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MARKETING PROCEDURE OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTS: A STUDY ON CONCH SHELL INDUSTRY OF WEST BENGAL IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The importance of rural sector in Indian economy cannot be undermined. The handicraft artisans of India, atleast a large majority of them, are known for their perfection of craftsmanship, excellence of design, form and an unsurpassed sense of colour. The artisan was an important factor in the equation of the Indian society and culture. The present research paper is based on primary survey conducted on conch shell industry in West Bengal. The sample survey comprises of 240 household units selected from four districts in West Bengal. At present rural conch shell producers/suppliers are struggling to market their products and services due to various reasons. Rural producers are facing serious problems about technical and marketing knowledge. They are also ignorant about modern marketing issues like quality, delivery schedule, packaging, after-sales-service, etc. However few studies have been conducted on conch shell handicraft items to access the marketing of rural products in the urban market using retail format. The present communication reviews in this field studies in the Indian context. A brief review includes in following sequence i.e. framework of rural handicraft marketing for conch shell products, marketing of conch shell products. The paper suggests that if proper measures are not taken to help the artisans and provide support to them, then the beautiful art will have to face extinction.

KEYWORDS

Rural marketing, Rural handicraft products, Artisans.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India is one of the important suppliers of handicrafts to the world market. India is known globally for her rich heritage of Arts & Crafts. India is the only country in the world with an unbroken, living vibrant tradition of crafts. Handicrafts are unique expressions of a particular culture or community through local craftsmanship and materials. The handicraft sector is a home-based industry which requires minimum expenditure, infrastructure or training to set up. They provide ample opportunities for employment even with low capital investments and become a prominent medium for foreign earnings, are prepared by using hands or with the use of simple tools. It uses existing skills and locally available materials. Income generation through craft does not (and this is important in a rural society) disturb the cultural and social balance of either the home or the community. Handicrafts play very important role in representing the culture and traditions of any country or region. Handicrafts are a substantial medium to preserve of rich traditional art, heritage and culture, traditional skills and talents which are associated with people's lifestyle and history. The Handicraft sector has, however, suffered due to its being unorganized, with the additional constraints of lack of education, low capital, and poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence, and a poor institutional framework. In India West Bengal occupies a premier place in respect of the development of conch shell industry. West Bengal is known the country over for its artistically designed conch shell, spread over certain important centre, since the distant past. Conch Crafts an ancient folk craft, dating back at least two thousand years. Conch shell Handicrafts play very important role in representing the culture and traditions of West Bengal in India. This handicraft is a substantial medium to preserve of rich traditional art, heritage and culture, traditional skills and talents which are associated with people's lifestyle and history. Conch shell handicraft is also hugely important in terms of economic development. They provide ample opportunities for employment even with low capital investments and become a prominent medium for foreign earnings. The conch or chank shell (*Turbinellapyrum*) is so intimately connected with the religious and social life of the people of India. Conch shell industries comprises the following types of units –a) Independents units b) Dependent or Tied units. The independent units are equipped with the requisite facilities for the manufacture of body, processing facilities. They have their own arrangements for the procurement of conch shell through middlemen. The dependent units neither have any processing arrangements for raw materials nor do they have any facility. These units are entirely dependent for their requirements of processed raw materials the privately owned manufacturing units. Marketing is an important productive function on which depends the ultimate success or failure of a production unit. Unless the goods produced are sold off on remunerative prices quickly without to wait for long in the godowns and warehouses by the manufacturers, no productive activity can be continuous and successfully carried on. It is, in fact, the 'barometer' or prosperity and adversity of an industry. The primary objective of all marketing effort is to place goods in the hands of consumer. In fact, marketing implies "the performances of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer or the user".¹ The general object of presenting this study is to examine marketing procedure of conch shell products and marketing problems of the industry.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sen (1935) notes that the use of conch bracelets by Bengali woman was described in ancient bangle literature and suggests that conch craft developed independently in Dhaka.

Sen (1961) discussed economic behavior of craftsman and production process of conch shell industry of West Bengal and Sikkim.

Nishar Ahmed (1980) express that the satisfactory performance in marketing of handicrafts could be possible due to the special interest taken by central as well as State Government to boost up the export of handicraft article and the qualitative performance of the artisans.

Narver et al (1990) explored the relationship between sustainable competitive advantage and market orientation. Market orientation in business culture effectively and efficiently create superior value of customers. A substantial market orientation must be the foundation for a business competitive advantage strategy

In the opinion of Tahroi and Singh, (1993) rural industrialization has been vital issue for the country to ensure socio economic development of the nation.

Prof Dr. Venugopal Rao (1994) has elaborated about marketing of handicrafts in which he has also highlighted about activities of artisans.

According to Reardon (1998) the success of rural industries crucially depends on two major function i.e. effective marketing and internal resource generation including finance. Marketing involves everything which could be important to lead the market.

Liang, Chen et al (2002) has discussed that China has, since the late 1970s, actively pursued a strategy of rural industrialisation by encouraging the development of rural industries which provide employment opportunities for the surplus labour in agriculture.

According to Aziz (2006), in India, entrepreneurs first emerged in the rural area. They were basically traditional artisans, cultivators and businessmen engaged in production and distribution of goods and services required by the people.

¹ R.S.Davar, Modern Marketing Management. Bombay Progressive Corporation private Ltd., 1977, p.4.

Kashyap and Raut, (2006) found that craftsmen have lack of understanding about the local demand pattern of the area, market dynamics, market channel, price fluctuation and value addition possibility which can help them to develop a comprehensive intervention plan based on market realities.

Giron et al (2007) concluded that marketing strategies are the key factor for the success of rural artisans in Mexican city. These strategies are important because it is related to the other element of success, for the use of pricing strategies oriented to profits. The second most important strategy is the use of personal recommendation which is used to promote products. Product diversification and the information artisans gave to customers were representatively the third and fourth strategy.

Rajagopal, (2009) highlights upon the new models of brand management in bottom-of-the- pyramid markets, considering the personality traits, image, technology and reputation of firms associated with the brands. New initiatives are to manage the global brands in BOP markets comprising suburban and rural markets that need to be implemented in the existing organizational culture.

Craig and Douglas, (2011) envisaged the role of marketing in tapping potential in rural areas and suggested how firms can help potential consumers develop their purchasing power, thus creating a situation that benefits both consumers and the firm.

Aitha, (2012) conclude that the distribution channel length varies in regions based on variation in the external environment. Village retailer with his unique buying preferences also influences the by distribution channel.

Shweta Sharma (2012) discussed about the Significance of Conch Bangles. Conch Bangles made of conch shells won by Hindu Women in Bengal, as ornaments at the weddings as a religious rite.

From the brief review of the existing literature it appears that marketing aspects of conch shell industry in West Bengal have not been adequately discussed.

3. NEED OF THE STUDY

The growth of conch shell industry improves the production of the durable consumer goods of mass consumption especially for women. This study is designed at throwing light on the present state of marketing of the conch shell products. It also aims at the formulation of suitable suggestion and plans for its future development on sound footing.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At present conch shell product suppliers are struggling to market their products and services due to various reasons. Rural conch shell producers are facing serious problems about technical and marketing knowledge. They are also ignorant about modern marketing issues like quality, delivery schedule, packaging, after-sales-service, etc. However few studies have been conducted to access the marketing of conch shell products in the urban market using retail format. The present communication reviews in this field studies in the Indian context.

5. OBJECTIVES

The general object of presenting this study is to assess marketing of conch shell products and marketing problems of the industry.

6. HYPOTHESES & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The required data for the present study have been collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected through the "Survey Method" with the help of structured questionnaire from 240 units. Total sample 240 household units include 22.50 percent independent units, 77.50 percent tied units. Four Districts of West Bengal namely North 24-Paraganas, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Bankura selected on the basis of concentration of conch shell handicraft units.

7. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

7.1 PRODUCT VARIETIES AND USES OF CONCH SHELL

India is known for its rich and diverse culture². Conch craft³ of West Bengal has a close significance to the rich culture of its state. The craft of conch shell⁴ is a very old craft of Bengal. Although the religious use of the chank shell is still widespread in India, the main trade of the shell in modern India is between Tamil Nadu, where the fishery is based, and West Bengal, where most of the carvers and bangle makers work, and where the retail outlets are concentrated. Shankha⁵ is a conch shell which is of ritual and religious importance in both Hinduism and Buddhism. The shankha is the shell of a species of large predatory sea snail, *Turbinella pyrum*, which lives in the Indian Ocean and surrounding seas. Shankh⁶ this instrument has a strong association with the Hindu religion. The conch shell⁷ is a major Hindu article of prayer, used as a trumpet and in order to get rid of negative energy and evil spirits. It is also used as a container for holy water (shankha *teertham*). Conch, or conque, is a musical instrument⁸, a wind instrument that is made from a seashell, the shell of one of several different kinds of very large seasnail. These instruments are sometimes referred to as "shell trumpets". A powder⁹ made from the shell material is used in Indian Ayurvedic medicine, primarily as a cure for stomach ailments and for increasing beauty and strength. Shankha¹⁰ (conch bangles) made of conch shell are worn by Hindu women as ornaments at their weddings as a religious rite. Two distinct kinds of conch shells left handed conch¹¹ and right handed conch are used to achieve divine benediction and also mythological beliefs rooted. The conch shell products of West Bengal may be divided under the following heads: conch bangle (sankha), blowing conch, other by products of conch shell.

It is evident from the above table that the all surveyed 240 conch shell units (100 %) in West Bengal are manufacturing Conch bangle (*sankha*). The manufacture of other by products of conch shell or decoration articles like spoons, forks, costume jewellery, table lamps etc are the distinctive feature in West Bengal. They together account for 125 units (52.08 %). As these are engage only in decoration work on the conch shell industry, their number is naturally not large at any centre in the state. On this basis, the organization of conch shell units by type of products of conch shell may be detailed as Table 7.1

TABLE 7.1: ORGANISATION OF UNITS ACCORDING TO LINE OF MANUFACTURE OF CONCH SHELL PRODUCTS

Type of products	Paschim Medinipur	Purba Medinipur	Bankura	North 24 Paraganas	Total	Total
Conch bangle (sankha)	60 (25)	60 (25)	60 (25)	60 (25)	240 (100)	240
Blowing conch	50 (20.83)	40 (16.67)	30 (12.50)	25 (10.42)	145 (60.42)	240
Other by products of conch shell	35 (14.58)	25 (10.42)	40 (16.67)	25 (10.42)	125 (52.08)	240

Source: Field survey; Note: parentheses indicate the percentage shares.

² <http://marrymeweddings.in/wpblog/bangles-for-the-indian-bride.html> viewed as Bangles For The Indian Bride

³ <http://www.craftandartisans.com/shell-craft-of-west-bengal.html> viewed as Shell Craft of West Bengal

⁴ <http://www.infobanc.com/shell.htm> viewed as shell and conch shell

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shankha>

⁶ http://chandrakantha.com/articles/indian_music/shankh.html viewed as Shankh

⁷ <http://www.religiousportal.com/SacredShankha.html> viewed as Sacred Shankha (Conch Shell)

⁸ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conch_\(musical_instrument\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conch_(musical_instrument)) viewed as Conch (instrument)

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shankha>

¹⁰ http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/S_0292.HTM

¹¹ http://www.indianetzone.com/25/types_conch_shell.htm Viewed as Types of conch shell

7.2 TYPES OF DESIGN OF CONCH SHELL PRODUCT

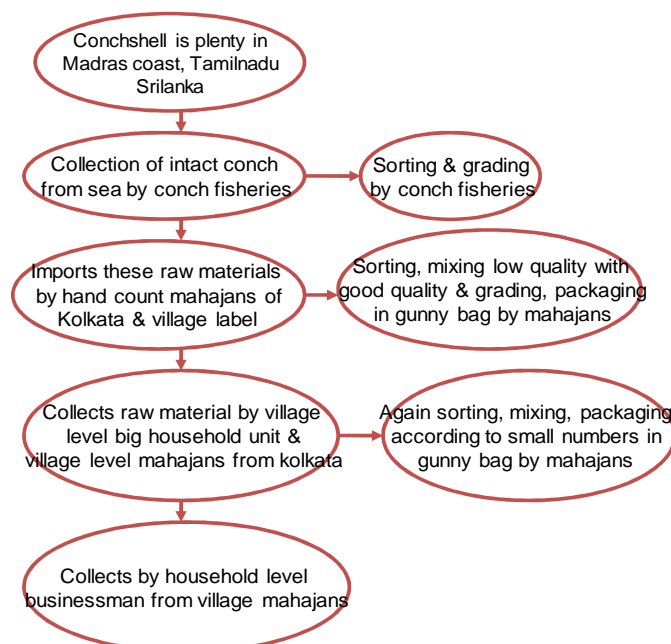
The conchshell craft is not a new art in Bengal, famous for the unique form of its arts and crafts¹². Conch shell¹³ craft is one of the most unique and most beautiful forms of handicrafts practiced in West Bengal. The conch shell artists are known as the 'Shankharis' in West Bengal. They practice their hereditary art with an expertise that is honed by ages of experience and skill. Shimmering conch shells are sliced with simple hand tools and perfectly fashioned to form shell jewelry like bangles, bracelets, pendants and a range of other jewelry items. It is an extremely sophisticated and delicate craft of West Bengal. The craft of Conch Shell decorating can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization¹⁴. The nimble fingers of the craftsmen turned every article they touched into a thing of joy. Most of the designs, forms and colours employed by them have evolved slowly through the disciplined efforts of generations of craftsmen.

Craftsmen create episodes from the Hindu epic Mahabharata or stories that revolve around Lord Krishna on these shells. While some craftsmen draw the image of Lord Shiva over the shell, others create entire episodes from the Mahabharata on it. Then, the stories of Lord Krishna also serve as popular themes for engraving the conch shells. The craftspersons keep the interest of entire country and design many different patterns and shapes of bangles. The designs crafted on the bangles to please the wealthy families are indeed very attractive. Designs of fish, Capricorn, butterfly, pitcher, *chillum*, lotus bud, paddy sheaf; leaf of marigold, parakeet and bamboo line are crafted on these bangles. Decoration and engraving on conch shells are done with a variety of files. The surface of the conch is hard and is difficult to slice it. Craftspersons use diamond cutter which has sharp teeth to cut the hard surface. Each artisan has his own unique style, it is very difficult to carve a conch shell and takes a minimum of two to three months to make just one conch shell article. Despite attempts to mechanize some of the processes, most chank shell workers still employ the traditional tools and techniques. *Sankharis* or conchshell workers are adept at making fashion bangles, bracelets and a range of ornaments out of conchshell. The craftspersons also design conch shells used to make jewelry items brooches, pendants, finger rings and ear rings like bangles, armlets, rings, lockets, buttons, hairpins and clips. Apart from engraved shells, other conch shell crafts include making items like table lamps, incense holders, ashtrays, vermilion containers, spoons and forks from the shells.

7.3 PACKING AND TRANSPORTATION METHODS USED IN CONCH SHELL INDUSTRY

"Packing, regarding as an integral part of any industrial activity, is a mean of safe delivery of any manufactured or processed item from the point of production through various stages of the distribution, until it reaches the ultimate buyer at a minimum overall cost."¹⁵ The technique of packing is not so simple as it appears to be. The producer should give special attention to this aspect of business as he would gain if there is less due to breakages in transit. The bag method of packing is safely used for conch shell to be sent to distances. Defective transportation system between the points of production and the markets hinders the movement of goods and makes primary marketing costly, the additional charge ordinarily falling upon the shoulders of the producers. "The functions of physical supply involve the creation of place utility through transportation and the creation of time utility through storage or warehousing."¹⁶ The main raw materials used in the manufacture of conch shell products like *sankha* is intact conch shell. These materials are not available locally which are obtained from nearer places in the State; the other raw materials are imported from other States from long distances specially from Tamilnadu and Srilanka, which is only possible through railway and motor trucks. The manufacturers prefer road transportation over railways because it is quicker and there are lesser damages in transit. Internal transport is also important for transportation of raw material of conch shell, i.e., intact conch shell packaged in gunny bag from the private body/conch shell manufacturing units to the places of work of small conch shell units. For internal transport purpose 'Rickshaws', bus, mini truck etc are in use at almost all conch shell centres in the State. Since the sale of conch shell products has increased to a great extent, they are now a day sent almost too every part of the State and the nearby States. For transporting the finished products to distant places the most important means are the railways and the roads.

Raw Material Collection Channels



¹² <http://www.bharatonline.com/west-bengal/arts-and-crafts/conch-shell-craft.html> viewed as Conch Shell Crafts

¹³ <http://www.indiaunveiled.in/subartscrafts/unique-conch-shell-craft-bengal> viewed as Unique Conch Shell Craft of Bengal

¹⁴ <http://www.india9.com/i9show/Conch-Shell-Craft-41314.htm> viewed as Conch Shell Craft

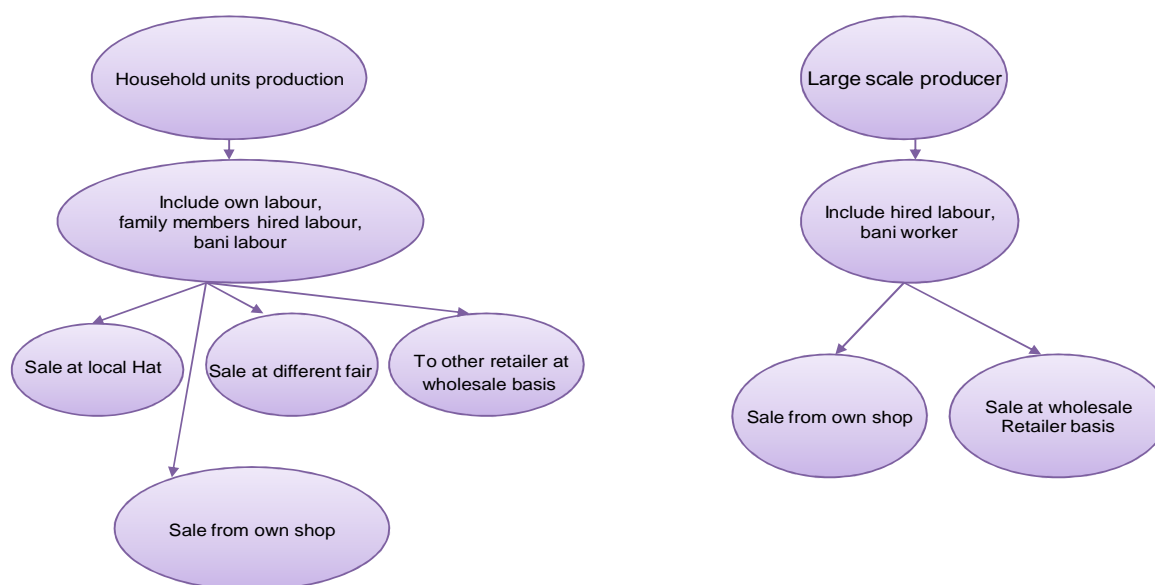
¹⁵ C.V.N. Rao, Role of Packaging in Marketing and Distribution, an article published in Laghu Udyog Samachar; Vol. I, April, 1977, No. 9, p. 16.

¹⁶ Clark and Clark, Principles of Marketing, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1962, p.407

7.4 FRAMEWORK OF MARKETING OF CONCH SHELL PRODUCTS

Messrs. Clark and Clark also define marketing almost in the same sense. "Marketing consists of those efforts which effect transfers in the ownership of goods and services and care for their physical distribution. The marketing process, consequently, involves both mental and physical aspects: mental, in that sellers must know what buyers want and buyers must know what is for sale, and physical in that goods must be moved to the places at which they are wanted by the time they are wanted"¹⁷. Marketing channels are the means employed by manufacturers and sellers to get their products to the market and into the hands of the ultimate users. In conch shell industry products are distributed mainly through following intermediaries as a part of distribution network: importers, indenting agents, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, dealers, commission agents. Products are sold mainly through following market places: Small and Large Retail Outlets, Supermarkets, Retail outlets situated in Malls, Shopping Websites (Using e-Commerce and Internet), Company Owned Showrooms and Retail Chains. The conch shell wholesalers make their purchases from the small conch shell producers and the factory owners directly. They are responsible for concentrating conch shell in large quantities in their godowns and dispersing it in bulk to the conch shell dealers throughout the country. All of them have their own godowns whether in their own premises or in the rented buildings. These wholesalers are persons with strong financial resources. They have better market contacts with the local and outside conch shell merchants and are better acquainted with the day-to-day changes in the conch shell trade. On account of trading on large scale, they are able to save in transportation costs also. The wholesalers also make advances to the conch shell artisans, small producers when needed. Due to weak financial position of the small producers in particular, the credit given by the wholesalers is a great help to them. In almost all principal conch shell centres in the State, a large quantity of conch shell producers is marketed through the local conch shell dealers. They are the persons who maintain their own shops and stalls and market conch shell products to local and outside consumers mostly on retail basis. Generally, major part of suppliers are procured from the conch shell wholesalers because the latter are able to give them goods on credit which the conch shell owners can seldom afford to give. Such conch shell dealers also operate in cities and towns other than those where conch shell manufacturing is not carried on in the State and outside. They obtain their requirements of conch shell goods either by direct purchase from the conch shell owners or through orders from the conch shell wholesalers.

Marketing Channels for Sale of Conch Product



4

8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Conchshell being an unorganized manufacturing carried out mostly in the household premises it has its varied labour process. The major marketing channels constitute door-to door sales, sales in hatt, bazaar etc., supplying the product to fixed sellers, sales through own counter, contract with local trader; or middlemen of traders, contract with master artisans, or wholesale traders, or exporters and export agencies, sales through own salesman, through advertisement, fairs etc. The conchshell producer sells their products through three different way namely i) direct selling at Hat, Shop or Fair as a retailer ii) through middleman at wholesale basis iii) through direct selling and through middleman.

The marketing systems and organization existing in the conch shell industry in the State are not without their defects. The main shortcomings may be summarized as below:

ABSENCE OF COMMON MARKETING ORGANISATION

The conch shell producers of the State have no separate marketing organization of their own and are unaware of the modern methods of sales promotion. Hence, they face great difficulty in selling their products. The conch shell units adopt such particular marketing system as they deem fit and desirable on any particular occasion. When the conch shell producers stand in need of money, they do not hesitate to sell their products even at lower prices. They sometimes sell their products partly on credit which is seldom realized in full. Their knowledge about their markets is utterly limited. The existing systems are adopted individually and involve comparatively higher expenditure in cartage and freight. A suitable common marketing organization could easily overcome these shortcomings.

INADEQUATE ADVERTISEMENT AND PUBLICITY

¹⁷ Clark and Clark, Principles of Marketing. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1962, pp. 4-5

Advertisement has assumed special importance in modern times where a large number of firms are producing identical products with resultant cut-throat competition. It is one of the essential functions of a good marketing organization. Unless people know about the product of any particular producer, its merits and superiority over competing brands, no significant amount of sales can be effected. The majorities of conch shell units in the State are small manufacturers with poor financial resources and limited production and cannot possibly met the huge expenses of modern advertisement. Advertisement of goods tends to expand the market as a result of which production increases. This, in turn, goes to lower the manufacturing costs. Advertisement activities are limited to occasional display and sales in big fairs and exhibitions and fixing up of stalls showing the processes of shaping and finishing of conch shell products by the State Government. However few bugger units also publish their printed catalogue with offsets of their products.

LACK OF SHOW ROOMS AND DISPLAYING ARRANGEMENTS

Lack of show rooms and displaying facilities is another important defect. Most of the conch shell units are indifferent to the benefits of show rooms and displaying arrangements. Small conch shell units sell all their products just after finishing their products and do not stock them. In the State the units maintain show rooms to display their products either in a portion of their dwellings or in the unit premises in a heterogeneous manner but as a matter of fact, they are not strictly rooms in real sense of the term.

UNSATISFACTORY STANDARDIZATION AND GRADING

Standardization implies establishment of certain standards based upon intrinsic physical properties or qualities of commodity with a view to further sub-dividing it into several grades and classes, while grading simply means dividing the products of varying quality and size into lots conforming to certain standard. In conch shell industry in West Bengal, there is no scale to measure the quality of a fixed standard and grade of the conch shell products. There is no gradation but a medley of different qualities. Only big conch shell units in the industry do carry out proper grading of their products. Hence, they are able to fetch higher prices, while others who do not do grading suffer considerable loss by selling their goods in mixed bulks at cheaper rates. Conch shell producers in competition do not care for quality; they concentrate only on quantity and reduction in costs. They compete with each other in manufacturing larger quantities and in selling them at lower rates. The big conch shell units produce different types of high quality products and do not offer any competition to the small conch shell units and face no effective competition in the market.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

A suitable common marketing organization could easily overcome several shortcomings. Existence of effective marketing organization and practices occupy an exceedingly significant place in the context of small and cottage industries. Another essential requirement of good marketing system is the satisfaction of consumer which is the most important goal of a business enterprise. Customer satisfaction is the heart of marketing process. The policies, programmes and strategies of the production units should be planned, organized and executed to satisfy the existing needs of the consumer in the most efficient manner and to anticipate their changing tastes and buying attitudes. To satisfy its consumers more effectively, the firm should lay greater emphasis on the value and services provided by product rather than its mere physical or technical features. Further, the firm should think more in terms of profitable sale rather than more volume for its own sake. The essential requirement of a good marketing organization is the existence of adequate marketing research facilities with the enterprise. In these days of cut-throat competition and greater sophistication in the tastes and habits of the consumers and consequent clamouring for variety, frequent changes in their demands for various reasons, no industry can survive unless it is constantly engaged in developing better and sophisticated marketing systems to catch fancy of the customers. Unless the customer knows what is being produced and what are its salient features and superiority over the other similar products of other producers in the industry, no concern can successfully sell off its products remuneratively and quickly. Good advertisement invariably yields good results and the money invested in it never goes waste and in turn brings greater profits. For conch shell industry it is very essential to have a cost effective and efficient distribution channel that adds value into whole value chain. Effective Distribution channel and Integrated Supply Chain Management help in growth of industry and make it more competitive.

10. CONCLUSIONS

However, the conch shell industry has, however, suffered due to its being unorganized, with the additional constraints of lack of education, low capital, and poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence, and a poor institutional framework, lack of infrastructure & technological support, lack of awareness of international and new trends and poor promotional campaigns are a few drawbacks of industry which needs to be overcome. It is estimated that conch shell handicraft Industry in India is all set to grow with rapid rate in future and contribute its share towards economic development handsomely.

11. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present work suffers from some limitations. An in-depth study on the wage structure of conch shell artisans, raw materials, capital and product markets could be in future.

12. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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