

## Editorial

*From time immemorial there existed trade of commodities involving the rural markets. Generally speaking, a market is a common place where exchange of goods and services take place between the buyers and the sellers. This exchange falls under the ambit of the Rural Marketing domain. Rural marketing refers to the marketing of goods and services to the customers residing in rural areas/urban areas from rural/ urban areas. Traditionally, rural marketing included marketing of agricultural produces only. This resulted in the establishment of regulated markets with an aim to see that agricultural producers get a better share of the consumers rupee. However, the definition of rural marketing has been undergoing change from time to time to accommodate the widening scope. The broader view taken by researchers and marketing professionals, to define rural marketing, includes marketing of consumables, consumer durables and services in addition to the traditional items under the earlier narrower definition of rural marketing (Jha, 1988). Thus, rural marketing involves marketing of manufactured goods and services including agricultural products in rural areas. In the new scope it would encompass Rural to Rural, Rural to Urban and Urban to Rural scenarios.*

*Indian economy is predominantly having a rural character which is reflected by the very high proportion of its population living in rural areas. In spite of this, even after seventy years of our country's independence, rural India seems to be in crisis. On the national scene, 87 per cent of our villages are in clusters of population of 2,000 or below. These are small markets without efficient linkages and financing options for which the farmers have fallen prey/ been exploited in the hands of the middlemen and moneylenders. As there has been no wide scale prevalent alternative rural marketing model, other than the five decade old agricultural marketing model, there is still a lot of dependency on agriculture as a mode of sustenance for rural India. This system, with its inherent shortcomings has continued to pose several challenges to the rural community. In fact about 80 per cent of the rural population of Jharkhand continues to depend on agriculture despite difficulties and challenges in this sector (Singh, Meena, Singh, Kumar & Kumar, 2012). "In many cases, low quality agricultural inputs, sometimes even spurious products, affect productivity, and that tends to trap the farmer deeper in poverty" (Chatterjee, 2007, p.3). According to M. S. Swaminathan, the distinguished agricultural economist "the agrarian crisis has its roots in the collapse of the rural economy. Unemployment leading to out-migration of the assetless has been growing. The minimum support price mechanism is not operating*

*for most commodities including its marketing challenges" (ibid, 2007). In this backdrop, it becomes very important to address these challenges on a priority basis. One of the solutions is to provide alternative growth strategies for the rural markets for attaining social change in rural India.*

*Rural marketing in India has been seen as both - as an opportunity and a challenge. It has an enormous rural market that offers a huge potential for all business facing tough competition in the urban markets. The rural market could be developed as a next frontier of growth by offering innovations in both durable and non-durable segments through new products and services and suitable positioning. The use of the existing network of channel partners and salesmen in rural markets are the key to connecting with the rural heartland. Haats (periodic markets) and melas (fairs); which are the oldest and unique trading institutions of rural India, supplement the retailer route to rural markets.*

*The issue of rural marketing inevitably deals with government policies and agricultural products promotions strategies by government, non-government as well as the private sector. The problem of rural marketing includes the perishable nature of produce, lack of storage capacity, lack of markets, weak infrastructure, exploitation by middlemen, lack of government intervention at the required time and scale, and the volatile nature of markets leading to an inability of the producers to bargain for fair prices. Although Government of India (2016) has introduced several schemes and policies related with the problems of marketing in rural India, there still remains a need for a more systematic approach including the perception and knowledge of the people directly involved, for the promotion of rural marketing.*

*Therefore, in order to evolve certain strategies for rural marketing, we need to keep in mind two things - the environment in which the rural market operates and its associated problems. However, the basis for rural marketing strategies requires segmentation of highly heterogeneous and scattered rural market and identification of their needs and wants. From marketing mix point of view these meaningful strategies revolve around four P's - product, price, place and promotion including social marketing. The purpose of social marketing is to bring about a change in behaviour and attitude through social advertising and social communication.*

*Cooperatives play a significant role in the rural economy. Therefore, the strength of cooperatives should be understood and the already existing network of distribution should be used in coverage and extension of rural markets. This would add advantage in*

*distribution and collection logistics because of their wide spread nature. However, it has been found that in Jharkhand, small farmers have not benefited much from the market development programmes initiated by the government owing to weak resource base. Therefore, setting-up of multi-purpose co-operative societies with both credit and marketing would be the most desirable strategy for strengthening co-operatives in the field of farm produce marketing in Jharkhand.*

*Similarly, financial institutions also have a major role to play in rural marketing. These financial institutions (like commercial banks, cooperatives and regional rural banks) in rural areas help in injecting money into the system in the form of agricultural credit to promote rural marketing. Although significant efforts have been made by central and state governments to provide institutional credit to rural areas in order to free them from the clutches of traditional money lenders, yet a lot of cases of exploitation are still found to be existing in the rural areas.*

*The Government of India through TRIFED under the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs has also come up with innovative strategies to promote the marketing of tribal arts and craft products and also tribal artisans, including expansion of its retail outlets "Tribes India" throughout the country and other retail marketing activities. The whole idea is to enhance the income of tribals by providing marketing support for their hand crafted products including gift items, metal craft, tribal textiles, tribal jewellery, tribal paintings, cane & bamboo, terracotta & stone pottery and organic & natural food products. The main objective of holding these events is to provide an opportunity to tribal artisans to show their craft directly to art lovers and get feedback about customer taste and preferences, which helps them in modifying their product designs and creations, according to market trends and needs (UNI, 2017).*

*The ecological, socio-cultural and urban setting of Jharkhand offers a rich potential for rural marketing opportunities. Therefore, the rural markets of Jharkhand should be based on the identification of requirement of basic facilities and actual needs of the market users. The development programmes of rural marketing should not be taken up on adhoc basis as being usually done in the past. Since each market influences and gets influenced by the nearby markets, the investment and efforts in developing rural markets should be to yield optimum results. Thus, the markets should be developed on the basis of an integrated planning for the hinterland of selected wholesale agricultural produce markets. This will facilitate in developing market linkages and efficient movement of farm produce from rural areas to consuming areas.*

*Agriculture being the main stay of our country it must become an income generating activity and this sector should not be left to the vicissitudes of weather, financial resources including infrastructural and marketing facilities. Thus, it becomes very much important to understand rural markets in-depth, the needs, psyche and the problems of rural producers and customers to be successful in marketing in rural areas. Similarly, it also becomes important for the people concerned to understand the environment in which the rural markets operate, the opportunities and the inherent problems associated with them including the strategies which could be successfully adopted to tap this vast potential segment.*

*Underlining the significance of the subject this thematic issue presents six research articles. Besides, this thematic issue also contains one book review. In the following paragraphs a summary of the featured articles are provided.*

*The first article entitled "Marketing efficiency of various channels for disposal of natural resins in tribal areas: a case study of central and north eastern plateau zones of India" by R. K. Yogi, Alok Kumar, A. K. Singh & Nirmal Kumar presents the existing marketing mechanism disposal pattern of natural resins and their marketing efficiency in agro-climatic sub-zone of central and north eastern plateau of India. Based on the interviews conducted on randomly selected 100 stakeholders including lac cultivators belonging to small, medium and large category of households, small traders, big traders, wholesalers and processors, the authors show that in the study area (Jharkhand) eight channels were operating although in a little quantum. In lac marketing, traders faced difficulty in storage and impurity of raw materials. Processing units were uncomfortable with unavailability of raw materials on time, unavailability of skilled labour, poor power supply and volatile market price. Lack of organized lac market was also observed in the study area. Institutions and government agencies should provide information and market support services to the lac growers. The authors conclude that positive approach should be taken by government to promote the domestic as well as overseas demand of lac based high value products. Financial assistance may be provided by financial agencies to safeguard the growers, trader and small lac processing firms.*

*The second paper by P. C. Deogharia titled "Vegetable marketing in Jharkhand: a micro study of marketable and marketed surplus of selected vegetables" analyses the marketable and the marketed surplus of selected vegetables and their distribution in different marketing channels. Based on the analysis of data collected on a sample of 150 cultivators selected through multistage stratified random sampling*

*method from Ranchi, Lohardaga and West Singhbhum districts of Jharkhand, the study concludes that marketing of vegetables in Jharkhand involves different marketing channels consisting of growers, assemblers, commission agents, wholesalers and retailers. The vegetable growers sell their produce immediately after harvest owing to the perishability of the product, lack of cold storage facility, poor economic condition of the farmers and other factors. The author has found that the factors such as size of holding and production have direct relationship with the marketed surplus of vegetables and their distribution in different marketing channels. However, factors like family size and gross income have a negative influence on marketed surplus of vegetables. It was also found that price has no impact on marketed surplus due to the fact that the vegetable growers in Jharkhand are forced to sell the produce at whatever price is available to them. The author believes that there is a need to restructure primary co-operative marketing societies, particularly from the point of view of the betterment of economic standards of growers which solely depends upon remunerative farm production.*

*Shiv Kumar's article entitled "Transport linkage analysis of rural markets in peripheral blocks of Ranchi, Jharkhand" uses empirical data to analyze the present pattern, network and frequency of rural markets of peripheral blocks of Ranchi city. Out of the 14 blocks of Ranchi, the author has focused on three peripheral blocks namely Kanke, Namkum and Ratu. Kumar concludes that in order to serve the existing and expanding needs of the city and its periphery, the roads are inadequate and unmetalled. Moreover, the roads along which rural markets are held are too narrow to allow free flow of traffic. As a result, the existence of rural markets is threatened due to lack of connectivity and cost of transportation including the time taken to reach the market. For solving the growing transport challenge, the author has suggested for Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services.*

*The fourth article entitled "Horticulture logistics situation in Jharkhand: opportunities and challenges" is based on an exploratory study where Pinaki Ghosh attempts to identify the variables such as transportation, market yard availability, storage facility, information technology, grading facility, standardization, aggregation facility, value addition scope, cold storages availability, laboratory linkage and irrigation facility responsible for horticulture logistics in Jharkhand. The author has found that there is shortfall of every variable in the actual level compared to the minimum threshold levels required for acceptable performance indicating a poor management of the horticulture logistics in Jharkhand. Further, using Principal Component Analysis the author has identified the three main factors*

*which explains the logistics condition. These need to be given special attention along with other important consideration areas like storage, market yard and information technology dissemination for improving the condition of the study area. The author is of the opinion that policy makers and other relevant stakeholders would surely benefit from these outcomes as they throw some light on the condition of the horticulture logistics in Jharkhand.*

*In the paper titled "The role of emotional intelligence in managing rural sales force performance", Pooja and Pranab Kumar, by using secondary data, try to explore the effect of emotional intelligence on sales performance particularly with reference to Indian rural market as the opportunities offered by the same are immense and any factor that can help in positively affecting the sales must be given due concern by the organizations. The authors feel that an industry wise comparison could also provide additional insights in understanding the constructs mentioned in the study.*

*In today's talent crunch scenario, employer branding is the strategic weapon used by the employers to tempt and reserve the prospective and present employees. The article titled "Employee engagement & internal employer branding: a study of service industry" by Kishore Kumar Morya and Sheetal Yadav makes an attempt to find a relationship between internal employer branding and employee engagement, in the hotel industry by collecting data from 45 hotels of four and five star categories of hotels from the NCR region of India. The factor analysis on collected data revealed three main factors of internal employer branding having direct effect on employee engagement on which the hotels should focus on to get greater profitability. The findings also revealed that Internal Employer Branding (IEB) has significant impact on Employee Engagement (EE) which enhances loyalty and commitment supporting employee engagement in the organization.*

*Finally, Rajeev Kamal Kumar presents a book review of a recently published edited book titled "Relocating women's equality" by Pankaj Kumar and Sadhna Gupta, published by Rawat Publications, Jaipur. The book has presented the woes and miseries of rural and tribal women including a few case studies of women's emancipation. The book is presented through four thematic sections. The reviewer feels that the book would be beneficial for the students, scholars, policy planners and activists in understanding the issues of women's emancipation and empowerment at the grassroots level.*

*We hope that the articles in this thematic issue will be read by practitioners and decision-makers, and may contribute to the better formulation and management of the strategies related with the issues*

*of marketing in rural India in future. We are thankful to the contributors who have generously submitted their revised papers within the stipulated time frame. Our sincere thanks go to the esteemed reviewers of the journal for their critical eyes, constructive comments, and rich advice that enhance the academic quality of this journal. We welcome articles on a host of development and management themes as well as reviews of books - preferably of reputable publishing houses.*

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