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**A PROFILE STUDY OF INTERMEDIARIES OF DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL IN THE  
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SYSTEM**

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**Abstract –**

Agriculture also has its own place in industrial development. Agriculture has assumed greater significance, it being the main source of livelihood of majority in the country. In the entire process of Agricultural Marketing, components in terms of members of distribution channel namely producer, middlemen and consumer have their own role and contribution in increasing effectiveness of the process.

Present study was confined to 10 talukas situated in Nashik district of Maharashtra state known for its agricultural progressiveness, dynamic agricultural marketing and consumer with reasonable awareness and proportionate sensitivity for agricultural marketing in particular. In the present study the different categories of intermediaries for agricultural marketing interviewed were wholesaler, Retailer and agents and/or brokers. The present study aimed at an in-depth socio economic and psycho situational features of 75 intermediaries besides difficulties encountered and the suggestions offered by them to improve upon the agricultural marketing process in its overall perspective.

**Keywords** - Distribution Channel, Intermediaries, Agricultural Marketing System.

**Introduction -**

The earlier Agricultural Marketing system was developed in the context of a planned economy, a fresh approach to marketing is necessary in the atmosphere of liberalization and globalization. The National Agricultural Policy indicates the need for new demand driven marketing set up. To meet the new challenge through strengthening and developing Agricultural Marketing system in the country is required.

Intermediaries, also known as distribution intermediaries, marketing intermediaries, or middlemen, are an extremely crucial element of a company's product distribution channel. Without intermediaries, it would be close to impossible for the business to function at all. This is because intermediaries are external groups, individuals, or businesses that make it possible for the company to deliver their products to the end user. There are four generally recognized broad groups of intermediaries: agents, wholesalers, distributors and retailers.



Landes and Burfisher (2009) examined the performance of India's agricultural marketing system and analyzed the economy wide implications of improved marketing efficiency system in India and concluded that greater investment in agricultural markets and efficiency in India's agricultural supply chains have the potential to enhance agricultural growth over the longer term. New policies lead to rapid investment by modern retailers and others in transforming India's markets and more efficient agricultural marketing is likely to strengthen consumer demand for food and other goods.

Devajar (2008) reported that for marketing of grapes in India four different marketing channels are used by the growers and further they found that marketing cost differs from person to person, place to place and time to time and further they used the output to input ratio for measuring the efficiency of marketing channels.

In the present study the different categories of intermediaries for agricultural marketing interviewed were wholesaler, Retailer and agents and/or brokers. This study aims to study the set of personal characteristics namely, age, education, professional experience, native background, type of family, size of family of 75 intermediary respondents along with the difficulties encountered and the suggestions offered by them to improve upon the agricultural marketing process.

The market channel can be seen as a set of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making a product or service available for consumption or use. The process connects producers and final consumers and influences competition and prices within the market. Johnson et al. (1996) considers the link between the actors involved in the transformation of a good as a chain or a sequence where the different steps, through which a product must pass to reach the final consumer, are analyzed. In an agricultural context this typically means producing, collection, processing, storing, transporting, wholesaling and retailing of the good in question

Sen (2000) presented his paper in the book entitled "Agriculture and the new Economy" edited by Krishnarao describes achievements attributed to the prevailing agricultural price policy enlisting the emerging problems. He further states that the commission adopted the view that its task was much more than to reconcile the short term conflict of interest between farmers and consumers. It has always stressed reduction in the cost of production through improvements in productivity for the benefit of both farmers and consumers.

### **Research Methodology –**

The present study as described earlier focuses on intermediaries for agricultural marketing process. The data was collected from 10 talukas of Nashik district of Maharashtra state. A schedule was used to collect the data from the respondents. The data collected is analyzed under the following heads -

#### **1. Personal Features of Intermediary Respondents -**

In social sciences research personnel characteristics of respondents have very significant role to play in expressing and giving the responses about the problem, keeping this in mind, in this study a set of personal characteristics namely, age, education, professional experience, native background, type of family, size of family of 75 intermediary respondents have been examined.

Gandhi and Namboodiri<sup>9</sup> (2004) conducted a study on "Marketing of Fruits and Vegetables in India: A Study" covering the Ahmedabad, Chennai and Kolkata markets. The sample respondents from the Ahmedabad markets comprise of 76 commission agents, 76 retailers and 59;



from the Chennai markets 63 commission agents/ wholesalers, 37 retailers and 20 producers, and 18 commission agents/ wholesalers and 12 retailers from the Kolkata wholesale markets.

## **2. Social and Economic features of Intermediary Respondents –**

Socio-economic indicators track economic progress and social change, and generally portray a people's state of well-being and quality of life. The different data collected under socio economic features were social participation of the respondents and their income.

Nadeem and Kumar (1998) in his study stated that in the traditional system wheat was sold through the village dealers, commission agents, consumers and shopkeeper etc. It was noticed that 71 per cent of wheat was disposed of to the village dealers. There were many reasons due to which the producers did not take their produce at the procurement centres or to the market. These were small marketable surplus, transportation problem and high market charges etc. They further reported that the village dealer had different alternatives to dispose of his produce where maximum quantity (65 per cent) of wheat was sold by the village dealers at the procurement centres due to the reasons like low transportation cost, no commission fee, labour savings etc. While the quantity disposed of by the commission agents to the other agencies (i.e. consumers, retailers, chakiwalas etc.) was greater (65.00%) than other agencies because very small quantity of good quality wheat was transacted through the market and most of the wheat was sold to the consumers. The village dealer usually purchased wheat from the growers and sometimes he also purchased wheat from other village beoparis and village shopkeepers. Maximum quantity of wheat (83.00%) was purchased from the producers. Most of the small and medium while considerable number of large farmers also sold their produce to the beoparies because the farmers due to many limitations were unable to sell their produce in the market or at procurement centres. In case of commission agents about 70% of the produce was sold on behalf of village beoparies because most of the produce was brought by the beoparies in the markets.

## **3. Psychological and Situational Features –**

It is very crucial and imperative to understand the psychology of the respondents during study. Psychological feature is a feature of the mental life of a living organism. The psychological feature arouses an organism to take action towards a desired goal; it is the reason for that action that which gives purpose and direction to behavior. The situational features are the situation an individual faces in his life. During the study the psychological features were studied of the Intermediaries namely economic motivation, risk bearing capacity and attitude towards agricultural marketing. The situational features studied were marketing infrastructure and co-ordination between channel members.

Aman and Hopkinson (2010) observed that although currently holding small market share, the entry and growth of international, consolidated wholesale has opened alternative channel structures. This poses a threat to some channel members and creates relationships that alter the distribution of power in the channel. The nature of the Pakistan retail market creates difficulties in compiling statistics or generalising from observations.

## **4. Monthly profit accrued, monthly loss incurred, disposal of profit and recovery of loss made as reported by Intermediaries –**

Profit and loss are the two sides of a coin. In any business profit and loss are inevitable. Profit is the money a business makes after accounting for all the expenses. In an attempt to understand situation with regard to profit, the majority of the respondents from the categories under study, made it clear that they were able to get profit less than Rs. 20,000. They also revealed that incurring



losses in their own profession has great many chances. As a matter of curiosity and concern, respondents were asked as to how they make disposal of the profit accrued response was for

- Repayment of loan
- Investment into capital
- Improvement in marketing strategy
- Given to producers as advance payment

The loss incurred when a capital asset (investment or real estate) decreases in value. The recovery of loss can be done through –

- Borrowed from friends and / or relatives
- Loan taken from financial institutes
- Any other source

Sahney and Srivastava (2009) decided to conduct a study aimed at an in-depth market analysis in terms of rural buyer behavior, farmer and dealer relationships, and comparative study on the strategies followed by the competitors, with the ultimate objective of improving upon the existing distribution network in the Bankura district by developing and implementing comprehensive marketing strategies. The farmers' profile and buyer behavior was examined. The major industry players were identified, market-share was studied and also the company's strengths at distributor and retailer level. A company wise analysis of dealers was undertaken, channel member relationships were studied and contact strategies were examined. Estimates were made with regard to the market size, growth patterns, new opportunities and threats. Measures were suggested for setting up a distribution network for Krishna Pvt. Limited based on demand, sales potential and customer reach.

#### **5. Difficulties spelt out by the Intermediaries in performing their role**

Distribution channels are generally organized according to specific business needs. They can be simple or complex, direct or indirect, effective or ineffective. The nature of a distribution channel depends on the type of goods and services being delivered, the logistics of the consumer base, how corporate governance is set up and how it might affect other marketing decisions. Broadly speaking, the success of the distribution channel depends upon elimination of the difficulties encountered in the process. In the present study the difficulties reported by the channel members were –

- i Uncertainty in Arrival of Produce in the market
- ii Inability to fulfill demands of consumers
- iii Fluctuations in cost of produce from producer's side
- iv Anticipate problems of Storage and processing
- v Inadequacy of finance for payment to the producer
- vi Facing legal and Ethical Issues
- vii Channel Conflicts
- viii Logistical Constraints
- ix Inventory Issue
- x Natural Calamities

#### **6. Suggestions given by the Intermediary respondents for enhancing efficacy of agricultural marketing**

The basic function of the distribution channel moves products and services to consumers from the point the products become finished goods or from the point of sale. To accomplish this, the distributor needs to identify transactions in a timely manner, ship efficiently, manage logistics and record delivery. Successful distribution requires collaborative planning and near-constant evaluation. Essential elements such as communication, planning, tracking transport and delivery must be organized in a format that makes sense for the specific business. In case of the agricultural marketing the suggestions were invited from the respondents which were –

- i Producers should consider requirement of consumers and accordingly produce the product for market to avoid uncertainty
- ii Financial assistance should be provided for purchase of agricultural produce in huge quantity by concerned Government Authorities
- iii Standardisation of produce cost by the Government Authorities concerned
- iv Storage facilities should be made available conveniently and at reasonable rate
- v Legal and ethical issues should be simplified and resolved easily
- vi Effective communication and co-ordination should be maintained in order to resolve the conflicts between the intermediaries
- vii Better logistical facilities to be provided.

According to The Weekly of April 8, 2013, in a discussion by esteemed members of "The Panel", whose combined decades of experience make an excellent sounding board for questions about the state of the industry concluded that Costs and Technology are among the Biggest Challenges Facing Distributors and Suppliers of any Industry. (Website given in the Bibliography)

#### Findings -

1. Intermediaries representing the categories of wholesaler, retailer and agents in majority are in between 31 to 40 years of age formally qualified upto HSC level put in about 10 years of experience in their profession, belonging to rural locale, living in joint family system with 4 to 6 members therein. Reported reasonable social participation earning in between Rs 2.1 to Rs 3.5 lakhs per annum. Psychologically with moderate economic motivation, risk bearing capacity and incidentally favorable attitude towards agricultural marketing. Majority of the respondents reluctantly reported in adequate marketing infrastructure and unsatisfactory co-ordination between channel members.
2. Uncertainty in arrival of produce in the market was the prominent difficulty to face by majority of the intermediaries.
3. Respondents representing various categories of intermediaries in their own interest and in the interest of effective agricultural marketing system that farmers should consider necessarily requirement of consumers and accordingly produce the product for market to avoid uncertainty.

#### Conclusions –

Agricultural Marketing is a matter of common interest obviously because it directly influences livelihood of an individual fulfilling his absolute requirement, naturally therefore quite a large amount of literature in size, shape and form is available. Researchers, administrators, policy makers and tillers of the soil are greatly concerned with and probably therefore significant contributions at their credit. In the entire process of Agricultural Marketing, components in terms of members of distribution channel namely producer, middlemen and consumer have their own role and contribution in increasing effectiveness of the process.



The term agricultural marketing is composed of two words -agriculture and marketing. Agriculture, in the broadest sense means activities aimed at the use of natural resources for human welfare, and marketing connotes a series of activities involved in moving the goods from the point of production to the point of consumption. Specification, the subject of agricultural marketing includes marketing functions, agencies, channels, efficiency and cost, price spread and market integration, producers surplus etc. The agricultural marketing system is a link between the farm and the non-farm sectors.

The present study revealed the socio economic and psycho situational features of 75 intermediaries besides difficulties encountered and the suggestions offered by them to improve upon the agricultural marketing process in its overall perspective. The study can conclude the difficulties encountered by the intermediaries and the suggestions offered by them. Considering the difficulties faced by the intermediaries, certain legal and ethical issues enforced by the Government authorities are proving bottlenecks in the performance of intermediaries' role efficiently. It is therefore very much necessary to simplify the same. All round efforts need to be made for effective communication and maintenance of order to resolve the conflicts between intermediaries. And last but not the least to improve socioeconomic health of all the members of channel in the interest of their profession, process of agricultural marketing and the country as a whole integration among the markets of the country should be done.

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