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Analyzing issues and challenges of cricket bat industry of district Anantnag

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Abstract

One of the major wood based industry is the Cricket bat industry of district Anantnag. The origin of this industry in Kashmir is supposed to be from Sialkot Pakistan. The technical know-how was imported from England. This trade flourished in those areas of Kashmir where raw material was substantially available. Those persons, who at that time were financially sound, established their units at Halmullah in Tehsil Bijbehara of District Anantnag. More and more people especially at Sangam, Halmullah, Sather and Bijbehara in district Anantnag got attracted towards this trade and established their own units. The Cricket bat industry in Kashmir is giving employment to thousands of people and collectively exports thousands of cricket bats per year. The cricket bat industry provides employment to large number of skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled people. The industry has readily available raw material especially willow and poplar for manufacturing of cricket bats. But the latest infrastructure and technology of manufacturing cricket bats is not available to the manufacturers of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. However, the unit holders along with their produce visit the Indian cities to sell their product directly in the market. The willow clefts are supplied in lacs of numbers to Jalandhar, Jammu and Meerut based cricket bat manufacturing units. It is worth mentioning here that almost 60% of the world production of cricket bats is done in India for which the willow is supplied from Kashmir. If the production would have been done in Jammu and Kashmir with the latest infrastructure and technology then how much this industry would have contributed towards GDP of Jammu and Kashmir which in turn would have given enormous boost to the economy of the Jammu and Kashmir. This would have created a lot of employment opportunities to the local youth.

Keywords: cricket bat, willow, poplar, skilled, semi-skilled, un-skilled

Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is a core of good mineral base, substantial water resources and is famous world over in its handicrafts, tourism, cottage industries and wood base industries. The valley offers a distinct free environment which is perfect for the development of industrial units. Many small and medium scale industries have come up basically in the traditional sector along with some new areas like food processing, agro based units, wood based units etc. The total number of permanently registered small scale industrial units (SSI) at the end of Nov. 2010 stood at 53157, generating 247065 employment opportunities. Out of these SSI units, 526 units were registered during the year ending Nov., 2010, providing employment to 3654 persons (Economic survey 2014-15). Kashmir (India) possesses substantial resource in men and materials which if tapped and mobilized by judicious planning will result in the development of small scale industries which can confidently look to the market both in India and abroad. Giving suitable guidance and necessary facilities, the people of Kashmir can easily produce sophisticated goods in a cost effective manner. Anantnag is one of the districts of Kashmir Valley situated in south and south-western direction. The district comprises of 6 Tehsils, and is known as the land of springs but it is also rich in wood based industry especially Cricket bat industry. Among 12 tehsils, Bijbehara is one of the most important tehsil which is our study area as this is the only tehsil where cricket bat industry is found mainly. The tehsil is dominant manufacturer of Cricket bats, it constitutes 51 villages some villages where cricket bat manufacturing is a dominant activity are Halmullah, Marhama, Sangam and Sather. The cricket bat industry has an impressive reputation of making bats but lacks in quality due to lack of updated infrastructure and technology.

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The Jammu and Kashmir is the main exporter of willow clefts to other parts of country; it means we are availing raw materials of cricket bats. But we do lack the latest equipment's to become a supplier of finished goods of this growing industry. The cricket bats are mostly manufactured from willow trees which are available in abundance in Kashmir valley. It is important to mention here that during the course of more than one century of making bats, Kashmir has gained a name and fame. In 1975 to 1980, there were only 25 units of cricket bats in district Anantnag and Pulwama of Kashmir division. It has grown to almost 340 units by the end of March 2017 in which district Anantnag alone has 230 units. The cricket bat industry in Kashmir is already employing thousands of people and collectively exports thousands of cricket bats. Large number of the research studies has been carried on the cricket industries of entire world. The numerable research studies are; Barthwal, R.R. (2008) ^[2], Bilal *et al.* (2012) ^[3], Harilal. K.N, Kanji Nanneen, Jeyaranjan. J, Eapen and Swaminane than (2006) ^[7] and Ahmad, L. (2018) ^[1]. However, while exploring these research studies the researcher found there is wide gap to carry the below a research problem on "Issues and Challenges of Cricket Bat Industry of District Anantnag".

Objectives of the study: The objectives of the study are reported as under:

- 1) To analyses the performances of cricket bat industry in District Anantnag.
- 2) To examine the problems faced by the industry.
- 3) To suggest future measures to make this industry economically profitable enterprise.

Methodology: To analyze the status of cricket bat industry, the data was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source data was collected by means of open end questionnaires which were strictly framed in accordance with the objectives of the study. The secondary source of data was collected from the District Industries center Anantnag (DIC) and also from the State Taxes department Anantnag.

Results and Discussion

The cricket bat is consisting of two parts, the cleft and the handle. The cleft part is used to hit the ball where as handle is used to hold the bat. Willow wood is used to make cleft part where as cane is used to make handle. Clefts can be made from willow and poplar trees which are available in abundance in the Kashmir valley. Cane is brought from Assam, Goa and Andaman and Nicobar Islands and is also imported from Malaysia. Cricket bat willow trees are grown in Kashmir. Right from the saffron fields of Pampore upto Sangam Bridge, the Jammu and Kashmir highway is dotted with shops selling willow bats. Heaps of willow clefts kept for seasoning on rooftops or in open on roadside can be seen on this highway. This area is known as bat hub of Kashmir valley. Kashmir willow is known around the world as second in number in quality to the famous English willow grown mostly in Essex and Thames valley (England). Cricket bat industry of Jalandhar in Punjab is also dependent on Kashmir willow clefts. Cricket bat willow trees are grown in Kashmir, when the tree attains the age of 15-20 years and the girth of 34 inches (near trunk), the willow is ready for harvesting. After cutting the willow tree, the trunks are cut into sections using handsaw. The willow cut sections or rolls are carried out from the field on men shoulders and are loaded into trucks and carried to the bat manufacturing units for the process of bat manufacturing.

Table 1: Showing the Number of Units and Employment

Year	Number of Units	Employment in Numbers
2007-08	163	520
2008-09	163	617
2009-10	168	820
2010-11	195	1090
2011-12	210	1370
2012-13	210	1560
2013-14	218	1670
2014-15	221	1890
2015-16	228	2150
2016-17	237	2340

Source: Compiled from official records of District Industries Anantnag and State Taxes department.

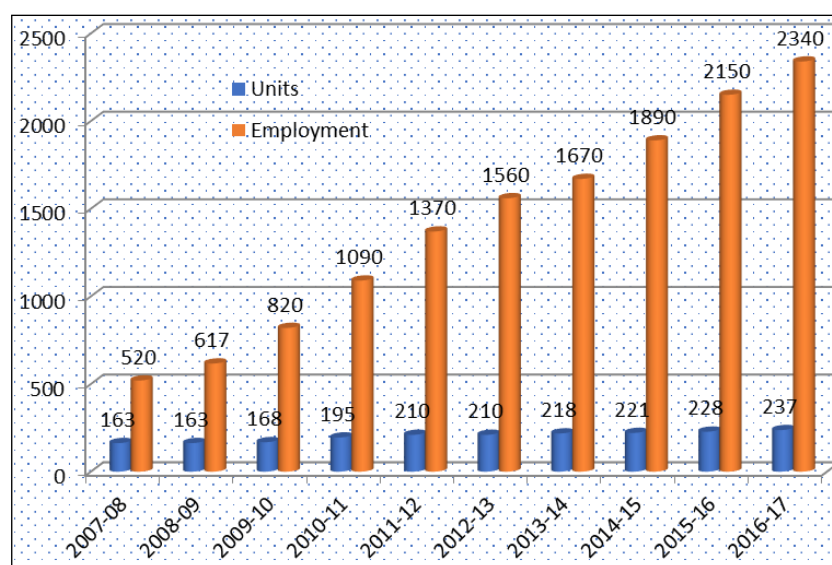


Fig 1: Showing the graphical representation on Number of Units and Employment

The perusal of the above table and figure gives the clear picture of the growth of cricket bat industry in terms of number of units and employment generation. In 2007-2008,

there were only 163 units of cricket bat manufacturing units in district Anantnag, providing employment opportunities to 520 persons. During the course of time the industry has grown

rapidly. In 2012-2013 the number of units has increased to 210, providing employment to 1560 persons. The formal registration of units has registered 27.40% growth during the year 2016-17 as against 24.30% in the corresponding year and employment has also registered a growth of 48.50% in comparison to 44.86% in 2015-16. The numbers of villages such as Kandipora, Thajwara, Samthan, Punjporaetc in tehsil Bijbehara have established cricket bat manufacturing units recently. After 2013, the industry registered sharp growth rate in number of units and employment due increase in demand for cricket bats, expansion of infrastructure facilities, increasing popularity of cricket, higher spending on physical education, cricket world cup 2015. The Cricket bat industry would have contributed many more times than the above figures of generating employment. But this industry lacks the latest infrastructure and the latest technological set-up this is the reason why clefts are being transported to other cricket factories of the country in order to make latest cricket bats. The emphasis lies on the government of Jammu and Kashmir how they would help this industry despite Kashmir having raw material for this industry in plenty yet we are not seeing any latest type bat manufacturing unit in the valley. From the very last year some bat manufacturing units are adopting latest techniques but still they are far away in order to compete with the global market in terms of latest infrastructure and technologies of manufacturing cricket bats. It is the duty of the local government to provide latest infrastructure and technology to the bat manufacturer units of the valley so that they can manufacture quality bats in the valley and export them to other parts of country and to other countries at good prices, which will create employment

avenues to the local population which means more people will rely on this industry. In the year 2016-17, 237 units giving employment to only 2340 people meaning all the units are type of small scale industries. Now in the year 2021 government is taking some initiatives to boost up the cricket bat industry but providing latest infrastructure to the manufacturing units is the needed to bring laurels to this industry. To boost bat industry in Valley, Government is mulling to bring cricket bats made by Kashmir willow under Geographical Indication (GI) tagging, while local manufactures hail the administration for the move. Kashmir willows are famous for their quality across the world and have gained huge attention from the cricketers. The government is creating awareness and provides handholding amongst the bat makers with regard to GI tagging through field officers.

Table 2: Production and sales of cricket bats

Year	Production (in lacs)	Sales (in lacs)
2007-08	830.20	401.25
2008-09	849.25	530.25
2009-10	900.00	828.86
2010-11	918.25	839.62
2011-12	930.35	783.83
2012-13	1007.40	820.96
2013-14	1040.50	919.20
2014-15	1079.32	973.45
2015-16	1102.05	1160.35
2016-17	1200.20	1160.35

Source: Compiled from official records of District Industries Anantnag and State Taxes department.

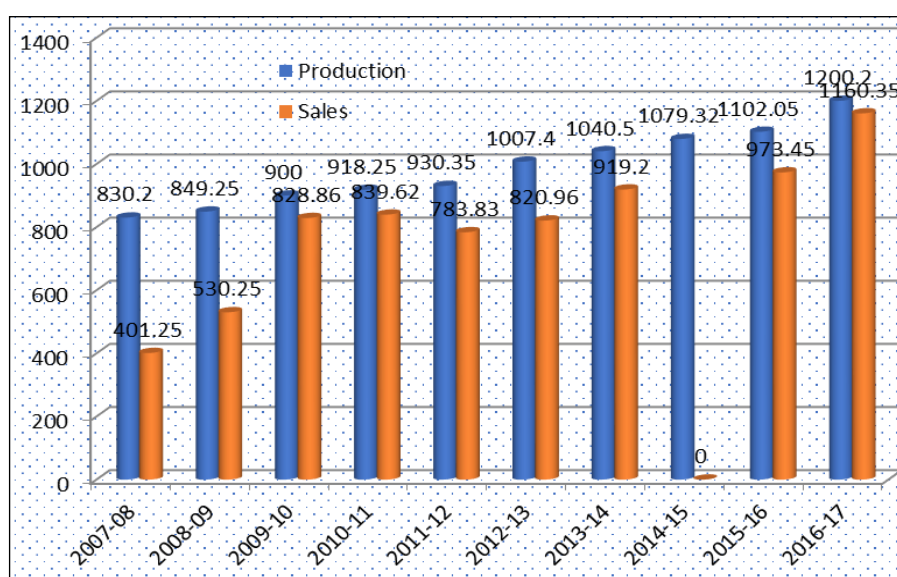


Fig 2: Showing the Production and sales of cricket bats

The above table and figure depicts that production and sales of cricket bats in district Anantnag has also shown an improvement. In 2007-2008 there were only 163 units of cricket bat manufacturing units in district Anantnag, producing the cricket bats worth Rs. 830.20 and the sale of cricket bats in this period was Rs. 401.25 lacs. In 2016-17, the production as well as sales of cricket bat has increased in the district i.e. production has increased to Rs. 1200.20 lacs and sales has increased to Rs. 1160.35 lacs, registering 8.90% growth rate as against 2.10% in the corresponding year and sales has registered 19.19% growth rate in 2016-17 as against 16.59% in the corresponding year. No doubt the production

and sales has gone up in the years as mentioned in the above table but according to the actual potential of the industry the production and the sales are not that much satisfying. If the true potential of this industry is utilized there will be a tremendous hike in the production and sales, we are producing clefts and exporting them to get good quality cricket bats to be manufactured outside the state hampers this major industry. We are rich in good quality raw materials but we are lacking the latest technological and infrastructure to manufacture good quality bats which will compete in international markets.

Conclusion

A recent study shows that GI tagging will serve as a great marketing strategy for selling these bats in markets and will also help in increasing its prices. A study on sports goods titled 'Indian Sports Goods Industry: Strategies for Tapping the Export Potential' conducted by the Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM BANK) says that "Kashmir willow bat is one such product, which holds significance as it is made from some of the best quality wood (willow) in the world." Kashmir willow will develop as a unique product with GI tagging indicating the product belonging to this region at the global level and will result in development of the "Brand Kashmir" attached to the bat. The government is creating awareness and provides handholding amongst the bat makers with regard to GI tagging through field officers. "Presently there are more than 400 cricket bat manufacturing units generating employment to about 8000 people directly," The Department of I&C has declared the area as Industrial Zone from Jawbara, Awantipora to Doonipora, Sangam (500 meters on either side of NH-44) for Cricket Bat Manufacturing units. "Further with regard to basic essential facilities, the matter has been taken up with various Departments including PDD for providing dedicated power supply to this area," she said. The Department of I&C has taken various steps for safeguarding the bat industry primarily by organizing the awareness camps and motivating the entrepreneurs to establish the willow bat industry. President, Cricket Bat Manufacturing Association (CBMA), Ghulam Qadir Bhat said that GI tagging will benefit every unit holder and will also help in generating employment. There are more than 400 units in the valley creating employment to more than 20, 000 people directly or indirectly, he said. There are various qualities of bats which are ranging from rupees 250 to 1500 and more besides the prices of the bats depends upon the size of the bat also, he said. It is the need of the hour to bring latest technological equipment's and manufactures cricket bats of high quality worth Rs 10000 to 50000 which will give a hard competition in the international markets. The GI tag will benefit all stakeholders of the industry; it would definitely give a boost to the bat industry. The maximum numbers of bats are manufactured in Kashmir. With GI tagging, we can sell bats across the globe. We would have access to every customer and can sell online with tags and earn customer's trust. He said, we make around 10 lakh bats every month in Kashmir in around 400 factories. It will be an honour to make bats that will be chosen by international players. In Anantnag and Pulwama districts, approximately there are 200-250 bat manufacturing units out of which 180 units are currently functional in which some make bats whereas others make willow cleft, he said adding "every unit holder generates employment to 10-15 workers including skilled and unskilled labourers." GI tagging will benefit the bat industry but the major bottleneck is low plantation of willow trees. It will also help in the generation of more employment and this way the dependence on government jobs will be no more.

Current challenges: Recently, numbers of farmers have switched over to cultivation of the Poplar trees as their maturity or growth period is very high as compared to the maturity period of Willow trees. "A Poplar takes only five to seven years to grow into a mature tree whereas Willow grows slowly thus taking 10- 13 years to grow as mature tree," said Amin, adding that timber of Poplar trees is mostly used for construction works and is used in pencil making. The bats made from the Poplar are not as good as Willow bats. Bats

made from poplar trees can only be used for Tennis balls or a plastic ball. The Government must utilize various barren and pasture lands for plantation of Willow trees. "The same can be sold to bat makers, this way all the stakeholders will earn benefit from this industry, if government fails to frame some policy with regard to plantation of Willow trees, the time is not far when there will be no willow bat making industry in Kashmir. Government must bring saplings of English Willow to the valley which could be planted in the valley on a trial basis. He believes that "illegal smuggling of bat cleft to outside J&K" is another hindrance in growth of bat manufacturing industry in Kashmir. Though the J&K government has banned selling of Cleft outside, the government must implement the same on ground to safeguard the interest of the bat Industry.

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