



### NAVIGATING TRADE BARRIERS: A STUDY ON IMPORT AND EXPORT CHALLENGES FACED BY PAPAD SUPPLIERS

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**Abstract:** This study explores the multifaceted import and export challenges encountered by papad suppliers, particularly small- and middle-scale enterprises in India. Despite the growing global appetite for ethnic and traditional Indian food products, papad suppliers often struggle to maintain consistent international market presence due to a variety of operational, financial, and regulatory barriers. The paper identifies and analyzes major constraints including high logistics expenses, customs duties, regulatory compliance, product perishability, inconsistent raw material availability, and branding limitations in a highly competitive global market. Papads,

being delicate and perishable with a typical shelf life of three months, demand careful packaging and efficient transit systems to preserve quality. However, exporters often face delays in customs clearance, long transit times, and high shipping costs-all of which negatively impact product viability. In addition, fluctuation in raw material quality, particularly ingredients like moong dal, poses challenges in ensuring consistency in taste and texture, which is critical for customer retention in foreign markets. Further, the study highlights those international regulations regarding labeling, product safety, and certification often become bottlenecks for small suppliers, who lack the infrastructure and expertise to comply with complex documentation procedures. Tariff barriers and expensive port handling charges also reduce the competitiveness of these exporters, leaving them with reduced profit margins and minimal room for scaling operations. Branding and market penetration become even more difficult due to price wars and the dominance of already established



global players. To overcome these trade barriers, this study recommends the adoption of integrated supply chain strategies such as contract farming for raw material procurement, investment in automated packaging systems, government support for export subsidies, and participation in international trade fairs to increase brand visibility. Strategic policy interventions and enhanced infrastructure can empower papad suppliers to expand globally and contribute meaningfully to the export economy.

**Keywords:** Papad Exporters, Import and Export Challenges, Logistics Costs, Customs Regulations, Supply Chain Management, Contract Farming, Perishable Food Products.

## Introduction

The Indian food industry is deeply intertwined with the nation's cultural heritage, where traditional snacks and delicacies hold a special place in both domestic consumption and international appeal. Among these, *papad*—a thin, crisp, disc-shaped food item made primarily from lentil or rice flour—has

evolved from a humble homemade accompaniment to a globally appreciated ethnic snack. From being a staple in Indian households to being served as an appetizer in high-end international restaurants, papads have gained considerable attention for their unique texture, flavor, and cultural authenticity. This transformation has sparked a growing interest in their commercial production and export, presenting both opportunities and challenges for Indian suppliers. The global food market has experienced a rising demand for ethnic and traditional products,



including Indian snacks, due to increased globalizations, migration, and the popularity of Indian cuisine abroad. As a result, the papad industry has witnessed a surge in export potential. However, tapping into international markets is far from straightforward. Indian papad suppliers, especially those operating as small- and medium-scale



enterprises (SMEs), often find themselves grappling with a host of barriers that hinder their participation in global trade. These challenges are not limited to regional clusters but are faced by suppliers across the country—from Rajasthan and Gujarat to Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

The papad manufacturing sector in India is characterized by a fragmented structure, where production is often carried out by cottage industries, self-help groups, women-led cooperatives, and small-scale entrepreneurs. While this structure has allowed for community participation and grassroots employment generation, it has also created several bottlenecks when attempting to scale operations or enter export markets. The issues range from raw material sourcing inconsistencies and inadequate packaging infrastructure to regulatory complexities and intense international competition.

SUPPLIER MANUFACTURE DISTRIBUTOR RETAILER CUSTOMER

One of the most significant challenges faced by papad suppliers

is the inconsistency in product quality and standardization. Papads are made using a variety of ingredients, including urad dal (black gram), moong dal (green gram), spices, and sometimes rice or sago. The quality and sourcing of these raw materials vary across regions and seasons, making it difficult for producers to maintain consistent flavor, texture, and appearance. In domestic markets, this variability is often tolerated due to consumer familiarity with regional differences. However, in international markets, where buyers expect uniformity, such inconsistency can result in the rejection of shipments and loss of consumer trust.

Another pressing issue is high logistics and transportation costs. Given the delicate and brittle nature of papads, they require specialized packaging and handling to prevent breakage during transit. Additionally, papads have a relatively short shelf life of about three to six months, depending on storage conditions and preservatives used. This perishability adds pressure on suppliers to ensure timely deliveries, which becomes



difficult due to long customs clearance procedures, port handling inefficiencies, and limited access to cold chain logistics in some areas. Exporters often face delays and cost overruns that compromise the financial viability of their operations. Regulatory compliance and documentation further complicate the export process. Papad suppliers must adhere to international food safety standards, labeling norms, and certification protocols, such as HACCP, FSSAI, and ISO standards. For small businesses that lack the resources or expertise to navigate these regulatory landscapes, this becomes a major hurdle. Incorrect documentation, delays in certification, and lack of clarity in export procedures often lead to shipment rejections, financial penalties, and reputational damage. The situation is exacerbated when governments implement sudden changes in trade policies or introduce new tariffs, creating uncertainty and risk in export planning. In addition, branding and market positioning represent major challenges for Indian papad exporters. The global ethnic snack market is highly competitive, with well-established brands occupying significant shelf space

in supermarkets and ethnic grocery stores. Smaller Indian suppliers, who often operate on tight budgets, struggle to invest in branding, advertising, or product differentiation strategies. This makes it difficult for them to gain visibility or build a loyal customer base in foreign markets. Moreover, the tendency to compete on price alone results in thin profit margins and undermines the potential for sustainable growth.

Despite these challenges, the Indian papad industry possesses several inherent strengths that, if leveraged strategically, could enable successful participation in international trade. These include deep-rooted cultural appeal, diverse regional flavors, a large and adaptable workforce, and increasing government support for MSME exports. To unlock this potential, there is a need for integrated efforts involving capacity building, infrastructure development, and strategic policy support.

This research paper aims to comprehensively examine the import and export challenges faced by papad suppliers across India, with a particular focus on small- and medium-scale

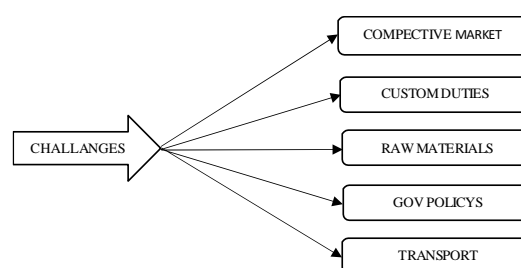


enterprises that form the backbone of this industry. Through primary and secondary data collection, the study explores the operational, financial, regulatory, and competitive barriers that limit their global reach. The objective is to identify key pain points in the supply chain and propose actionable recommendations that can enable papad suppliers to expand their footprint in international markets. By shedding light on the real-world struggles of Indian papad suppliers, this study not only contributes to the growing literature on trade barriers faced by traditional food exporters but also provides practical insights for policymakers, trade facilitators, and industry stakeholders. In an era where culinary diplomacy and soft power are gaining importance, empowering traditional food industries like papad manufacturing can serve as a vehicle for inclusive economic development and global cultural exchange

### Major Challenges Faced

Despite the growing international demand for traditional Indian foods like papads, small and medium-sized suppliers across India face persistent challenges that hinder their ability to

scale and compete globally. These challenges are especially pressing in the context of India's fragmented papad industry, where many operations are run by family-owned businesses. The major issues include intense competition in domestic and international markets, operational inefficiencies, and complex customs regulations that add to export burdens. Suppliers also struggle with inconsistent raw material quality, fluctuating prices, and lack of access to streamlined procurement. Furthermore, restrictive government policies and inadequate export incentives, coupled with high transportation and logistics costs, limit market reach and profitability. Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential to enhancing the global competitiveness of India's traditional snack industry.



### 2.1 Raw Material Inconsistency and Price Volatility:

One of the primary challenges faced by middle-class papad





suppliers in India is the volatility in the prices and availability of raw materials. Papads are typically made from pulses, spices, and oil, all of which are subject to seasonal variations. The prices of these raw materials fluctuate based on factors like weather conditions, yields, and market demand. This instability significantly impacts the income of small local businesses that primarily source their inputs locally. A sudden rise in prices or scarcity of

these ingredients forces suppliers to rely on lower-quality alternatives, leading to inconsistent taste, texture, and overall product quality. While consumers in domestic markets may tolerate minor variations, export markets expect a high level of consistency, and any deviation can harm a supplier's reputation. Furthermore, small suppliers often lack the capital to secure long-term contracts with reliable suppliers, exacerbating the challenge of maintaining consistency.

## ***2.2 Limited Financial Resources and Capital Constraints:***

Financial constraints are another significant hurdle for middle-class papad suppliers. Due to limited access to capital, suppliers struggle to invest in the necessary infrastructure, such as stable supply chains or long-term raw material guarantees, which larger companies can afford. This scarcity of funds also limits their ability to scale operations and adopt better production or packaging technologies. The inability to secure loans or funding further reduces their capacity to buffer against price fluctuations in raw materials and other operational costs.

## ***2.3 Government Support and Policy Challenges:***

Although India has programs such as the Micro and Small Enterprises Sector Development Programme aimed at supporting SMEs, these programs are often difficult for small papad suppliers to access. The bureaucratic processes are long and complicated, making it



challenging for suppliers to take full advantage of available government support. In addition, frequent changes in government policies, export regulations, or tariff structures create uncertainty, making it hard for small-scale suppliers to plan their long-term strategies effectively.

#### ***2.4 Logistical Expenses and***

##### ***Transportation Costs:***

Transportation and logistical costs are another critical issue for papad suppliers in India. The fragile nature of papads, which are thin and crispy, makes them prone to breakage during transit. To ensure their products reach customers, suppliers must invest in strong, often expensive, packaging materials to protect the papads. However, many small suppliers cannot afford these high-quality packaging solutions, leading to damaged products. In rural areas where many small suppliers are based, inadequate transportation infrastructure increases costs and delivery times, further straining profitability. Additionally,

fluctuations in fuel prices and the challenges of transporting goods to urban centers or ports for international exports add further complications. Shipping papads abroad also introduces additional costs like port charges, customs duties, and handling fees, all of which significantly affect small suppliers with limited resources.

#### ***2.5 Customs Duties and Export***

##### ***Hurdles:***

Exporting papads presents significant challenges in the form of customs duties and other regulatory barriers. The cost of tariffs imposed by importing countries can make papads from India less competitive compared to locally produced products or those from countries with lower tariffs. Furthermore, the export process involves dealing with complex documentation and meeting stringent regulatory requirements, such as food safety certifications and packaging standards. Small suppliers often struggle with these hurdles due to limited financial resources and a lack of expertise in navigating international trade regulations. Delays at ports, coupled with the perishability of papads, can result in losses and damage to the supplier's reputation, particularly in



foreign markets where customers expect timely and high-quality deliveries.



### ***2.6 Short Shelf Life and Product***

#### ***Expiration:***

The short shelf life of papads, typically around three months, is a significant challenge for suppliers, especially those in India. Papads are highly perishable, and maintaining product freshness throughout transportation and storage is a constant concern. Without access to advanced supply chain management tools or modern refrigeration systems, small suppliers face difficulties in ensuring their products remain fresh, particularly when exporting them over long distances. Delays in customs or shipping can result in the papads expiring before reaching the market, leading to financial losses. Proper packaging, which can extend shelf life, is costly and often unaffordable for small suppliers, further exacerbating the problem. Moreover, predicting demand to avoid both overproduction and underproduction

becomes a difficult task, leading to either waste or missed sales opportunities.

### ***2.7 Competitive Market and***

#### ***Revenue Challenges:***

The papad industry, part of the FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) sector, is highly competitive, both domestically and internationally. For middle-class suppliers in India, competing with well-established brands is a constant struggle. These suppliers must balance product quality, production growth, and marketshare while navigating the pressures of pricing and costs. The quest for sustainable profitability is complicated by the need to maintain high-quality standards, which requires significant investment. The challenges of competing with larger firms, which have more resources, infrastructure, and established brand presence, create significant barriers for small suppliers looking to expand their market reach, especially in international markets.

## **4. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FOR PAPADS SUPPLIERS IN INDIA:**





The middle-class papad manufacturers in Indai face several challenges that hinder their ability to scale and remain competitive in the market. Key challenges include intense competition from established brands, inadequate export procedures, the high cost of logistics, and the relatively short shelf life of papads. These factors collectively create an environment where local suppliers struggle to maximize their potential in both domestic and international markets. However, the situation is not without remedy. By integrating innovative technologies, improving infrastructure, and receiving governmental support, middle-class suppliers can effectively overcome these barriers. This section explores possible strategies that can enhance competitiveness, improve operational efficiency, and increase sales within this sector.

### ***3.1. Enhancing Packaging and Storage Solutions***

#### ***Airtight and Sustainable Packaging:***

One of the most effective ways to address the short shelf life of papads is through the implementation of

improved packaging solutions. Suppliers should prioritize airtight, water-resistant, and eco-friendly packaging. Innovations such as biodegradable vacuum-sealed bags can extend the product's shelf life by 20-30 days. This not only preserves the taste and quality of the papads but also aligns with growing consumer preferences for sustainable products. By focusing on packaging that maintains product integrity during transportation and also meets ecological standards, suppliers can add value to their products and appeal to environmentally conscious buyers.

**Dry Storage Infrastructure:** Dry storage facilities are critical for preventing spoilage, especially during periods of extended transit. For exporters, having access to adequate dry storage can minimize the risks of product degradation. Governments and cooperatives can play a pivotal role by subsidizing dry storage services for middle-class suppliers, ensuring that they have affordable access to these facilities. Studies show that the use of dry storage can significantly reduce spoilage costs—by up to 50%—



which, in turn, helps suppliers improve profitability.

### ***3.2. Building Brand Identity and Market Presence***

#### ***Branding and Marketing:***

To stand out in the competitive market, middle-class suppliers must focus on building strong brand identities. This can be achieved by investing in professional branding services, including logo design, packaging aesthetics, and catchphrases that resonate with consumers. Research indicates that 70% of customers are more likely to purchase branded papads that come in attractive packaging, compared to unbranded alternatives. Suppliers can also tap into government-subsidized marketing workshops to enhance their brand presence.

**Influencer Collaboration:** In the digital age, social media marketing has become an invaluable tool for businesses seeking to expand their reach. By collaborating with influencers in the food niche, papad suppliers can increase product visibility at a relatively low cost. Influencer campaigns, especially those on platforms like Instagram, can significantly boost sales. For

instance, a well-executed influencer marketing campaign could result in a 25% increase in product sales, highlighting the power of social media in enhancing brand exposure.

### ***3.3. Expanding Market Access Local and International Trade Expos:***

Participating in food trade fairs and expos is a highly effective strategy for identifying new markets and connecting with potential distributors. These events offer middle-class suppliers the opportunity to secure long-term contracts and orders. Government support in the form of subsidies for attending such events can further encourage supplier participation, helping them expand both locally and internationally.

#### **E-Commerce Platforms:**

Leveraging online platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, and IndiaMART can help suppliers tap into the growing e-commerce market. These platforms provide suppliers with access to a vast customer base and offer valuable data analytics to help suppliers target high-demand regions. By focusing their marketing efforts on these regions, suppliers can



optimize their sales and distribution strategies.

### ***3.4. Streamlining Logistics and Reducing Costs***

**Shared Logistics:** One of the key areas where middle-class papad suppliers can reduce costs is in logistics. By pooling transportation resources with other suppliers, they can significantly lower transportation expenses. Shared logistics can cut transport costs by as much as 30%, improving overall profitability.

**Government Support for Infrastructure:** Improving rural road infrastructure is another critical step in enhancing the efficiency of papad distribution. Government initiatives aimed at providing affordable transport options and developing logistics hubs near rural production centers would help reduce transit time and minimize product damage. Additionally, grants aimed at developing Local Government Procurement (LGP) points can further streamline the supply chain.

### ***3.5. Navigating Export Regulations with Support Systems Access to Trade Consultants:***

Many middle-class suppliers face difficulties navigating international regulations and trade policies. Government trade facilitation centers can provide affordable consultations on matters such as export paperwork, customs procedures, and sanitation patents. By simplifying the export process, these centers can help small traders better understand and comply with international standards, ultimately making it easier for them to enter global markets.

**Simplified Export Policies:** The complexity of export procedures often discourages small-scale traders from venturing into international markets. By reducing the bureaucratic red tape and simplifying export policies, the government can encourage more papad suppliers to explore export opportunities, expanding their reach and improving profitability.

### ***3.6. Addressing Consumer Trends and Preferences***



**Product Diversification:** To cater to the evolving tastes of modern consumers, papad suppliers should consider diversifying their product offerings. Creating gluten-free, low-sodium, or flavored papads can help meet the growing demand for healthier, more varied snack options. Surveys indicate that 40% of consumers prefer flavored snacks, such as masala or garlic-flavored papads, over traditional, plain varieties. By adapting to these changing preferences, suppliers can tap into new markets and attract a broader customer base.

**Quality Certifications:** Obtaining international quality certifications, such as HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point), is another strategy to build consumer trust. Such certifications reassure buyers that the product is safe, of high quality, and meets global standards. This can be particularly important for suppliers looking to expand into international markets, where consumers are more likely to trust certified products.

### ***3.7 Leveraging Government Schemes and Financial Aid Subsidies and Grants:***

The Indian government provides various relief programs aimed at small-scale food processors. These programs can help suppliers upgrade their equipment, improve packaging, and enhance supply chain management. The India government could consider creating specific grants tailored to papad suppliers, similar to those available to other small-scale industries, to further stimulate growth in this sector.

**Low-Interest Loans:** Access to low-interest loans can significantly reduce the financial burden on middle-class papad suppliers. These loans can be used to finance the purchase of new equipment, implement marketing campaigns, or enhance product quality. Research suggests that suppliers who have access to low-interest loans can see their revenues double or triple within two years, highlighting the positive impact of financial assistance on business growth.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The papad industry, particularly small and medium-sized manufacturers, faces significant challenges in India, with India



serving as a crucial example of these struggles. From intense competition with larger brands to the logistical hurdles of maintaining product quality during transit, the barriers are formidable. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. By embracing innovative packaging solutions, investing in cold storage, and optimizing logistics, suppliers can significantly extend the shelf life and reduce spoilage, thus improving their market reach both locally and internationally. Moreover, branding and marketing strategies, including collaborations with influencers and participation in trade expos, offer substantial opportunities for visibility and growth.

The sector must also adapt to changing consumer preferences, with a growing demand for healthier, diversified snack options, such as gluten-free or flavored papads. By tapping into these emerging trends, manufacturers can diversify their product offerings and cater to a broader market. At the same time, leveraging government schemes for financial support, including subsidies and low-interest loans, can alleviate the financial burdens many

small suppliers face, enabling them to invest in necessary infrastructure and marketing strategies.

Overall, the papad industry across India, while facing multiple challenges, holds immense potential. With the right support mechanisms, technological adoption, and strategic planning, small and medium-sized suppliers can not only navigate these barriers but thrive in an increasingly competitive global market. It is crucial for stakeholders at all levels—government, industry bodies, and suppliers themselves—to collaborate in fostering an environment conducive to sustainable growth, ensuring that the rich heritage of papad continues to be a significant part of India's food landscape.

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