



Export Behaviour of Merchant Appalam Exporters from Madurai

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ABSTRACT

The export of traditional food products has gained increasing importance in recent years, especially with the growing global demand for ethnic and ready-to-cook items. Among such products, appalam holds a unique position, with Madurai emerging as a key centre for its production and export. This study examines the export behaviour of merchant appalam exporters from Madurai, focusing on their operational practices, motivations, and challenges in the international market. The research is based on primary data collected from 31 merchant exporters using a structured questionnaire. Various analytical tools such as Percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, mean ranking, correlation, and chi-square test were used to interpret the data. The findings indicate that exporters prefer supplying under international brands due to access to established markets, reduced marketing risk, and reliable demand. At the same time, factors such as regulatory compliance, limited awareness of export promotion schemes, and dependence on intermediaries continue to influence their export decisions. The study highlights the need for improved awareness, simplified procedures, and stronger branding strategies to enhance export performance. Overall, the research provides useful insights into the behaviour of merchant exporters and the future prospects of appalam exports from Madurai in the global market.

Keywords: Appalam exports, Merchant exporters, Export behaviour, Madurai, Export promotion schemes, Global markets.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the food processing industry is a significant component of India's manufacturing sector. It comprises manufacturers of food and beverages under its organised and unorganised segments. The growth and development of the food processing sector remains crucial in any developing economy because of its strong backward linkages with agriculture for raw material supply, forward linkages with domestic and international markets through the supply of processed food products, income transmission effects that increase farm incomes, and its role in reducing the risks of post-harvest losses and price fluctuations. Since food manufacturing involves high value addition, the manufacturing of food products from primary agricultural commodities generates significant employment in the economy (Gopinath et al., 2002).



During 2023–24, the sectoral shares of the Indian food processing industry in gross value added of agricultural, manufacturing, and overall economic activity was

14.46 Per Cent, 17.5 Per Cent and 1.39 Per Cent, respectively. India's food processing industry shared 9.46 Per Cent of agricultural output and 7.43 Per Cent of manufacturing output during this period. This is also the first industry in terms of the number of firms and employment among all Indian organised sector manufacturing industries, having employed

69.53 lakh workers across the organised (22.96 lakh) and unorganised sector (46.57 lakh) (MOFPI, 2023–24). Processed food exports constituted 22.6 Per Cent of the agricultural food exports by India in 2021–22. (Jai Ram Meena et al., 2026).

It is understood that, India is the world's second largest producer of food next to China, and has the potential of being the biggest with the food and agricultural sector. The food processing industry is one of the largest industries in India-it is ranked fifth in terms of production, consumption, export and expected growth. There is a growing demand for the consumption of foods in India on need based. Fuelled by what can be termed as a perfect ingredient for any industry – large disposable income - the food sector has been witnessing a marked change in consumption patterns, especially in terms of food. Increasing income is always accompanied by a change in the food market. In the southern region, where vegetarian meals are served with wafer substance called, Appalam is widely used. The uniqueness of this dish is that the demand for papad, is always present among all age groups and among all cultures. As Indians, stay and live abroad, the traditional food – papad has also penetrated into their foreign markets. Members of other domicile also have added to their wish list this traditional food savory. (A. Nixon Jesuraj et al., 2018).

APEDA, a statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce, has significantly strengthened India's agricultural exports by supporting infrastructure, quality standards, and global market access. In this context, traditional products like appalam have gained good export potential.

Appalam exports involve many participants, but merchant exporters play a key role by linking small producers with international markets through sourcing, quality control, packaging, and documentation. In Madurai, the industry is dominated by MSMEs, family-run units, and women-led groups that rely on these exporters. With over 300 units producing handmade appalams, the district contributes around ₹450 crore in exports to nearly 20 countries.

Madurai's cluster-based production supports large-scale output and provides livelihoods to thousands, making it socio-economically important. Major markets include the US, UK, UAE, and others where demand for ethnic foods is rising. However, challenges like lack of branding, low technology adoption, and compliance issues remain. Overall, studying merchant exporters helps bridge the gap between local production and global market requirements, improving the competitiveness of Madurai appalam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary focus of this study is to understand what drives merchant exporters to get involved in appalam exports, looking closely at the reasons behind their choices and business decisions. It also aims to explore how aware these exporters are of the various export-related schemes available to them, and to understand how useful and effective these schemes are in actually supporting and improving their export activities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Traditional snacks form an important part of India's food exports, especially region- based products that reflect local skills and culture. Madurai appalam is widely known for its quality, large-scale production, long shelf life, and export suitability. However, most producers do not export directly and instead rely on merchant exporters, who handle documentation, compliance, logistics, and market access. While this system supports exports, it raises concerns about producer visibility, value realization, and long-term export capability. The



reasons behind this preference—such as operational, financial, risk, and market-related factors—are not fully explored. Hence, this study examines the preference for merchant exporting, the factors influencing exporter behaviour, the challenges faced in global trade, and how these insights can improve the export potential of the Madurai appalam industry.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the export behaviour of merchant exporters dealing with appalam, focusing on factors such as motivation, awareness of schemes, satisfaction levels, and operational challenges. Primary data was collected from 31 exporters through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms, supported by observations and limited case-based insights to reflect real business practices. Madurai was purposively selected as the study area due to its strong presence as a hub for appalam production, with a high concentration of small-scale units and merchant exporters. Out of approximately 50 exporters identified from DGFT reports, 31 complete responses were obtained through a census approach, ensuring reliable representation. The study is entirely based on primary data and uses statistical tools such as Percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, mean ranking, correlation, and chi-square test (SPSS Version 20) to analyse exporter behaviour and interpret findings.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE EXPORTERS

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Exporters

| Factors | Frequency | Per centage |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| Years of experience in exporting appalam | | |
| <i>less than 10 years</i> | 4 | 12.9 |
| <i>10 - 20 years</i> | 4 | 12.9 |
| <i>20 - 30 years</i> | 15 | 48.4 |
| <i>More than 30 years</i> | 8 | 25.8 |
| Total | 31 | 100.0 |
| Average annual turnover from appalam export | | |
| <i>Below 50 Lakhs</i> | 4 | 12.9 |
| <i>Rs.50 lakhs - Rs.1 crore</i> | 6 | 19.4 |
| <i>Rs.1 crore - Rs.5 crores</i> | 13 | 41.9 |
| <i>Above Rs. 5 crores</i> | 8 | 25.8 |
| Total | 31 | 100.0 |
| <i>Asia</i> | 31 | 100.0 |
| Total | 31 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary Data

From Table 1, it is observed that most exporters have 20–30 years of experience, indicating a strong presence of experienced players in the appalam export sector. Most exporters fall under the Rs.1 crore to Rs.5 crores turnover category, showing medium-scale operations, while some belong to higher turnover groups. All exporters focus on the Asian market as the primary destination, likely due to cultural familiarity, consistent demand, and simpler trade regulations. The presence of both medium and high turnover exporters reflects a stable and growing export environment, where experienced exporters with established market connections play



a key role in sustaining appalam exports from Madurai.

EXPORT BEHAVIOUR: -

Analyzing the main reason for supplying under international brands helps to identify the primary factors influencing exporters' preference for international branding instead of exporting under their own brand name.

Table 2 Preference to supply under International brand rather than exporting under own name

| Main reason to supply under international brand rather than exporting under own name | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Per cent | Cumulative Per cent |
|--|-----------|----------|----------------|---------------------|
| <i>Access to a large, pre-established global customer base</i> | 9 | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| <i>Lower risk as the brand handles international marketing and sales Guaranteed</i> | 8 | 25.8 | 25.8 | 54.8 |
| <i>large-volume orders and consistent revenue</i> | 8 | 25.8 | 25.8 | 80.6 |
| <i>Opportunity to learn and adopt international quality standards</i> | 5 | 16.1 | 16.1 | 96.8 |
| <i>Simplified logistics since the brand often manages final distribution</i> | 1 | 3.2 | 3.2 | 100 |
| <i>Total</i> | 31 | 100 | 100 | |

Source: Primary Data

The Table 2 shows that, the most of the respondents (29.0 Per cent) supply under international brands to gain access to a large, pre-established global customer base. This is followed by 25.8 Per cent of exporters who prefer this arrangement due to lower risk as the brand handles international marketing and sales, and another 25.8 Per cent who are motivated by large-volume orders and consistent revenue. Additionally, 16.1 Per cent of the respondents consider the opportunity to learn and adopt international quality standards as their main reason.

Only 3.2 Per cent indicated simplified logistics managed by the brand as their primary reason. Overall, the findings show that access to global customers and risk reduction are the key reasons for exporters supplying under international brands.

❖ Factors Influence & Motivate Exporters

Further, analyzing motivating factors to determine how many exporters consider each factor as a motivation for supplying under international brands. This analysis helps identify the most commonly recognized motivating factors among the respondents.



Table 3 Factors influence Exporters to supply under International brand

| Motivating Factor | Yes (f) | Yes (Per cent) | No (f) | No (Per cent) | Total |
|---|---------|----------------|--------|---------------|-------|
| <i>Reliability on long-term supply contracts</i> | 17 | 54.8 | 14 | 45.2 | 31 |
| <i>Saving on international advertising & branding costs</i> | 6 | 19.4 | 25 | 80.6 | 31 |
| <i>Technical support / training provided by the brand</i> | 8 | 25.8 | 23 | 74.2 | 31 |
| <i>Easier clearance of food safety & regulatory hurdles</i> | 9 | 29.0 | 22 | 71.0 | 31 |
| <i>Prestige or reputation gained from being a supplier to a top brand</i> | 11 | 35.5 | 20 | 64.5 | 31 |

Source: Primary Data

It is revealed from the Table 3, that reliability on long-term supply contracts (54.8 Per cent) is the most significant motivating factor for exporters supplying under international brands. This is followed by prestige or reputation gained from being a supplier to a top brand (35.5 Per cent). Additionally, easier clearance of food safety and regulatory hurdles (29.0 Per cent) and technical support or training provided by the brand (25.8 Per cent) also motivate some exporters. However, only 19.4 Per cent of the respondents indicated that savings on international advertising and branding costs motivate them to supply under international brands. Overall, the findings suggest that contract reliability and brand reputation are the primary motivating factors for exporters.

Table 4 Factors motivating continued export of Appalam under International brands.

| Motivating Factors | N | Mean | Rank |
|--|----|------|------|
| <i>High profit on processed food products</i> | 31 | 3.48 | 1 |
| <i>Rising global demand for Ready-to-Eat products</i> | 31 | 3.10 | 2 |
| <i>Government incentives (Tax rebates/subsidies) for exporters</i> | 31 | 2.81 | 3 |
| <i>Ease of access to quality raw materials locally</i> | 31 | 2.81 | 3 |

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the Table 4, that high profit on processed food products (Mean = 3.48) is the most influential factor motivating exporters to continue exporting appalam under international brands, securing the first rank. This is followed by rising global demand for ready- to-eat products (Mean = 3.10) with the second rank. Meanwhile, government incentives such as tax rebates/subsidies and ease of access to quality raw materials locally (Mean = 2.81) share the third rank, indicating comparatively lower influence among the respondents.



BARRIERS TO ACCESS THE SCHEMES

Table 5 Barriers to access the schemes – Descriptive statistics

| Barriers to Access the schemes | N | Me an | Std. Deviasi on | Varia nce |
|--|----|----------|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Complex documentation and high paperwork</i> | 31 | 4.26 | .930 | .865 |
| <i>Frequent changes in policy or tax rates</i> | 31 | 3.52 | 1.029 | 1.058 |
| <i>Benefits are too small to cover actual costs</i> | 31 | 4.00 | .775 | .600 |
| <i>Delayed disbursement of funds incentives</i> | 31 | 3.74 | .965 | .931 |
| <i>Strict criteria that merchant exporters find hard to meet</i> | 31 | 3.84 | 1.003 | 1.006 |

Source: SPSS Output

The table 5 shows that, Complex documentation and high paperwork (Mean = 4.26) is the most significant challenge faced by exporters while availing export promotion schemes. This is followed by benefits being too small to cover actual costs (Mean = 4.00) and strict criteria that merchant exporters find hard to meet (Mean = 3.84). Additionally, delayed disbursement of funds or incentives (Mean = 3.74) and frequent changes in policy or tax rates (Mean = 3.52) are also perceived as notable challenges by the respondents. Overall, the results indicate that procedural complexity and limited financial benefits are the major issues affecting exporters in utilizing export promotion schemes.

LEVEL OF AWARENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHEMES

Table 6 Relationship between Level of Awareness and Effectiveness

| Correlations | | | Awareness | Effectiveness |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| <i>Spearman's rho</i> | <i>Awareness</i> | <i>Correlation Coefficient</i> | 1.000 | .841** |
| | | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> | . | .000 |
| | | <i>N</i> | 31 | 31 |
| | <i>Effectiveness</i> | <i>Correlation Coefficient</i> | .841** | 1.000 |
| | | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> | .000 | . |
| | | <i>N</i> | 31 | 31 |

Source: SPSS Output

The correlation Table 6, Shows that there is a strong positive relationship between awareness and effectiveness of export promotion schemes ($r = 0.841$). The significance value ($p = 0.000$) is less than 0.01, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant at the 1 Per cent level. This implies that higher awareness of the schemes among exporters is associated with higher perceived effectiveness of those schemes. Therefore, improving awareness about export promotion schemes may enhance their effectiveness among merchant exporters.



EXPERIENCE AND AWARENESS OF EXPORT PROMOTION SCHEMES

Table 7 Association between Experience and Awareness of schemes.

| Chi-Square Tests | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| <i>Pearson Chi-Square</i> | 46.793 ^a | 39 | .183 |
| <i>Likelihood Ratio</i> | 40.206 | 39 | .417 |
| <i>Linear-by-Linear Association</i> | .177 | 1 | .674 |
| <i>N of Valid Cases</i> | 31 | | |

Source: SPSS Output

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no association between years of experience in exporting appalam and the level of awareness of export promotion schemes among merchant exporters.

The Pearson Chi-square value is 46.793 with 39 degrees of freedom and a significance value of 0.183, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is no significant association between years of experience and awareness of export promotion schemes among the respondents. This suggests that the level of awareness about export schemes does not significantly vary with the exporters' years of experience.

Table 8 Association between Experience and Reason for supplying under International brands.

| Chi-Square Tests | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------|
| <i>Pearson Chi-Square</i> | 7.157 ^a | 12 | .847 |
| <i>Likelihood Ratio</i> | 8.800 | 12 | .720 |
| <i>Linear-by-Linear Association</i> | .332 | 1 | .564 |
| <i>N of Valid Cases</i> | 31 | | |

Source: SPSS Output

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no association between years of experience in exporting appalam and the main reason for supplying under an international brand.

Further, tested the relationship between years of experience and the main reason for supplying under an international brand. The results show that the Pearson Chi-square value is 7.157 with a significance value of 0.847, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the significance value exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant association between years of experience and the main reason for supplying under international brands among the respondents.



Table 9 Association between Annual turnover and Reason for supplying under International brands.

| Chi-Square Tests | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------|
| <i>Pearson Chi-Square</i> | 9.395 ^a | 12 | .669 |
| <i>Likelihood Ratio</i> | 10.169 | 12 | .601 |
| <i>Linear-by-Linear Association</i> | 1.349 | 1 | .245 |
| <i>N of Valid Cases</i> | 31 | | |

Source: SPSS Output

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no association between the average annual turnover from appalam exports and the main reason for supplying under an international brand.

The relationship between average annual turnover and the main reason for supplying under an international brand was tested. The results reveal that the Pearson Chi-square value is 9.395 with a significance value of 0.669, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. As the significance value is above 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant association between average annual turnover and the main reason for supplying under international brands among the respondents.

FINDINGS

Merchant exporters are largely found to prefer exporting under international brands in the appalam sector, primarily to gain access to wider global markets. A strong inclination towards stable and consistent business opportunities is reflected, as long-term demand and assured market access are given high importance. Brand reputation and steady income flow are also recognized as key motivating factors, as credibility is enhanced through association with established brands.

Moderate influence is attributed to factors such as prestige, regulatory support, and technical assistance, indicating that these elements play a supportive rather than a decisive role in export motivation. Cost-related benefits, particularly savings in advertising and branding, are considered less significant, suggesting that exporters place greater emphasis on sustainability and long-term growth over immediate cost reduction.

A positive relationship is identified between the level of awareness and the effectiveness of export promotion schemes, indicating that better utilization of such schemes is achieved when awareness is higher. The importance of awareness in determining the success of these schemes is clearly emphasized. However, no significant association is found between years of experience and awareness, suggesting that similar levels of awareness are maintained among both new and experienced merchant exporters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions are proposed to enhance the export performance of appalam exporters. Greater efforts should be made by government agencies and export promotion bodies to create awareness and conduct training programs on export promotion schemes, enabling exporters to fully utilize the available benefits. Exporters should also be encouraged to develop their own international brands, which can help in achieving better profit margins and building a strong market identity over time. In addition, regulatory procedures should be simplified and adequate guidance should be provided to help exporters comply with international food safety and quality standards. Furthermore, exporters should focus on diversifying their markets beyond Asia to explore opportunities in other regions and expand their global reach.



Emphasis should also be placed on improving packaging, branding, and product standardization to enhance competitiveness in international markets. Financial institutions and export promotion councils are expected to provide better financial support, including subsidies and incentives, especially for small and medium exporters. Lastly, organizing training programs in areas such as international marketing, quality certification, and global supply chain management would significantly help exporters strengthen their overall export capabilities.

CONCLUSION

The study on Export Behaviour of Merchant Appalam Exporters from Madurai provides valuable insights into the export practices, motivations, and challenges faced by merchant exporters in the appalam industry. The findings indicate that most exporters possess considerable experience and operate at moderate to large business scales. Asia emerges as the primary export destination for appalam, while regulatory compliance in other continents poses certain challenges for exporters. The study also highlights that exporters prefer supplying under international brands mainly due to access to global markets, reduced marketing risk, and reliable supply contracts.

Furthermore, the research shows that while exporters are aware of export promotion schemes to some extent, there is still a need to improve awareness and accessibility of these schemes. Strengthening support mechanisms, enhancing regulatory guidance, and encouraging brand development can significantly improve the export potential of appalam exporters.

Overall, the study concludes that with appropriate policy support, improved market diversification, and stronger branding strategies, the appalam export sector from Madurai has significant potential for growth in the international market.

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