marketing mix for the products of the concerned MSME cluster, which is indeed one of the unique clusters in India. Of course, it is evident from the study that it is the need of the hour that the concerned government authorities, NGOs and the artisans of the cluster should take corrective measures for proper utilization of the available resources through modern techniques and marketing strategies with a long term vision of Asharikandi Terracotta and Pottery Craft Cluster as a production hub of world class Terracotta products, and revive this traditional art which is, at present, standing on the verge of extinction

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