



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

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SMEs IN THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF AGRA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AGRA SHOE CLUSTER)

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ABSTRACT

The Importance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in any economy cannot be overlooked as they form a major chunk in the economic activity of nations. They play a key role in industrialization of a developing country like India. The Agra Footwear Cluster comprises approximately 5000 units- e registered and mechanized or mechanized. A number of units are small scale registered or unregistered firms, and even run as household units/workshop, usually function in a traditional manner with little or no mechanization. Looking back, 1991 was a turning point: a break with the past that opened up new opportunities and posed new threats to these units. Step by step, import tariffs were lowered and regulations relaxed, making it easier to import both non leather components crucial for premium export quality and to import machines. By 1996 it had become clear that Agra's exporters were facing increasingly tough international competition. In the light of above scenario, it became imperative to identify the opportunities the Agra shoe cluster avail, the challenges they confront and to suggest action plan to purge these challenges. Based on the primary survey the study finds that the opportunity and challenges for the Agra shoe cluster. The footwear cluster in Agra has enough growth potential provided strategic intervention is made in certain "key areas". Strategies in some key areas have been discussed in detail in Action Plan.

KEYWORDS

SMEs, Shoe Cluster, IDR.

INTRODUCTION

In India, the SSI owes its definition to the Industries Development and Regulation (IDR) Act, 1951. The sector has been defined in terms of investment limit in land & machinery (original value) since 1996 and the current investment limit is Rs. 10 million. The SMEs id defined follows:

Type	Mfg.Enterprise	Service Enterprise
Micro	Up to Rs.25 lakh	Up to Rs.10 lakh
Small	Rs.25 lakh to Rs.5.0 cr.	Rs.10 lakh to Rs.2.0 cr.
Medium	Rs.5.0 cr. to Rs.10.0 cr.	Rs.2.0 cr. to Rs.5.0 cr.

A special role for SMEs was earmarked in the Indian economy with the advent of planned economy from 1951 and the subsequent industrial policy followed by government. India has nearly three million SMEs, which account for almost 50 percent of industrial output and 42 percent of India's total exports. By and large, SMEs developed in a manner, which made it possible for them to achieve the objectives of:

1. High contribution to domestic production
2. Significant export earnings
3. Low investment requirements
4. Operational flexibility
5. Low intensive imports
6. Capacity to develop appropriate indigenous technology
7. Import substitution
8. Technology-oriented industries
9. Competitiveness in domestic and export markets

However, as a result of globalization and liberalization, coupled with WTO regime, SMEs have been passing through a transitional period. With enhanced competition from China and a few low cost centers of production from abroad, many units have, of late been facing a tough time. However, those SMEs who had a strong technological base, international business outlook, competitive spirit and willingness to restructure themselves withstood the current challenges and came out successful to make their own contribution to the Indian economy.

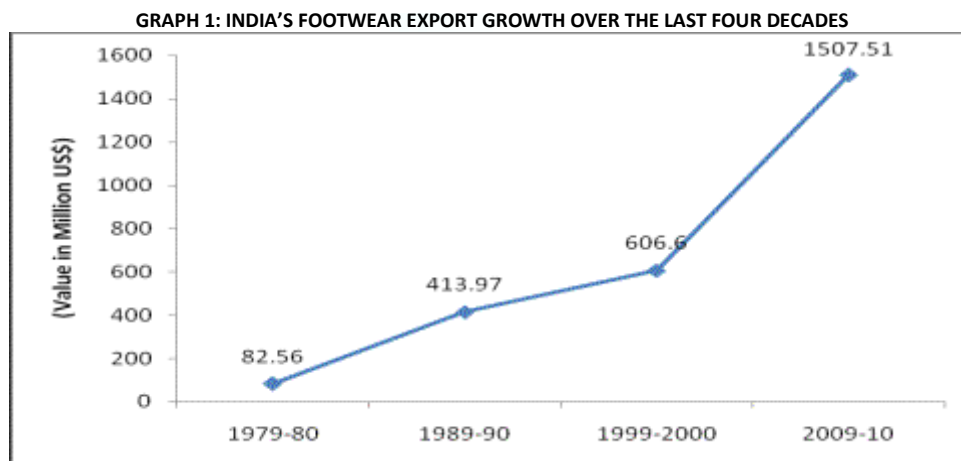
It is the most important employment-generating sector and is an effective tool for promotion of balanced regional development. These account for 50 percent of private sector employment and 30 to 40 percent of value-addition in manufacturing. It produces a diverse range of products (about 8000 odd items), including consumer items, capital and intermediate goods. The SSI sector in India employs around 26 million people and is involved with the production of over 7500 industrial items with the product range varying from very simple items produced with traditional technology to high tech products. At present, the SSI sector accounts for over 90% of industrial units in the country, 40% of value addition in the manufacturing output and approximately 35% of India's exports.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To Evaluate the Economic Contribution of the Shoe SME in the Agra District.
2. To conduct the SWOT Analysis of the Shoe Industry in Agra District.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INDIAN FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY

The Indian leather footwear Industry has undergone remarkable changes during the last three decades, with the large raw material reserve, access to large supply of labour and management. The factory sector of the footwear industry has made rapid strides in the production and export of shoe uppers and full shoes. The government's , trade and industrial policies, institutional support, coupled with progressive entrepreneurship growing demand for export and domestic demand have been the major factors contributing its growth. The clinical changes in the footwear manufacture have brought about traceable and tangible mechanization in the industry. The footwear industry in India is the second largest employer in the country. The concentration of footwear units in various parts of the country is Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Kanpur, Agra, Bangalore, etc. India's footwear export growth during last four decades has been depicted in the following graph.



Source: http://www.leatherindia.org/footwear_2010.asp

STATUS OF FOOTWEAR CLUSTER IN AGRA

Agra, India's most diverse as well as most tightly knit footwear cluster is a prime example of an artisanally rooted, low-cost cluster with predominantly Cottage/small scale manufactures. It was specialized in cheap handmade build up shoes. Agra is characterised by a cast based artisanal community that makes and a traders community that sales. The shoe industry in Agra is characterized by an abundance of highly skilled workers and concentration of necessary ancillary units. In addition Agra has a well developed whole sale market both for raw materials and shoes. The rapid changes that have taken place by a way of technological development, transformation of specialized skills, organizational improvements on one hand and tremendous changes in demand for variety of shoes both in domestic and international markets on other hand, were responsible for the growth of this industry in Agra. The Agra Footwear Cluster can be categorized into two parts according to the market they are catering to. These are: Domestic Units and Export Units.

Agra is a larger footwear manufacturing center, in India, having around 60,000 skilled workers and providing employment to around one lack persons in around mostly 5000 cottage, (home based) SMEs entrepreneurs producing about 90 million pairs of shoes and 110 million pairs of sandals and chappals annually, which satisfies approximately 53% of the domestic requirement of the footwear. Traditionally, this has also been a center of cottage industry production, based on family run production units operating from home, however as the production volume increased, these individual units converted into the organized units, thereby improving working standards and conditions. About 25% population of Agra city is directly or indirectly earning their lively hood through this industry. The following tables show the illustrative growth of the modernisation of the footwear industry and the estimation of employment on footwear cluster in Agra:-

TABLE 2: GROWTH OF AGRA SHOE INDUSTRY

S.N.	Year	No. of Mechanised Units	No. of Semi Mechanised Units
1.	1970	10	50
2.	1980	15	85
3	1990	25	120
4	2000	40	180
5.	2005	50	200

Source: agra.nic.in

TABLE 4: ESTIMATES OF EMPLOYMENT IN FOOTWEAR CLUSTER IN AGRA

S.No	Types of Production Units	No. of Unit	Employment (Direct)
1.	House hold units	3000	15 000
2.	House hold workshop	1250	10,000
3.	Non-house hold workshop	500	10,000
4.	Semi-mechanised workshop	200	20,000
5.	Mechanised factories	50	15,000
6.	Workers in ancillary units	-----	18,000
7.	Women job workers	-----	10,000
8.	Factory workers (women)	-----	2,000
	Total	5000	1,00,000

Source: agra.nic.in

SWOT ANALYSIS

Given the opportunities and challenges of the Agra Shoe Cluster, several important questions arise for Agra as a player in this segment. First, how is the Agra Shoe industry coping up with the challenges? What are the strengths to be highlighted in the global market and what are the shortcomings that need to be overcome? How do we compare with our competitors and what should be our strategies to effectively compete in the market? Given the fact that India's success in this industry has significant implications on its economy in terms of export revenue and employment generation for educated youths, these questions are of importance.

For the purpose of SWOT analysis a self structured questionnaire was prepared and asked them to fill it up. The questionnaire comprised of a number of statements related to strength, weakness, opportunity and threats which were identified on the basis of informal discussion with the Shoe factory owners, employees, published interviews and secondary sources.

These statements were asked to be rated by the respondents on the basis of 5 point likert scale. The highest rate **one** was to be given to the most favored statement and the lowest rate **five** was to be attributed to the least preferred statement. The statistical tool used for the purpose of SWOT analysis was weighted mean and software used was Microsoft Excel. The weighted mean for every statement was calculated on the basis of rates given by respondents and then every statement was ranked according to weighted mean in order of preference. The matrix of SWOT has been given in the **table** and ranks have been given to each of them according to the weighted mean score.

TABLE 5: SWOT ANALYSIS

RANK	STRENGTHS	AVG. SCORE
	MARKETS	
1.	Strong presence in the domestic market	2.4
2.	Ancillary arrangement with medium/SSI units.	2.3
3.	Development trust and relationship in the long run.	2.2
4.	No import is requiring as all items are indigenous.	2.1
	TECHNOLOGY	
1.	Availability of customized and local made machines.	2.4
2.	Machinery is available at low price.	2.1
	INPUTS AVAILABILITY	
1.	Raw materials are available in sufficient quantity.	2.3
2.	Availability of other inputs like Adhsives, chemicals, Last, Punch, mould, Grainderies and packing materials (Boxes) etc.	2.2
	INNOVATION CAPABILITY	
1.	Ability to develop duplicate and customized machines.	2.1
2.	Flexible operating practices.	2.0
	SKILLS	
1.	Workers are very skilled and working like machines.	2.4
2.	Workers are specialized in specific field.	2.3
3.	Most of the job is learnt while doing in house hold units.	2.2
4.	Vast pool of skilled laborers.	2.1
	BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT	
1.	Stable business environment till today and increasing day by day.	2.0

RANK	WEAKNESSES	AVG. SCORE
	MARKETS	
1.	Imports started coming in especially from China.	2.5
2.	Middlemen/traders enjoying most of the profits in the value chain.	2.3
	TECHNOLOGY	
1.	Low level of technological development.	2.4
2.	Manufacturing defects and use of substandard materials.	2.3
3.	Problem with quality and productivity.	2.3
	INPUTS AVAILABILITY	
1.	Most of the raw materials are indigenous.	2.3
2.	Imported materials are also used.	2.2
	INNOVATION CAPABILITY	
1.	Very frequently changes in design, technology, process and marketing due to foreign branded footwear availability in the market.	2.6
	SKILLS	
1.	No skill up gradation training for the workers.	2.2
	BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT	
1.	Business Environment is changing.	2.6
2.	Competition is going to increase.	2.5

RANK	OPPORTUNITY	AVG. SCORE
MARKETS		
1.	The domestic market has tremendous market potential and can be utilized at the maximum.	2.6
2.	Globalizations can be user tremendous market potential for the competitive firms (entire globe is the market – global village).	2.5
3.	Tariff and non-tariff barriers are depleting.	2.4
4.	Quality and productivity is the rule of the game.	2.4
5.	Enterprises can join hands together for international marketing, brand buildings and participation in trade fairs.	2.3
TECHNOLOGY		
1.	Advent of latest technology with the intervention of CLRI, FDII, CFTI and foreign country.	2.6
2.	Creation of technological awareness among entrepreneurs.	2.3
3.	Tremendous enthusiasm on the part of the cluster actors.	2.2
4.	Possibility of establishing consider for providing technical knowhow.	2.1
INPUTS AVAILABILITY		
1.	Competition is going to make availability of inputs cheaper and sufficient.	2.2
INNOVATION CAPABILITY		
1.	Exposure visits, participating in exhibitions may make the entrepreneurs and technicians more innovative and problem solving.	2.3
2.	Demonstration effect /awareness program.	2.2
SKILLS		
1.	Increased awareness is likely to improve the skill base of the workers.	2.2
BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT		
1.	Changing business environment and marketing channel can provide opportunity for enterprising firms.	2.3

RANK	THREATS	AVG. SCORE
MARKETS		
1.	Competition is going to increase because of setting up modern units elsewhere in the country.	2.6
2.	Overseas importers are smart enough to change their sourcing country. Survival of the fittest.	2.5
TECHNOLOGY		
1.	Low level of technological development.	2.3
2.	Technology can impose a major threat unless it is changed/ modernised.	2.2
3.	Technology is an ever changing process.	2.1
INPUTS AVAILABILITY		
1.	Difficulty in encountering competition unless raw materials are made cheaper.	2.6
2.	Quality of raw materials.	2.4
3.	Quality of footwear components.	2.2
INNOVATION CAPABILITY		
1.	Innovation is required in every facets of business operations.	2.4
SKILLS		
1.	Skill base of the workers needs up gradation to adopt latest technology.	2.5
BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT		
1.	The changing business environment is always a problem for the less enterprising firms.	2.3

Source: Primary Survey

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research work evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Agra Shoe industry as a player in this segment vis-a-vis its competitors. The opportunities for the industry are the domestic market has tremendous market potential and can be utilized at the maximum, globalizations can be user tremendous market potential for the competitive firms (entire globe is the market – global village), tariff and non-tariff barriers are depleting, advent of latest technology with the intervention of CLRI, FDII, CFTI and foreign country, creation of technological awareness among entrepreneurs, tremendous enthusiasm on the part of the cluster actors, changing business environment and marketing channel can provide opportunity for enterprising firms, etc. On the other hand major threats to the industry are competition is going to increase because of setting up modern units elsewhere in the country, difficulty in encountering competition unless raw materials are made cheaper, innovation is required in every facets of business operations, the changing business environment is always a problem for the less enterprising firms, etc.

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