

**Role of Trade Fairs in Empowering Womenpreneurs of West Bengal: A Case Study of Saras Mela**

**Dr. Istu Roy (Corresponding Author)**

State Aided College Teacher

Department of Business Administration

Netaji Mahavidyalaya, The University of Burdwan

and

**Dr. Abhik Kumar Mukherjee**

Assistant Professor

Department of Business Administration

The University of Burdwan

## **Role of trade fairs in empowering womenpreneurs of West Bengal: A case study of Saras Mela**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This study investigates the role of Saras Mela, a government-sponsored trade fair in West Bengal, in fostering women’s entrepreneurship and socio-economic empowerment. **Design/methodology/approach** – An exploratory qualitative methodology was employed using in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. Primary data were collected from five selected women entrepreneurs and key officials. Thematic analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software. **Findings** – Saras Mela serves as a pivotal platform for rural womenpreneurs by providing market access, government support, and financial incentives. Participants noted improved income, confidence, and social standing. However, gaps were observed in training related to marketing and product promotion. **Originality/value** – This study contributes to the limited literature on trade fairs as instruments of women’s empowerment in India, offering policy insights for inclusive rural development.

### **1. Introduction:**

A trade fair (called a *Mela* in vernacular language) is a basic element of the marketing mix which happens to be an important promotional event to reach a huge target market at one go (Datta and Sarkar, 2020). The main purpose of trade shows is to provide attendees and companies with a wide range of opportunities to engage and interact with each other. The exhibitions offer buyers a natural and almost ideal platform to offer marketing solutions. Trade shows and exhibitions ranked second only to advertising as a marketing communication tool for each organization. Therefore, trade fairs and exhibitions have now become an important part of the marketing campaigns of business organizations.

Trade fairs are among the most effective platforms for businesses to showcase their products. Various agencies organise such events to help entrepreneurs directly reach out to their prospective customers (B2B and B2C) by allowing them to display their wares. Saras Mela is one such trade fair organised under the patronage of the Government of West Bengal. This paper explores the role played by this trade fair, namely, Saras Mela in empowering the womenpreneurs with their economic upliftment and socio-cultural dominance in West Bengal.

The Saras Mela, during the period of this study, took place in Newtown Mela Ground of Kolkata. *The Paschim Banga Panchayat and Gramme Unnayan Department* which falls under the purview of *West Bengal Panchayat and Rural Development Department*, which works in various districts of Kolkata to uplift rural people and encourage local artisans to enter the mainstream market and compete with other vendors on an equal footing, happens to be the host of this fair. The *West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission (WBSRLM)*, known as Anandadhara oversees the whole operation of this mela. This fair connects the rural artists and urban consumers, promoting their wares and preserving other forms of fading art and craft. Further, it assists these craftsmen in selling their handmade goods, and also the native culture, including its music, dancing, and traditions, achieves popularity and thus get preserved. Keeping pace with changes in technology, Memorandums of Understanding have been signed with different e-commerce platforms, which happen to be a recent development. This would help improve the connection of the craftsmen, who can now sell their goods both offline and online. This would enable the craftsmen to contact many others who might not be physically able to attend the Mela. This would also make the participating entrepreneurs capable of reaching the foreign markets. Usually, the number of participants in this fair range around 250 registered stalls, with participants coming from different Indian states like Assam, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand etc. along with those from the host state of West Bengal. A unique feature of this fair happens to be a food court having stalls from each district offering the distinctive cuisines and delectable specialties unique to the district concerned.

This fair serves as a platform for connecting rural people to the outside world and building connections with a bigger market, all district self-help organisations are urged to participate. Both the clients and the craftspeople would profit from this. Customers will have a new platform where they can browse a variety of artworks.

## **2. Review of Literature:**

A literature review is an important section of any academic study where a researcher reports scientific studies related to a specific discipline incorporating the articulation of existing theories in the discipline. In it the researcher tries to extend domain of knowledge by reporting the findings where theories are tested, examined, and/ or restated (Mishra, 2015, p. 801). It is more than a summary of the sources; it has an organizational pattern that combines both summary and synthesis. While a summary is a recap of the important information of the sources, a synthesis happens to be a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information.

Besides enlarging knowledge about the topic, writing a literature review demonstrates skills in two areas:

1. *Information seeking*: the ability to scan the literature efficiently, using manual or computerized methods, to identify a set of useful articles and books
2. *Critical appraisal*: the ability to apply principles of analysis to identify unbiased and valid studies.

The studies have been prepared to confer with the maximum possible literature on the subject and which was directly or indirectly concerned to the women entrepreneurship:

- Shingla and Singh (2015) in their book “Women empowerment through entrepreneurship development” acknowledge the impact of entrepreneurship development on women’s status. The study area was the Vaishali district of Bihar. They found that there was a substantial improvement in the overall status of women in their families.
- Suba and Sneka (2016) in their paper, titled “Women entrepreneurship in India”, focuses on women’s capabilities because they had more professional degrees to cope up with the market need. They tried to explore whether women can come out of the stereotype mindset and they can develop their creativity amidst this dynamic world. The authors found that most of the wo.....men faced a common problem,

which was non-cooperation from her husband and close family members. Finally, they concluded that if women got positive support from family, society, and government they can make a better future for our nation's economy.

- Bhuyan (2016) in his study titled, "A Study on the Performance of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India". He has found that MSMEs are an important contributor to the GDP of a country like India. He has also discussed they are important facilitators of employment generation in a country.
- Smith et al. (2017) tried to explore, through their work, "Trade Fairs and Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs" which Studies have shown that women entrepreneurs are increasingly participating in trade fairs, contributing to economic growth and innovation.
- Hazarika and Goswami (2018) conducted a study on "Micro-entrepreneurship Development in the Handloom Industry: An Empirical Analysis among the Tribal Women in Assam" that women entrepreneurship got importance all over the world for the development issue of women. They observed the Government of India tried to give attention to the better education of women, inequality of women, and empowerment of women. This study tried to identify those factors which affect tribal women to own a handloom micro-enterprise. The authors found that those women are risk-taker. They concluded that weaving is a part of their tradition and they enriched this handloom culture.
- Singh and Kumar (2018) in their work focused on "Handloom Entrepreneurship & Government Intervention- A Case Study of Varanasi" the working model of entrepreneurs in the handloom sector of Varanasi. The author observed that the handloom business became their family business but lack of management skills and entrepreneurial ability they cannot achieve their proper place. The main objective of this paper was to highlight the functioning and relevance of master waves and their roles in the value chain of handloom weaving. Finally, the author found that they changed their trends and

they had started kept their records in ledger books mostly they started to participate in various exhibitions also.

- Senapati and Ojha (2019) in their work titled “Socio-economic Empowerment of Women through Micro-entrepreneurship: Evidence from Odisha, India” observed that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) play a crucial role in those countries that can contribute to women empowerment providing them employment opportunities. They have explored that finance is the key challenge in start-ups and marketing strategies are required.
- Das and Guha (2019) conducted a study titled “Measuring Women’s Self-Help Group Sustainability: A Study of Rural Assam” that the self-help group-bank linkage program is now a major global microfinance program in India. These financial institutions help income-generating activities in rural Assam.
- Johnson et al. (2021) in their study entitled, “Skill Development Through Trade Fair Participation: Implications for Women's Empowerment” explore trade fairs often require participants to enhance their presentation, negotiation, and marketing skills. These opportunities for skill development can have a spill-over effect into other aspects of women's lives, boosting their confidence and overall capabilities

**3. Objectives of the Study:** This study makes an effort to attain the following objectives:

- To identify the support provided by the fair organising authorities of Saras Mela to the participating womenpreneurs;
- To explore the role played by Saras Mela in empowering the womenpreneurs.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

**Nature of the Study:**

The present research study is an exploratory study which is based on a particular trade fair sponsored by the Government of West Bengal, namely the Saras Mela held in the city of Kolkata. Further, it is by nature a survey-based study.

#### **Nature of Data:**

This study is based on primary data which have been collected from select womenpreneurs participating in Saras mela. The data collection was done through the form of personal observation, and in-depth interviews of the selected entrepreneurs.

#### **Sources of Data:**

The primary data for the proposed study was collected from the women entrepreneurs who participated Saras Melaheld in Kolkata during January 2022. Data from some of the officials associated with of Saras mela were collected from Anandadhara State Office (WBSRLM), aSociety under the P&RD Department. Any secondary data required for this study was collected from the relevant websites of the government, regulatory agencies, participants, media publications, books, journals, etc.

#### **Data Collection Instrument:**

In this study, interview guides were framed for collecting data from participating women participants in trade fairs. In-depth interviews were conducted at the venues of Saras Mela ground. Open-ended questions were posed to an individual women entrepreneurs, and their answers are analysed for patterns and themes. In connection with this study, open-ended questions were asked across five dimensions of support to each of the sampled women entrepreneurs. Further, in-depth interviews were conducted on officers of Saras mela organising authorities with the objective of getting their views on the role played by the respective trade fair in promotion of women entrepreneurship within the state of West Bengal.

#### **Methods of Data Collection:**

For the purpose of data collection in relation to this study, two different methods were employed. They are briefly discussed hereunder:

*In-depth interviews:* The data for the purpose of this research study were primarily collected from selected participating women entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews of select womenpreneurs. To be specific, data were collected from a total five women entrepreneurs participating in Saras mela which is held at Kolkata. Regarding the officials of trade fairs, data were collected from officials of organising authorities of Saras mela, their opinions were gathered by conducting in-depth personal interviews, which were conducted by the researcher by visiting their offices. The duration of each of the interviews with the participating womenpreneurs ranged between 30 minutes to 45 minutes per interviewee.

*Non-participant Observation:* In relation to this study, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer i.e. herself acting as a tool for data collection, when she went to meet the women entrepreneurs at the fair venue and collect data therefrom. Through this process of data collection, the researcher watched the subjects of her study.

### **Sample Size:**

An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question. Moreover, samples in qualitative investigations tend to be small. The researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996). Qualitative research studies have been found to consider small sample size (even less than ten) when they happen to be adequate for the study (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017). For the purpose of this study, five women entrepreneurs were identified from the participating women entrepreneurs who participated in Saras Mela. The following Table 1 reflects the places and the products sold by the sampled Womenpreneurs participating in Saras Mela 2022:

### **Table1**

*Sampled women entrepreneurs of Saras Mela*

---

Respondents	Product Sold	Places
Respondent 1	Bed Sheet, Hand Embroidery, Sharee, Kurti, cushion cover	Polba
Respondent 2	Showpiece, Bag, Bottle Bag, Wall Hanging.	Goghat
Respondent 3	Jewellery	Singur
Respondent 4	Bottle craft, Home decor,	Dadpur
Respondent 5	Jewellery, Wooden, Bamboo & Cane bamboo.	Paschimpara

---

Source: Compiled by Authors

## **5. Analysis & Findings**

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity and reliability of the collected data have been checked using the triangulation approach. Conducting interviews with the women entrepreneurs, conducting interviews with the fair authority officials and non-participant observation by the researcher are the three data sources which gave uniform results.

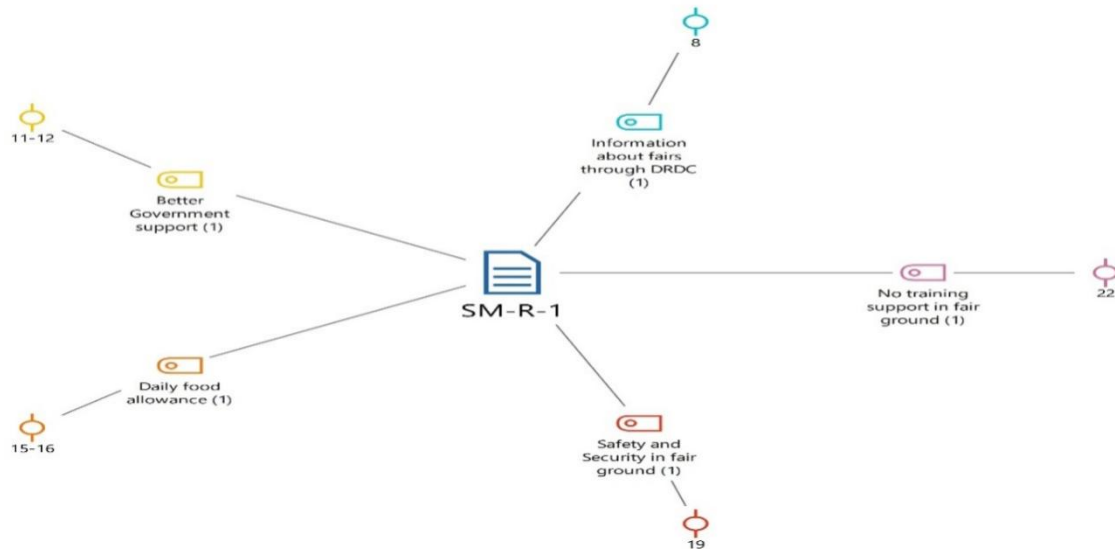
### **Analysis of data**

The data gathered for the study which is textual in nature, has been analysed using qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (Version 2020). The coding maps generated through this software have been presented in Figure 1 below, reflecting the Single-Case Model of selected five respondents (numbered as Respondent 1 to Respondent 5).

### **Figure 1**

*Coding Map showing the response of respondents of Saras Mela*

## Single-Case Model



**Source:** Analysis of Primary Data

On performing thematic analysis of the transcribed data (in-depth interviews), five major themes have emerged. These five themes are – Information about fairs through District Rural Development Cell (DRDC), Better Government Support, Daily Food Allowance, Daily Food Allowance, Safety & Security in fair Ground, and No training support in fairground, which are discussed hereunder:

*Information about fairs through DRDC:* West Bengal Panchayat and Rural Development department, West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission (WBSRLM) and the DRDC play a significant role for connected the women entrepreneurs with Saras Mela, which is causing their business to grow and develop. According to the words of the women entrepreneurs who claim to receive calls and texts from those offices and are given information regarding the fair.

*Better Government Support:* The vision and activities of the West Bengal state government, in the perspective of the participating women entrepreneurs, have been essential in helping them to develop their entrepreneurial skills. Since the State Government offered them with this chance, women entrepreneurs would not have been able to attend the Trade Fair, they are happy with this effort of the State Government.

---

*Daily Food Allowance:* According to the words of the women entrepreneurs, Rs 200/- is provided to them as a food allowance by the fair authority daily.

*Safety & Security in fair Ground:* The fair authorities of Saras Mela is highly worried about the safety and security of the participating women entrepreneurs, according to the feedback supplied by them. The families of the women business owners are also relieved as a result. The fair authority of Saras Mela is understood to take good care of each and every woman entrepreneur, and each woman entrepreneur has a strong bond with the other women entrepreneurs, enabling them to live and work together as a single, cohesive family at the fair. Because the fair's organisers create appropriate facilities for females, such as separate lodging, restrooms, and kitchen areas, the women entrepreneurs believe they won't experience any infrastructure issues at the event.

*No training support in fairground:* According to the women entrepreneurs, the fair authorities does not offer them any training in product marketing, product promotion, etc.

Further,with the objective visualisation of the themes identified above, a Word Cloud was generated using the transcribed data. In this process, potentially unwanted words were filtered out, finally reaching to four key words, they being 'Authority', 'Government', 'DRDC' and 'Allowance'.Figure 2 presentedbelow showsthe word cloud representation depicting the most frequentlyused words articulated by the selected womenpreneurs. Here, the word 'Authority' has been found to be mostly used signifying the recognition by the participants of the major role taken by the organising authorities in various aspects of the fair.

**Figure 2**

*Word Cloud depicting role played by Saras Mela*



**Source:** Analysis of Primary Data

Further, Table 2 presented below confirms and extends the report reflected in the Word Cloud representation, by depicting the frequencies of the words articulated by all the respondents, while they were being interviewed. ‘Authority’ tops the chart (reflecting highest frequencies in case of all respondents), followed by ‘Government’ (for three respondents) and ‘Incentive’ (for two respondents).

**Table 2**

*View of Respondents regarding the role played by Saras Mela*

Word	Respondent-1		Respondent-2		Respondent-3		Respondent-4		Respondent-5	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Authority	11	73.33	11	73.33	11	52.38	11	61.11	11	73.33
Government	4	26.67	4	26.67	6	28.57	3	16.67	3	16.67
DRDC	2	13.33	2	13.33	2	9.52	2	11.11	2	10.11
Incentive	2	10.53	1	6.67	1	4.76	5	27.58	5	27.58

**Source:** Analysis of Primary Data

It is worth noting that theme of ‘training’ of participants for honing up their marketing and promotional skills, did not get reflected on the data visualisation through Word Cloud. Moreover, for checking the reliability of the data collected triangulation approach has been used by relying on three sources, namely Womenpreneurs (through in-depth interviews), Fair authorities (through in-depth interviews) and Researchers (through non-participant observation). The triangulation of the data collected from the three sources of Saras Mela have been presented in Table 3 below:

---

**Table 3**

*Triangulation of data collected from Saras Mela*

---

<b>Communication about organisation of fairs</b>	<p><b>Womenpreneurs:</b> West Bengal Panchayat and Rural Development Department, West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission (WBSRLM) and The District Rural Development Cell (DRDC) informed the women entrepreneurs through SHGs group.</p> <p><b>Fair authority officials:</b> Officials informed women entrepreneurs about fairs through SHGs.</p> <p><b>Non-participant observation:</b> Researcher observed that fair officials informed the women artisans about fairs in right time.</p>
--	---

**Findings:** It was found by triangulation method that women entrepreneurs got information about fare in right time.

---

<b>Experiences and Benefits from trade fairs</b>	<p><b>Womenpreneurs s:</b> Women entrepreneurs are pleased about this State Government initiative.</p> <p><b>Fair authority officials:</b> Officials said that participative women entrepreneurs are really benefited and they are already develop their economic condition that is why they can provide better education support of their son.</p> <p><b>Non-participant observation:</b> It was observed that women entrepreneurs developed their economic position for this initiative of the State Government. When researcher talk to them they told after</p>
--	---

participating this fair they were made their home and they tried to provide better education to their son and daughter.

**Findings:** It was found by triangulation method that this policy of Government of West Bengal is really effective for the development of participative women entrepreneurs.

---

**Womenpreneurs:** According to the words of the women entrepreneurs Rs. 200 is provided to them as a meal allowance by the fair authority on a daily basis.

**Daily Allowance**

**Fair authority officials:** Official said the same information about allowance, which is provided by fair authority for fooding of women entrepreneurs.

**Non-participant observation:** Researcher observed that allowance, which is provided by fair authority for daily fooding of participating women entrepreneurs.

**Findings:** It was found by triangulation method that authority provides daily food allowance for participative women entrepreneurs.

---

**Challenges faced by participants**

**Womenpreneurs:** According to the words of participative women entrepreneurs authority of Saras Mela is very concerned about their safety and security of women entrepreneurs.

**Fair authority officials:** Fair authority of Saras Mela is very concerned about the safety and security of women entrepreneurs because the authority thought it

---

was their responsibility to provide enough safety to women artisans. They also told which is closely related to the reputation regarding security of the fair.

**Non-participant observation:** It was observed by research scholar that Fair authority of Saras Mela is very concerned about the safety and security of women participants. It was also observed that so many security guard were moving around in the fair ground.

**Findings:**

It was found by triangulation method that this policy of Government of West Bengal is really effective for the development of participative women entrepreneurs.

---

**Womenpreneurs:** The women entrepreneurs have disclosed that no training is provided to them by the fair authority regarding product marketing and product development

**Training regarding marketing & promotional facilities**

**Fair authority officials:** Officials said that no training provided by fair authority. Mainly authorities like to provide product development training, and sometimes they provide product Marketing or promotional training.

**Non-participant observation:** Researcher observed that no training is provided to women entrepreneurs by the fair authority regarding product marketing and

---

product development.

**Findings:** It was found by triangulation method that participative women entrepreneurs getting no support regarding training of marketing and product promotion.

---

**Source:** Analysis of Primary Data

From the above triangulation exercise, uniformity can be observed among the responses provided by the three sources across all the five themes.

## **6. Conclusion**

The trade fair namely, Saras Mela have laid an exclusive platform for the local artisans through which they can exhibit their products and wares, and thus make their skills and prowess known to the market at large. The womenpreneurs participating in this trade fair have reported that this outlet has made them financially strong and empowered, which in turn helps to improve their status and standing within the family. Thus, it can be concluded that such exercises adopted by the state government happen to play a major role in empowering the women in a patriarchal society like India.

## **7. Limitations of the study**

Like any study, this study also suffers from certain limitations which are highlighted hereunder:

- The inherent limitations associated with survey-based study using primary data could not be ignored.
- This study is based on one edition of the Saras Mela held at a particular location (namely, held in Kolkata during January 2022). The study can be further enriched by incorporating data from subsequent editions of the said trade fair held at different parts of the state.
- Due to paucity of resources, for the purpose of this study data could be collected only from five participating womenpreneurs, which could be enriched by including more sampled womenpreneurs.

## References:

- Bhuyan, U. (2016). A study on the performance of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in India. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*.
- Das, T., & Guha, P. (2019). Measuring Women's Self-help Group Sustainability: A Study of Rural Assam. *International Journal of Rural Management*, 15(1), 116-136.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0973005219836040>
- Datta, D. B., & Sarkar, B. (2020). The Effectiveness of West Bengal State Paschim Bango Rajyo Khadi Mela as Organisational Marketing Tool. *SEDME (Small Enterprises Development, Management & Extension Journal): A Worldwide Window on MSME Studies*, 47(1), 64-77.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0970846420930498>
- Hazarika, B., & Goswami, K. (2018). Micro-entrepreneurship development in the handloom industry: an empirical analysis among the tribal women in Assam. *International Journal of Rural Management*, 14(1), 22-38.<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0973005218754437>
- Johnson, L. C., Davis, M. R., & Brown, J. K. (2021). Skill Development Through Trade Fair Participation: Implications for Women's Empowerment. *Journal of Women's Studies in Business*, 15(3), 180-200.
- Mishra, P. (2015). *Business Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Senapati, A. K., & Ojha, K. (2019). Socio-economic Empowerment of Women Through Micro-entrepreneurship: Evidence from Odisha, India. *International Journal of Rural Management*, 15(2), 159-184. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0973005219866588>
- Shingla, P., & Singh, M. (2015). Women empowerment through entrepreneurship development. *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 9(1), 27-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09737189.2015.11885429>
- Singh, S. (2018). Handloom Entrepreneurship & Government Intervention-A Case Study of Varanasi. *PACIFIC BUSINESS REVIEW INTERNATIONAL*, 10(9), 126-134.
- Smith, A. B., & Martinez, E. F. (2019). Trade Fairs and Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Gender and Business*, 6(2), 110-130.

Suba, B., & Sneka, M. (2014). Women entrepreneurship in India. *Shanlax International Journal of Commerce*, 4(3), 21-36. [https://www.shanlax.com/wp-content/uploads/SIJ\\_Commerce\\_V4\\_N3\\_004.pdf](https://www.shanlax.com/wp-content/uploads/SIJ_Commerce_V4_N3_004.pdf)

\*\*\*\*\*