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Abstract

Although a particular key concept may have been emphasized at times, the three core concepts of geography- space, place and environment have always co-existed. Studying the primary rural market (the hat) based on these concepts is essential since the hats now account for a large part of the rural retail consumer market. Private companies including multinationals are eyeing these hats, launching projects with the intention of changing the mind sets of the villagers bringing about cultural globalization among them. Today these hats are offering a vast untapped potential to these companies as the wares have changed with the changing nature of the rural economy, livelihood and lifestyle. With improvement in infrastructure and income opportunities brought about by government interventions, policies and programmes, change in rural physical and cultural landscape is taking place; culminating in change in economic geography of these areas. This study is relevant in the present day context re-emphasizing the local-regional -national-global scale, and on the phenomenon of re-making of rural place. The work focuses using mainly qualitative approaches with representative case studies from tribal areas of Bankura, Jalpaiguri and Araku for an insight into impacts of the changing marketing system on the 'tribals'. The outcome of the study urges upon the necessity of different development strategies to be devised keeping intact the integrity of the traditional hats in rural areas of India.

Key Words: space, environment, livelihood, non-farm activities, cultural globalization.

Introduction

Geography is currently in the midst of reinterpreting the 'rural'. There are calls within tourism studies,

rural geography and cultural geography for further investigation into the new meanings represented in rural places, their emergent rural identities. Economic geography would benefit from a wider integration of research themes, including those of consumption, real regulation, global-local networks. Recent change in economic geography is taking place with the recent strands of development thinking. Rapid restructuring of the retail market and the strong influence of international capital is taking place affecting the traditional indigenous marketing system of rural India. Conceptually, rural marketing is different from agricultural marketing. Agricultural marketing denotes marketing of produce of the rural areas to the urban consumers whereas rural marketing denotes marketing of produce of the rural areas within the rural areas itself (Kumar & Dangi 2013). During the first phase, pre-1960s, rural marketing was identical with agricultural marketing in India. From 1960s to 1990s, the marketing of agricultural input and marketing of non-farm rural product was considered as rural marketing. Post 1990s due to rise in income, various companies focused on tapping rural market potential and flooded the areas with fast moving consumer goods (henceforth referred to as FMCG) and consumer durable goods. This they have done using the hat: looking up to them as a promising and emergent market. Traditionally the rural markets are located in production areas and primarily serve as places where farmers can meet with traders to sell their products. These may be occasional /periodical (perhaps weekly) markets, such as hat bazaars or regular ones. As most interior villages of rural India do not have proper linkage to the market, many Indian villages especially the ones that are well connected with small cities- host a business center, which is open only once a week or bi-weekly mostly on government owned lands. The hat, is the

traditional part of the rural marketing system, with its important socio-economic and cultural dimensions, is unique and significant even in this globalized era. It is a place of accumulation of local people to buy and sell their local goods to fulfil their daily needs. Velayudhan (2007) viewed that in spite of availability of the same products in the village shop, 58% of the visitors preferred to buy these from a hat due to better price, quality, variety and a touch and feel experience of the product, satisfy the seeing-is believing requirement. Hats also offer multi-purpose shopping experience and allow for live demonstrations all vital considerations for a villager to buy any product. It is also representative of local culture, a good communication centre of a particular village or several villages. It is a source of earning money in the remote areas of the country. It is also a physical asset of an area.

Trade is a dominant sector in rural economies. No household is completely self-sufficient, so every household participates in marketing, however rudimentary it might be. The high risk attached to rain-fed agriculture and to the vagaries of the monsoon is the main driver of livelihood diversification. The poor are more vulnerable and more susceptible to shocks. Their asset holdings being lower are susceptible to agricultural trade risks and to food price risks. Non-farm activities are particularly important for those rural households with little or no land. In countries for which data exist, there is a clear negative relationship between the importance of non-farm activity and farm size (Chuta and Liedholm 1979). The study revealed that as farms became smaller, the share of non-farm income in total household income became larger.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of work at the local-regional scale is for understanding the socio-spatial differentiation of rural space. To interpret the meaning of ordinary landscapes and the significance of ordinary places, focus has been made upon the changing cultural landscape of the hats: with human beings as the agent of such change. The study also intends upon dissemination of existing knowledge of rural non-farm activities related to marketing. To understand the dynamics of rural markets, issues and challenges associated with the rural marketing strategies, an approach that is grounded in intensive particular case-studies have been undertaken: exclusively dealing with tribal-specific products in hats of

Bankura and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal (eastern region) and Araku (southern region). The representation of the tribal culture is reflected in these hats. Studying the primary rural market (the hat) in the new context is essential. This is because it accounts for a large part of the retail consumer market and the latter is growing faster than the urban market. Private companies including multinationals are eyeing these hats by launching projects with the intention of changing the mind sets of the villagers, bringing about cultural globalization in the process. Today these hats are offering a vast untapped potential to them as the wares have changed with the changing nature of the rural economy, livelihood and lifestyle. It is for these specific reasons that the study was designed to be undertaken in these three separate yet with the commonality (of tribe specific) hats, as case studies.

Study Approach & Objectives

It involves observing and recording the facts of both the physical background and the cultural landscape. It involves further the interpretation of the relationship between the two. Since the relationship itself is recorded in the cultural landscape, this landscape is the starting point of our investigation. The study of this relationship is at the core of cultural geography (Bryan 1958:9)]. Way back in 1958, Bryan had stated the ways and how's of cultural landscape and an attempt has been made to follow it. Secondary literature has been drawn from sources available on various websites, research papers, published in online and printed journals, books, news agencies, blogs, reports, etc. The literature sourced has further been reviewed, edited and categorised to make it suitable to study the considered objectives. The main objective of this study is concerned with linking the past with the present to gauge into the future of hats of rural India. A geographical analysis based on the conceptual background is one of the aims of the study. Documenting the spatial pattern of arrangement of the rudimentary 'enterprises', the global-local interface, the 'corporate' hat re-emphasizing the significance of hats are the other aims to be fulfilled. A critical assessment of development strategies adopted and policy implications will give an integrated and comprehensive analysis justifying the topic of the paper. I have used rapid market appraisal (RMA) and participatory techniques, including personal observations, interviews, surveys and

focus group discussion with the primary stakeholders. The sampling covered both sellers and buyers. Primary data was collected through observation and compiling the field evidence. The majority of the data discussed come from the surveys and interviews designed by the author.

Scope of the study

The area coverage of this study is the rural hat in general with specific focus on three hats in tribal belts. Hats being traditional; their roots/evolution in India, their significance in the rural economy, the structural changes with infiltration of consumer goods brought into the hat from various companies and its impact; and policy implications is the centre of the study. This has been done covering (three) different geographical space, place and environment across the country.

Significance of the study

A significant part of the contemporary economic restructuring story in the context of rural marketing - creation of new forms of rural development - remains largely unexamined. For an effective distribution of products, companies must /and do use 'hats' in their distribution strategy in rural marketing. Focused brand-building initiatives like participation at community events such as melas, haats, street theatre, van campaigns, and puppet shows generate positive word-of-mouth and influence buying decisions. Hence it is felt necessary to study the impact of such strategy on the local traditional rural marketing scenario. This study might generate important information useful to formulate hat development programmes and guidelines for interventions that would improve efficiency of the hats in the upcoming rural marketing system consequent to the infiltration of the corporate sector. The study can be used as a source material for further study.

Evolution of the hats in India

Several literary evidences point to the brisk economic activity/business carried out in villages in addition to the towns even in the ancient times. Such markets now commonly known as hats/haats, have its roots in ancient India spelt/ pronounced as *hatta*, *hattika*, *hauts*, *haths*. Chakravarti (2003) in the reconstruction of the Economic History of Bengal had mentioned of purchase of plot of land in

Damudarpur Plate No. 2 in connection with *hatta* or market. He also mentioned of the Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapala which recorded the grant of four villages along with *hattika*, (which according to Kielhorn he cited) meaning 'market dues'. The Irda Plate similarly mentioned the grant of a village "along with its market place" (*sa-hatta*), while the Bhatara Plate speaks of shops (*hattiya-griha*) and big markets (*hatta-vara*) in some of the denoted villages of Bengal in ancient times. He also wrote of *hatta-pati* as the officer in charge of markets which indirectly testifies to the brisk nature of internal trade then.

Another study by Kumar & Chaudhuri (Ed, 2005) of mid eighteenth century background, mentioned of the hat or periodic rural market in typical Asian market as a 'patch work of minute, fragmented units'. This was true of the lowest level of the entire market structure - where surpluses from a few neighbouring villages were regularly exchanged by the petty traders or the producers. Such periodic rural markets were referred to as *hauts* in Dinajpur (i.e. Bengal) and in North India as *haths*. In the hat the peasant sold his product directly to the consumer as well as to the middlemen. Such type of marketing system was designed for buying and selling in small lots, bulk of purchases being made not with a view to resale but for consumption by poor peasants or artisans. Mention is also made of the significant role played by the itinerant trader (*pheriwala*), the village based trader (*bepari*), the merchants' agent (*paikar*) and of course the buyer in the articulation of simple peasant marketing at the hat level. Within this local framework however opportunities were restricted and so the *bepari* and the *paikar* eyed at the regional market for better gains.

Reference of the establishment of hats by *zamindars* by giving away lands on a rent free basis in Dinajpur (Bengal) was given in the Cambridge Economic History of India. Literary evidence of Raychaudhuri (1982) reveals the good raja or zamindar was expected to establish markets for the periodic hat. This reflects the local forces of political economy in play at that time. Mention was also there of the self sufficiency of the villages. However, all villages were not self sufficient it said. 'The individual village was probably part of a narrow circuit of exchange which encompassed several villages, with

the pedlar, the hats, and mandis mediating the distribution of commodities'; a distinction made between bazaars (which were mainly retail markets) and the mandis (or wholesale markets in the countryside). The rural market was very much a feature of the intra-local trade as it said that even in the smallest village rice, flour, butter, milk, beans and other vegetables, sugar, and other sweetmeats, dry and liquid, can be procured in abundance.

As per the Financial Express (2011), 30% of the hats were established after independence & 70% before independence dating back to several centuries. According to National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER, 1998), the Indian rural market includes 47,000 hats (congregation markets). Financial Express in 2011 also gave a spatial coverage of hats on a state basis. The states with maximum number of hats are in Uttar Pradesh (10,380); followed by Bihar (4,993); West Bengal (4,078) and Jharkhand (3,996); thus giving a regional (spatial) scenario followed by the western region comprising of the state of Maharashtra (3,758).

The Study Area

Three pockets have been purposely selected by me :

(1) West Bengal has more than 4000 hats and as per the West Bengal State Marketing Board's data (2007) the district of Bankura has a total of 74 rural markets out of which 64 were primary hats/ markets, with the weekly ones being 15 in number : the latter having a total spatial coverage of 15.73 acres only. This information has been extracted from wbagrmarketingboard.gov.in/bazaar. Ranibandh hat is one of the 15 weekly hats of the district of Bankura covering an area of 2 acres. It falls under the Khatra community development block. This district has a significant portion of the population belonging to the tribals.

(2) Totopara: This is the area dominated by the Totos, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group of West Bengal, earlier referred as a Primitive Tribal Group (PTG), housed in Jalpaiguri district, close to Indo-Bhutan border.

(3) Araku: This hat is close to the Tribal Museum and the rail station (3 km away) of Araku in South India. The strong influence of the hat could be felt on a Friday: with immense road congestion, mixed vehicular traffic and congregation of tribal people women in particular, from morning 5 a.m. to 6 p.m.

in the evening.

Geographical Analysis of the Hats :

The place image : Massey's (1984; 1992) pioneering work has demonstrated that place-based identity is constituted by the interactions between the extra-local forces of political economy and the historical layers of local social relation. The rajas and zamindars were responsible for the establishment of hats in the past, now it is the local government tying up with the corporate sector in several parts of the country playing a significant role in modifying the hats. Whether at the scale of individual sites with specific amenities and services or at the level of an entire region or country, place is both a context for consumption and a consumable entity in itself (Ashworth and Voogd) as cited by Hopkins (1998). Place has a physical setting, a location and a sense of identity. Hat is the "place image" that emerges; the hat's name itself, implies the importance of location and place: each hat is generally named after the place with which it is associated. As per records the hat in Ranibandh is named after the place as Ranibandh hat while the local people refer to it as *thanagora* hat: it being located just off the thana (police station).

The cumulative advantages of site, commercial complexity, social amenity, transport connectivity, position in the administrative hierarchy, and the inherited inertia of age, all have contributed to the viability of the major rural marketing centers—the hats for mediating economic exchange and social satisfaction for a specific clientele population: the localities of the surrounding villages. They normally form part of a local trade network and are usually arranged on a periodic basis, on specific weekdays. They are commonly organized at a central place in a village or district centre or beside a village's access road. These hats act as centres/ nodes of exchange and serve as sites for social intercourse. The location of the hat is itself 'strategic' in the sense that more than half of the hats in India are centred on the most accessible spot be it the market place (52%) or the bus stop (35%); a few near the temple (5%); and the rest (8%) are unspecified. (The figures in the parenthesis are based on the report of the Financial Express in 2011).

In geography, a threshold population is the minimum number of people necessary before a particular good or service can be provided in an area. The concept is equivalent to the "range" in central place theory and

retailing, which delineates the market area of a central place for a particular good or service, and is dependent on the spatial distribution of population and the willingness of consumers to travel a given distance to purchase particular goods or services (Goodall 1987). The catchment area for a large hat is comparatively high in states of Madhya Pradesh (100 villages), Bihar (85 villages) and Odisha (79 villages), while it is lowest in Andhra Pradesh (14 villages). In case of small hats, the catchment area in Madhya Pradesh is highest at an average of 32 villages, while it is lowest in Andhra Pradesh of 11 villages. Hats not only cater to the needs of the village in which it is located but also the surrounding ones, serving on an average 4000 persons. Velayudhan (2007) opined that those hats which are located in the interior less prosperous villages are of more significance. Many villages do not have retail shops located at a fixed spot and so they depend on hats. Kashyap (1998) spoke of an average of 314 stalls in a hat with a sale volume exceeding rupees two lakhs. Larger sized hats are to be found in more populated villages with better infrastructure of roads and hence better transport connectivity and larger volume of outturn of people, goods and services. The size and periodicity of the hat thus indicate its threshold area, its zone of influence, its area association.

The Space of a hat

A particular way of representing space and time guides spatial and temporal practices which in turn secure the social order (Harvey 1990). Conceptually the hat can be defined in terms of space occupied at specific time (a weekly and in some cases bi-weekly one). Since most agricultural labourers get their wages once a week, hats are also held on a weekly basis. Sunday markets are the most popular, while middle-of-the-week hats are most infrequent. A hat is created by primarily small, independent businesses promoting their specific commodities. There is an intricate space management: each seller is allotted a space which is demarcated by a piece of cloth/plastic on the floor if it is under the open sky or by a *kucchha*, semi-pucca or pucca stall. Thus each 'place' is allotted to a particular 'enterprise': the enterprise may be vegetables/fish/seeds, etc. The basic marketing structure is still simple. The stalls are usually temporary structure-wise; and the spatial relations in the economy were vividly demonstrated in the hats. The location of stalls followed a pattern:

those goods which are perishable (especially fish) were found at the entrance preceded by eateries such as boiled peas and nuts; those goods which are durable in the core and those goods which are breakable (earthen ware) were seen in the outskirts (periphery). No spatial conflict was reported by the field surveyors. Near the entrance of the Ranibandh hat there was a cycle and motor cycle stand for keeping vehicles owned by the buyers and sellers.

The Tribal Enterprises

The all India average scenario of product specific stalls in a hat mentions agricultural products to be still predominant (53%); followed by manufactured goods 19%; processed food 6%; handicrafts 5%; forest products 5%; services 4%; meat/poultry 3%; and others 5%. In all the three hats surveyed, a similar scenario was found: varieties of seeds like pumpkin, gourd, carrot, radish, beans, brinjal, bitter gourd etc were for sale besides the seasonal vegetables, spices and lentil. Some types of pesticides were also found. Household and agricultural implements like hammer, shovel, hatchet, jigsaw, knife, cutlery etc. were noticed (figure 3). In Araku animals (sheep, goat, deshi hen) were for sale through the agent/middleman and by auction; retail/loose sale was lesser. In Totopara hat implements used by carpenters were seen (figure 3): wood being the building material still in use. Manufactured goods such as dress materials, clothes, bags, *gamcha* (a multi-purpose towel) were brought from outside and were hence not indigenous products sold. In Ranibandh there were some stalls of handmade bamboo products such as basket, tub, *kulo*, sweeping brush etc. (figure 4). The women mainly are involved in this: making them with their own hands. Clay/earthen pots for domestic requirements such as *handi*, *bhaar*, *kuup*, *ghola*, *chatuee*, *challara*, etc were seen on the outskirts. The *handi* is used for cooking rice, *bhaar* in marriage and other ceremonies, the *kuup* for keeping money (traditional system of saving money), the *ghola* for keeping vegetables, the *chatuee* for preparing wine, *challara* for preparing *muri* or puffed rice, the *kulo* for cleaning paddy after harvesting. The clay pots have to be dried for its hardness and it is done using lots of wood as fuel. The wood is mainly brought from the nearest Sutan jungle and the bamboo baskets (*jhuri*) is polished with red colour and sold in the hat. The pots are brought into the hat by men on bicycle. The hat thus

depicts a gendered division of labour too. The women were more in number (both sellers and buyers in the *Sukravansantha* hat of Araku. There was no gender discrimination to be found in Araku : country liquor (known as *salso*) was sold and consumed by both men and women. In all these 3 hats surveyed in different corners of the country with different environmental locations there were some commonalities: There were no stock-keeping units, the hat reflecting the unique local specific consumption patterns, tastes, and needs of the rural consumers, a symbolic cultural landscape, a local self-contained market serving the villages in the vicinity.

The 'Corporate' Hat

High congregation areas, like fairs, hats, markets etc. are proving to be an important marketing tool since clusters of target audience can be tapped at the same time and place (Ahmed 2013). MART, a leading Rural Marketing and Research Team/Agency has been a pioneer in encouraging companies to participate in hats for creating awareness and promoting brands in rural markets (FE, 2011). Setting up of temporary stalls by branded companies in rural melas/hats are few successful examples of penetration of consumer goods into the rural areas. Emerging market brands are competing locally and globally at the local level they are using the periodic market place, campaigning in mobile vans to promote their brands and giving out their product samples. Colgate for example had distributed free sample and toothbrushes at these hats for awareness of oral health, promoting the product as a substitute for neem twigs, salt, charcoal etc commonly used in the rural belt. Over the years, more and more companies have benefited by using hats for below-the-line promotions. Some companies have used hats for redistribution of products to smaller villages, as shopkeepers from these villages attend three to four hats every week. Others have used hats for branding by painting boundary walls or toilets with their brand messages as a permanent reminder for the large number of visitors that frequent the hat week after week (Figure 6). Still others have contributed to improving the infrastructure at hats, like raised platforms for sellers, providing drinking water and toilets for women, and, in exchange, have got branding rights from the panchayat or hat contractor.

The PPP Model

In the past, hats in rural areas were organised by zamindars and the rulers of princely states and later by the panchayats. Today, in most regions, panchayats are the organisers and owners of hat land areas. However, in states such as Tamil Nadu (75%), Bihar (75%) and Uttar Pradesh (55%), private parties are increasingly organising hats. The fee for putting up a stall is nominal. The participation fee per stall on the hat day averages Rs 13/-. It ranges as high as Rs 24/- in Maharashtra and low at Rs 6-7/- in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (Financial Express in 2011). Kashyap (1998) has given the nomenclature of Rural Supermarkets to the hats. The first comprehensive study of haats in India was undertaken by him in 1995 for the Government of India. The report generated a lot of interest among the corporates, as it was around the same time rural markets began to grow. The role of MART is significant in bringing the corporate sector into these hats. Over the years, more and more companies have benefited by using hats for below-the-line promotions. Branded products now constitute a third of all FMCG sales at hats, pointing to the opportunity that awaits big brand marketers like Hindustan Unilever, Marico, Godrej, etc., in upgrading consumers to their offerings. Hats thus serve a good opportunity for promotion of consumer goods being a potential low cost distribution channel available to these marketers.

The Global-local Interface

Barter as a form of exchange is still prevalent in this globalized era! The hat of Ranibandh is a typical tribal hat. There was seen the ancient exchange process of mustard. In exchange of 5 khuchi mustard a person can get 1 khuchi oil, khuchi being a rudimentary unit of measurement: a small container made of bamboo (local material) and been marketed by tribal women. In Araku too, the unit of measurement was not in grams/kgs, but based on selling with a container. A matador vehicle near the entrance of the hat was used for advertisement of various medicines, pesticides (chemical ones) over the microphone reflecting the impact of green revolution. Information about seeds was obtained through advertisement on packets. Seeds sold in packets as well as loose, some were labeled in English language entitled 'kishan bandhu beej high-yielding variety (shown in figure 1); another was mentioned on the packet as Bharat Laxmi Nursery

selling top quality vegetable seeds. The Ranibandh area was earlier known for cultivation of inferior grains such as *janhe*, *gundoli*, and *iri* said some of the senior farmers. All these indigenous breeds have now become extinct replaced thanks to globalization with its homogeneity. In the hat of Totopara which houses the Totos identified as a primitive tribal group (PTG) now being referred to as Particular Vulnerable Tribal Group of West Bengal the *global-local interface* was the most prominent one. The figure 6 depicts the use of hat space by Airtel and figure 5 the FMCG products were displayed in a stall.

Significance of the Hat

A hat helps in identifying and maintaining rural landscapes. A report in the Financial Express in 2011 has discussed the hats to be the traditional *hypermarkets* of rural India, selling anything from fresh farm produce, agricultural inputs and equipment, groceries, consumer expendables, garments to durables like pressure cookers. A study by Rural Marketing Association of India mentioned that there are 43,000 number of haats annually adding a sizeable sale volume of Rs 50,000 crore. Several rural development schemes and programmes have increased the connectivity and improved the infra structure. However, despite the development of permanent shops, hats continue to play a vital role in the rural economy where exchange of goods and services are carried out. A visit to any hat bazaar of any village gives the glimpse of the social and commercial lifestyle of the people living within its zone of influence. These markets provide people an opportunity not only to purchase consumer goods, but also to sell surplus agriculture and allied products (figure 1 & 2). The hat represents the initial entry of locally produced farm products into the upward moving marketing distribution system. The majority of the households who sell farm produce combine market activity with "subsistence" production. A range of fresh items are available. It is a minor market for horizontal exchange in as much as the sales are small, from person to person, and for local consumption. The hats provide a first contact point for villagers with the market, a means for distributing local products and exchanging rural surplus, an opportunity for buying daily necessities as well as farm supplies and equipment and a place for social, political, and cultural contact. Cultural integration is best exemplified in the Totopara hat (figure 5) where

traditional household items are giving way to the urbanized ones. Multipurpose shopping allows reduction in travel as well; reflecting the applicability of Christaller's theory, the reason for such purchase being:

(i) **Convenience:** Hats can be compared to the large departmental stores where the advantage is a one stop shopping exercise. Hats crop up every week, providing consumers with products of their choice, their necessity, with their availability and at low price;

(ii) **Availability:** It is a market where one can purchase house hold goods, food items, cloths, durables, jewellery, cattle, machinery, etc.

(iii) **Attractiveness:** Hats are attractive places to those who want to buy second hand durables and to those who prefer barter transactions. Further the freshness of the produce, buying in bulk for a week and the bargaining advantage attract the people.

Govt. Interventions

The Government of India like the Corporate sector has used the term "Haat" in place of the word "Hat". The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) (Marketing Cell) in 2009 had issued guidelines for setting up of Haats at Village, District and State levels (i.e., the regional development strategies) under the Swarnjayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) Scheme. Marketing of rural products through fairs/ melas and temporarily set-up rural haats is an important component of the programme. The objectives for setting up of rural haats at various levels under the SGSY Scheme includes:

- (i) Creation of better marketing facilities;
- (ii) Enabling the rural poor to sell their products throughout the year;
- (iii) One stop shopping platform to the wholesalers, retailers/consumers by showcasing the range of local rural products;
- (iv) Ensure stable market and remunerative prices;
- (v) Sensitizing Self help groups (SHGs) to the demand patterns of the market;
- (vi) Strengthen the forward and backward linkages;
- (vii) Promotion of hygienic conditions in & around the rural market;

(viii) Promotion of growth centers/convergence of rural economic activities around these Rural Haats.

The govt in its guidelines issued have stressed upon the significance of the traditional rural hats. The Village Haats which are to be constructed may be done at the existing place of marketing (weekly hats) in the villages. The land for the proposed Village Haat must be owned by the Gram Panchayat/Government. Weekly haats on private lands will not be considered. The efforts should be made to design the Haat based on local architecture to promote tourism as well. A Rural Haat Management Committee may be constituted for management and maintenance of Village Haats which may comprise of Gram Pradhan, representatives of Gram Panchayat, representatives of Self Help Group / leader of village federation and Gram Panchayat Officer/ Gram Development Officer, which would be a sub-committee of the Gram Panchayat. Haats should generate sufficient resources to meeting the recurring expenses through levy of user fee etc. Gram Panchayat will pass a resolution to maintain the Haats through levying suitable charges/fees. The collection and allotment of stalls will be the responsibility of the Management Committee which will maintain the village Haats from the rental income and other fees/funds collected from the village Haats. The expansion of Village Haats may be considered from surplus funds. Permanent shops and other facilities for the village Haats may be planned from these funds. Department of Rural Development of the State Govt. will primarily be responsible to monitor the progress of such haats periodically. The concerned DRDA will collect information on sale of product, functioning of these haats and furnish the report to State Government which in turn will do so to the Ministry every month in Monthly Progress Report (MPR) and on Management Information System (MIS), when it becomes operational.(www.rural.nic.in).

Policy Implications

The potential for further development in agriculture so as to create additional employment opportunities seems to be tapering off. There is a wide array of activities being undertaken within the rural non-farm sector. In terms of the Standard Industrial Classification categories, the most important components are manufacturing, services, and

commerce activities. Agricultural processing and marketing activities, construction, transport, and utilities fall within the rural non-farm employment (Chuta and Liedholm 1979). A study report by Accenture (2010) reveals that rural spending is now less dependent on farm income, which now constitutes less than 50 percent of the total rural income. The only recourse is to develop the non-farm sector keeping in mind environmental considerations, needs of the people, availability of resources, traditional crafts and the skills of the local people. This sector holds the key to the problems of unemployment, poverty and sustained development. Raising the income of rural households and purchasing power, change is discernable in the consumption pattern as well. In terms of employment, non-farm activities are quantitatively an important component of the rural economy that should not be overlooked in the design of rural development policies or programs viewed Chuta and Liedholm(1979).Literary evidence of several reports reveals that about fifty percent (21,000 in number)of the hats do not have any support from bodies like panchayats and marketing committees that look after agricultural produce. So the weekly markets operate without any infrastructure. This discourages many potential buyers (rising rural middle class) from coming to the markets. The panchayats and marketing committees can generate income/ source of revenue by raising the participation fee/stall (guidelines already issued by the govt). Hats can be made more competitive which will ensure high price for the produce. Policies designed to develop the infrastructure of a developing economy could indirectly affect the performance of rural non-farm enterprises. The provision or expansion of electricity, water, or roads would appear to benefit these enterprises (World Bank, 1978a). Like financial facilities, infrastructure facilities such as roads, warehouses, communication facilities are also inadequate. Focus should be on improving the infrastructure on these hats like electricity, sheds with a permanent structure, toilets, potable water, waste disposal arrangement, etc. According to government figures, only 15 percent of the over 27,000 periodic markets in the country are formally regulated (Acharya 2006) and there is urgent need for this. New decentralization/self-governance legislation is providing power for local authorities to develop and manage markets and haat bazaars (as exemplified through the MoRD tie up

with SGSY). Local authorities are entering into agreements with the private sector for the development and management of market facilities.

Changing Face of the Rural Customer

Going Rural is the new marketing mantra of all well known national and international companies because they know that more than 70 percent of Indian population is living in villages. Hence, these companies are increasing their market size by producing goods and services as per requirement of rural customer in rural markets. The primary stakeholders are hence left to the hands of the policy makers: earlier they were pressurised by intermediaries and now the local specificity would be lost thanks to globalization. On asking them of their opinions and views regarding entry of 'outsiders' into their hat premises the younger generation said they would like to avail the opportunities and experiment with the products while the older ones said they had no other option as their traditional local unique specific raw materials and the indigenous technology are waning. A recent study conducted by Global Information and Measurement Company Nielsen has revealed that over 80 percent of FMCG categories are growing faster in rural areas as compared to urban areas. Since they are eyeing the hats.

Conclusion

Hats contribute to local economic development, by acting as centres of demand and markets for agricultural produce (particularly from small-scale producers) from surrounding rural areas, for consumption by local residents; acting as centres for production and distribution of goods and services to rural areas. This might also include the provision of agricultural inputs and market information, including details of price fluctuations and of consumer preferences; becoming centres for the promotion of non-farm activities and employment in manufacturing, services and trade. The overall scenario of Indian hats reveals that agricultural products still accounts for around half of all sales at hats. Yet a change in consumer tastes and requirements is perceived with the purchase of FMCG products. Change in transaction methods: from barter system to modern monetary system even in remote corners is conspicuous. The hats are the rural marketing hubs, as point of sales and redistribution and as point of communication.

confirming that India's rural markets are becoming a powerful economic engine. They are the nerve centre of the economic social and cultural life of villages. Producers and farmers depend on hats not only for the disposal of their produce, but also for purchase of their daily needs. Yet very little attention has been paid in the planning era towards the development of rural marketing. The hat system demonstrates the Indian ingenuity of keeping product prices low. There are no high shop rentals, salesmen, salaries or investment in display shelves and shop interiors. The fee for putting up a stall is meagre. Seizing this opportunity, corporate sector started eyeing the rural areas.

The process of importing and adaptation of the global into the local is manifested in terms of dress, habits and consumer goods items; the agents of the global culture being the multi-national/transnational companies. Even the tribal society has not been spared. Cultural globalization has set in even in remote areas of the country. With availability of power (electricity), use of mobile, access to the internet, increasing road connectivity, rising income and the emerging middle class in rural areas, the socio-economic-cultural scenario of the traditional several century old hats are coming under the grip of homogenization/ universalization. Only time will speak on whether the hats will prevail (local significance) or lose out to the corporate world (global significance). "Go Rural, Win Rural" is the new Mantra for the corporate world. The hats are being eyed upon by the corporate world because of the saturation of urban markets, a huge untapped market in rural areas, the rise in income of rural population and because the rural people are traditionally and emotionally attached to the hats. The corporate world have shifted their strategy from the 4 P's {i.e., product, price, place (distribution) and promotion} to 4A's strategy that is: affordability, awareness, availability and acceptability (Gupta, 2011). To generate awareness about their products among the rural masses the strategies are being implemented in events like fairs and festivals, hats, these being used as occasions for brand communication through puppets shows and live demonstrations in hats. The biggest challenge corporate sector faced in tapping the rural market was how to reach products and brand messages to the six lakh-odd villages. At that time, 50% of villages were not connected by road and most households in these remote villages did not have electricity and,

therefore, no TV sets. Hats provided a solution to this problem by serving as a very useful mechanism of reaching the interior rural markets. Each hat caters to around 20-50 surrounding villages from where buyers and sellers come to buy and sell goods and services. By putting up a stall in the hat, a company could expose its products and communicate brand messages to the 5,000 or more people who visit the hat every week. Haats are the first point of contact between the rural consumer and the commercial market. With little investment in advertisement Companies can directly communicate to the huge rural masses and sell their products directly without much intermediaries. Corporate houses hence are increasingly focusing on haats for expansion. Hats are therefore a potential low cost distribution channel available to these marketers. Soon the fear of takeover will spread to rural areas as well.

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