First National SARAS Mela 2026 (outside Delhi NCR) Concludes on a High Note in Vijayawada, Records Over ₹12.8 Crore in Sales and Attracts More Than 12 Lakh Visitors

Over 1,500 Rural Women Entrepreneurs from 30+ States and UTs Showcase Their Products at the First National SARAS Mela Outside Delhi-NCR

More Than 50% of Participating Women Entrepreneurs Gain Their First Exposure to a National Consumer Base

Handloom and Handicrafts Account for 75% of Total Sales; SARAS Shakti Food Court Records Over ₹1.9 Crore in Sales

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The First National SARAS Mela held outside Delhi-NCR - organised as an initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, in collaboration with the Government of Andhra Pradesh - concluded recently at Punnami Ghat, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. It brought together around 1,500 women entrepreneurs from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Lakhpati Didis from 30+ States and Union Territories. Participating through 600 stalls, they welcomed an average of 45,000 to 50,000 visitors a day.

The President of India, H.E. Smt Droupadi Murmu graced the First National SARAS Mela, and inaugurated it on 15 October 2026. The President also visited the SARAS stalls and interacted with Lakhpati Didis on the occasion. She was happy to note that along with an encouraging rise in women's entrepreneurship, rural women's participation in economic decision-making has also increased.



The Mela organised with support from NIRDPR and Kudumbashree was also graced by dignitaries including Shri S. Abdul Nazeer, Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, and Union Ministers Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Shri K. Rammohan Naidu and Dr. Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar, Union Minister of State for Rural Development.



The First National SARAS Mela provided a national platform for rural women to showcase handloom, handicrafts, natural food products and regional cuisines, advancing Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's clarion call of "Vocal for Local". It is also a step forward towards Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of six crore Lakhpati Didis by 2029, under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM). The Mission focusses on bringing about a major transformation in the rural economy by providing opportunities for skill development, financial assistance, market access and entrepreneurship to women associated with SHGs.



Commenting on the Mela, Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and Rural Development said the Centre and the state government were working to strengthen women's financial independence through technology and better marketing. He stated that Andhra Pradesh's model for promoting Self-Help Group (SHG) products, including initiatives like *SHE Marts* and the *Swayam Andhra* brand, would be expanded and adopted more widely across the country.

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu urged women to move beyond seeking employment and become job creators. He emphasised that the event should not remain restricted to a multi-week exhibition but should pave the way for year-round market opportunities for products made by rural women.

During the mela, other dignitaries including, Dr. Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, H.E. Mr. Xu Feihong, Ambassador of China to India, and his delegation also toured the stalls, interacted with entrepreneurs and purchased rural artisanal products.



The Mela clocked a cumulative sales of ₹12.8+ crore, with the SARAS Shakti Food Court with its 50 stalls reporting ₹1.9+ crore in sales. Handloom and handicrafts together accounted for 75% of sales. The highest grossing stall in terms of total sales peaked at ₹15.6 lakh. Cyclone Arnab affected Vijayawada during the final days of the Mela leading to a temporary closure on 28th and 29th October. Despite bad weather conditions and

disruption of transport, the State Administration and the organisers ensured safety and seamless operations. As a result, the First National SARAS Mela remained the talk of the town till its closure and delivered a total of 12 lakh+ in footfall numbers.

The closing ceremony began with a welcome address by Shri Chiranji Lal, Assistant Director, NIRDPR. Dr. G. Lakshmisha, District Collector & DM, NTR, Vijayawada and dignitaries from the Ministry of Rural Development, SERP, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh and NIRDPR presented awards to SHGs across handloom, handicraft, natural food products and live food categories, with further awards for product quality and packaging, stall design and branding, customer engagement, product innovation, demonstration and presence on social media. State nodal officers, district coordinators, the district administration and the SERP, NIRDPR and Kudumbashree teams that supported the Mela also received awards.

The stalls gave entrepreneurs opportunities to understand pricing, quality expectations, packaging and consumer preferences. The Mela also saw participation from 10 Farmer Producer Organisations and 15 Cluster-Level Federations. The dedicated Lakhpati Didi Pavilion showcased 21 rural women entrepreneurs and their enterprise journeys, including 11 Didis whose annual turnover ranges between Rs 50 Lakh to Rs 1 crore. Lakhpati Didis are women SHG members whose households earn a sustainable annual income of at least ₹1 lakh.

The Mela bore testimony to success stories of Lakhpati Didis from all across the country. One such inspiring story is that of Ms. Chandrakala of Lotus SHG, Tirupati, who took charge of her family's woodcarving business in 2007 following her husband's death. Now her enterprise reports an annual turnover of over ₹1 crore. Similarly, Ms. Siddhi of Mahamaya SHG from North Goa has scaled her business, receiving overseas orders for ethnic wear through Instagram and now has an annual turnover of over Rs 60 lakhs annually.

Alongside daily sales and buyer interactions, the Learning and Knowledge Pavilion hosted representatives from institutions and corporates who held interactive training sessions on enterprise development, with more than 50 training sessions being organised for Didis. The sessions offered guidance on product presentation, finance and digital tools for SHG businesses. NIRDPR addressed branding, product design and packaging, along with export marketing for SHG enterprises. NABARD focused on scaling SHG enterprises through finance. UNICEF introduced digital courses on using AI to start and manage small enterprises, alongside financial literacy, with examples from Computer Didi and Didi ki Dukan enterprises showing how these tools can support small businesses.

Ten structured buyer-seller meets at the Meet and Greet Pavilion connected women entrepreneurs with corporate procurement and retail channels. Delegations included Fabindia and My e-Haat of the HCL Foundation, creating opportunities for business relationships beyond the exhibition.

The Convergence Pavilion brought together 20 Central and State Government departments, including MSME, Textiles, Agriculture and Tribal Affairs, to facilitate access to formal credit, Udyam registration and statutory certifications. Digital facilitation desks

enabled digital transactions with 100% UPI adoption and onboarding onto the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), Flipkart Samarth and Meesho, helping rural enterprises access additional markets.

The SARAS Shakti Food Court featured 50 stalls operated by more than 200 women entrepreneurs from over 30+ States and Union Territories. Alongside regional food traditions, an AI-powered Customer Assistant enabled visitors to scan and access menus, receive dish recommendations based on their preferences and view customer reviews. Daily cultural programmes from more than 10 participating states including Ladakh, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Odisha and Chhattisgarh among others added to the experience, bringing together craft, cuisine and performing traditions from across India.

A key initiative taken by the collaborating partner, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Government of Andhra Pradesh, was the 'Entrepreneurship Development and Acceleration Programme (EDAP)', organized on the sidelines of the Mela with India SME Forum as the nodal agency. The programme followed an enterprise pathway covering expert learning, product readiness, digital onboarding, pitching, Udyam registration and buyer engagement. It recorded 3,489 attendances at expert sessions, 138 live product pitches, 288 entrepreneurs received photography and packaging support, 452 sellers received Meesho onboarding support, and 3,383 new WhatsApp Business accounts with product catalogues went live. A total of 15,231 Udyam registrations through the SWAYAM Helpdesk was also achieved.

The Mela also incorporated practical measures to reduce single-use plastic and encourage sustainable event practices. A total of 2 lakh cloth bags were made available across 600+ stalls while 2,000 reusable glass or clay bottles were supplied to participating artisans to reduce plastic bottle use. 800 eco-friendly bamboo/water-hyacinth dust bins were also provided across stalls.

Overall, the First National SARAS Mela brought market exposure, enterprise learning, institutional support and digital access together in one venue, supporting rural women entrepreneurs in building customer relationships and exploring opportunities beyond the event.

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