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INDEX

Sr. No.	Title	Author	Subject	Page No.
1	Cost of capital: an empirical case study of hindustan unilever limited	Dr. Vinod K. Ramani	Accountancy	1-2
2	Self Revolution	Mohanapriya.P	Arts	3-4
3	Wound healing activity of Cestrum elegans	V. Subhaa, Dr. D. Sukumarb, Dr. V. Elangoc	Chemistry	5-6
4	Anti Bacterial Activity of Apigenin 7-0-(6"caffeoyl) neohesperidoside from chrysanthemum indicum	M.Jerome Rozario, Dr.A.John Merina, Dr.V.Srinivasana	Chemistry	7-10
5	Adsorption Studies of Cu (II) and Cr (VI) from metal solution using crosslinked chitosan-g-acrylonitrile copolymer	Shankar.P, Gomathi T., Vijayalakshmi.K, Sudha P.N	Chemistry	11-13
6	An Insight into Derivative Markets: Indian Perspective	Dr. C.Shobha, Dr. T. Hanumantha raya	Commerce	14-16
7	Vision and Planning	Dr. J. K Sehgal	Commerce	17-18
8	An Analytical Study of Employee's Productivity in Some Selected Nationalized Banks of India	Dr. Jyotindra M. Jani, Manish B. Raval	Commerce	19-20
9	New Products of Tourism in India	Dr. M. K. Maru	Commerce	21-22
10	Inventory Management in Sugar Mills - A Comparative Study	Promila	Commerce	23-25
11	Price -Mix Strategy of Jammu and Kashmir Co-Operatives Supply and Marketing Federation Limited in Jammu District of J&K State	Tarsem Lal	Commerce	26-28
12	Warehouse Management Information System: A New Perspective in Supply Chain Management	Dr. Vipul Chalotra	Commerce	29-30
13	A Study on Consumer Satisfaction of Aavin Milk in Salem City	Dr.A.Vinayagamoorthy, Mrs. M.Sangeetha, C.Sankar	Commerce	31-33
14	Hybrid Attribute Selection Process for Decision Tree Based Classification Algorithms	Mr. A. Jebamalai Robinson, Mrs. S. C. Punitha, Dr. P. Ranjit Jeba Thangaiah	Computer Science	34-36
15	Visualizing the validation of UML diagrams	Lavleen Kambow	Computer Science	37-38
16	Effectiveness of coconut palm insurance scheme in the coastal belts of India-A SWOT analysis	Prof. (Dr.) D. Rajasenan, Bijith George Abraham	Economics	39-41
17	An Analysis of the Efficiency of Selected Public and Private Banks in India during 2005-2011	Dr.Dinesh Kumar, Sanjeev	Economics	42-44
18	Measurement of Emotional Development of the Students	Dr. Nivedita K. Deshmukh	Education	45-46
19	A comparative study of effect of method of lecture and dramatization of Marathi teaching	Dr. Nivedita K. Deshmukh	Education	47-48
20	Peer pressure-problems and solutions	V.Vaithyanathan, Dr.P.Sivakumar	Education	49-50
21	Language Anxiety In Indian L2 Learners: Male or Female Learners - Who Scores High?	S. Gandhimathi, Dr.R.Ganesan	Education	51-52

22	Topological Characteristics of ECG Signal using Lyapunov Exponent and RBF Network	Abinash Dahal, Deepashree Devaraj, Dr. N. Pradhan	Engineering	53-55
23	Development of slicing package of solid model for cone and sphere in rapid prototyping	Dineshkumar M. Patel, Prof. P.D.Solanki	Engineering	56-58
24	Hardware modeling Simulation with COSSAP	Krunali Amrutlal Ratanpara, Devendra Soni, Shrenik Rajesh Golwelkar	Engineering	59-61
25	Coordination Of Pss And Statcom To Enhance The Power System Transient Stability	Lalit K. Patel, Kaushik M. Sangada, Sunil S. Changlani , Ankit M. Patel	Engineering	62-64
26	Cooling Performance Analysis of Heat Sink	Mr. Pritesh S. Patel, Prof. Dattatraya G. Subhedar, Prof. Kamlesh V. Chauhan	Engineering	65-67
27	Thermal Modeling and Analysis of Friction Stir Welding	Rankit Patel, Prof. Bindu Pillai	Engineering	68-70
28	Review on shrinkage defect – A case study	Mr. Ravi N. Kalotra, Mr. Gajanan Patange, Mr. J.K. Gohil	Engineering	71-75
29	Stream Function Formulation of Lid Driven Cavity	Mr. Zankhan C. Sonara, Prof. Dattatraya G. Subhedar, Mr. Kartik Patel	Engineering	76-78
30	Implementation of ABT (Availability Based Tariff) - its Treatment & Proceedings	Dilip m.Bhankhodiya, Dipak t. Vaghela	Engineering	79-82
31	Active Filters for Power Quality Improvement	Dipak t. Vaghela, Dilip m. Bhankhodiya	Engineering	83-87
32	Design and Analysis of Air Bearing using Orifice and Feed Hole Pocket	Nileshkumar T. Raval, Prof. M.Y.Patil	Engineering	88-90
33	Drip irrigation technique enhancing water and fertiliser use efficiency in cauliflower	Dr. S.S. Yadav, Dr. R.S. Meena	Engineering	91-92
34	Experimental and FEA Evaluation of Hybrid Joint Strength of Single Lap joint.	S. S. Kadam, P. A. Dixit	Engineering	93-96
35	CFD Analysis of Mixed Flow Submersible pump Impeller	Mitul G Patel, Subhedar Dattatraya, Bharat J Patel	Engineering	97-100
36	EVA: An Innovative Parameter for Shareholders' Wealth Measurement	Shri. Arvind A. Dhond	Finance	101-103
37	Profitability and consistency analysis of Textile Sector in India	Dr. K. S. Vataliya, Rajesh Jadav	Finance	104-107
38	Harmonious Relationship between Art and Music Critical vision (comparison)	Dr. Marwan Imran	Fine Arts	108-109
39	Land Use Pattern and Crop Combination Region in Satara District : A Geographical Study	Dr. Rathod S. B., Mane-Deshmukh R. S.	Geography	110-111
40	Garlic---Benefits and Uses	Dr. Sneha Harshinder Sharma	Geography	112-114
41	An Assessment of Thermal Comfort Zones in Terms of Tourists: A case study of Karveer Tehsil	Mr. Prashant Tanaji Patil, Miss. Mane madhuri maruti, Miss. Mugade Nisha Ramchandra	Geography	115-117

42	Hematological changes due to the impact of Lead nitrate on economically important estuarine fish <i>Mystus gulio</i>	Dr.S.Palani Kumar	Horticulture	118-119
43	Stress Management level in the employees of Manufacture Industries By considering key parameters with reference to Bhavnagar city	Dr. K. S. Vataliya, Adv. Ajay H. Thakkar	Human Resource	120-122
44	The Case of ABC Group-A Case on Performance Appraisal System	Shivani Sah	Human Resource Management	123-124
45	A Study On Performance Appraisal of Employees in Health Care Industry in a Private Multi-Speciality Organization	Dr. C. Swarnalatha, T.S. Prasanna	Human Resource Management	125-126
46	(Upnyas - Jansi ki Rani Laxmibai (vrundavanlal varma)	Dr. Sneh Harshinder Sharma	Literature	127-128
47	"Educational Technology for Professional Development of English Teachers: A Case Study of the College Teachers of English in Jammu Province"	Dr. Wajahat Hussain	Literature	129-130
48	The Reality of Sultana's Dream: A step towards success Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein	Riju Sharma, Ruchee Aggarwal	Literature	131-132
49	Road blocks of Match Industry in Andhra Pradesh: Certain Issues and Concerns	Anuradha Averineni	Management	133-134
50	Government's Assistance Towards the Development of Small Scale Industries in India with Special Reference to Krishnagiri District	B. Mohandhas, Dr. G. Prabakaran	Management	135-140
51	Effects of Role Stress on Employee Job Satisfaction and Turnover	Dr. T.G.Vijaya, R.Hemamalini	Management	141-144
52	"MNP – A major concern of Telecom Operators in Gujarat"	Mohsinali Momin, Dr. Deepak H. Tekwani	Management	145-147
53	A Study on Fiscal Support Provided by Vijaya Bank to Msme in Coimbatore City	Mrs. G. Murali Manokari, Mr. G. Lenin Kumar, Mrs. G. Sathiya	Management	148-150
54	Competencies for HR Professionals	GAYATHRI. M	Management	151-153
55	Cost and Strategic Management - Application, Framework and Strategies for the Growth of Sme Sector	Manisha gaur	Management	154-156
56	Development of Management Education System in India	Mr. Goudappa Malipatil	Management	157-158
57	Study on Volatility and Return of Major Indices of Indian Stock Market with Reference to Sensex And Nifty	Mr. Mukesh C .Ajmera	Management	159-160
58	A Need for an Epitome Shift in Management Education A study on Conceptual Teaching practices	Mrs. Vanishree K. Jamashetti, Mr. Sanjeev Rathod	Management	161-162
59	Personal Social Responsibility – A novel thought	Parul Jain, Dr. N.C Pahariya	Management	163-164
60	Green Marketing – A Consumer's Perspective in the Indian Scenario	Nidhi Srivastava, Preeti Pillai	Management	165-166
61	Challenges and Opportunities of Mobile Banking - An Indian Scenario	Sandhya.Ch.V.L	Management	167-169
62	A pragmatic study of civilizing amortment among The diverse countries	Mr. Vimal P. Jagad, Mr Mukesh .C Ajmera	Management	170-171
63	Celebrity Endorsement in India An Effective Tool of Sales Promotion	Piyush Shah, Dr. N C Pahariya	Management	172-176

64	A Study of Prominent Character Strengths and Their Relationship with Well Being Among Business Management Students	GarimaKamboj, DikshaKakkar	Management	177-180
65	Coffee Consumption in India: An Exploratory Study	Shri. Arvind A. Dhond	Marketing	181-183
66	Applicability of Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) in India	M. Ramakrishnan, Dr. Sudharani Ravindran	Marketing	184-186
67	Account Holders perceptions towards Self Service Technologies: a study of selected Private Sector Banks	Dr A Kumar, Prof Ankur Gangal	Marketing	187-189
68	Impact of Sales Promotion on Sales figures of Select International FMCG Brands	Dr.Sharif Memon	Marketing	190-193
69	Factors Affecting Green Product Design: Marketing Professional's Perspective	D. S. Rohini Samarasinghe	Marketing	194-196
70	The Impact of 'Ambience' and Variety on Consumer Delight: A Study on Consumer Behaviour in Ahmedabad	Dr A Kumar, Prof Vineeta Gangal	Marketing	197-200
71	Co-Relation of Social Justice with Human Rights: A Review	Dr. Monica Narang	Marketing	201-202
72	Study of Iron Status and Free Radical Activity in Plasmodium Falciparum and Plasmodium Vivax Malaria Infection	Sangita M. Patil, Ramchandra K. Padalkar	Medical Sciences	203-205
73	GOAL SETTING TENDENCIES, COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND WORK MOTIVATION VIS-À-VIS AGE DIFFERENCE – A STUDY ON PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATION	Dr. Swaha Bhattacharya, Dr. Monimala Mukherjee	Psychology	206-208
74	Role of NGOs in Social Mobilization in the context of SGSY	Dr.Veershetty C. Tadalapur	Sociology	209-211
75	Age at menarche and its secular trend in rural and urban girls of bathinda district	Jyoti Sharma, Dr. Ajita	Sports Science	212-213
76	Effect Of Resin Finishing On Stiffness And Drape Of Khadi Fabric	Dr. Suman pant, Ms. Noopur Sonee	Textiles	214-216



Road blocks of Match Industry in Andhra Pradesh: Certain Issues and Concerns

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ABSTRACT

This paper made an earnest attempt to present the various maladies that re encountered by the match industry in Andhra Pradesh. It also emphasizes the manufacturing process of handmade safety match units in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. The cottage match enterprises in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh provide employment to thousands of unemployed youth directly or indirectly. These cottage match units generate tremendous gainful employment especially to women in rural and urban areas. This activity helps better the economic conditions of the poor people in the region. However, in recent years, these cottage match units are confronting multifarious problems in the areas of production, finance and in marketing. It is in order to dig out the problems of the match industry in the region and to advise suitable remedial measures to overcome the problems and to put the are recommended in this paper which when implemented in the true spirit as and when necessary, the match units would be placed on more rational, scientific, modern and result oriented lines.

Keywords : Match Industry, Economic Conditions, Organized Sector

INTRODUCTION

The age old match industry in India is belongs to the cottage sector. It is an industry which is about 70 years old in the country. A majority (70%) of the match manufacturing activity is accounted for by the match manufacturing cottage sector. The industry is highly labor oriented. Female workers play a predominant role in the match industry. Since the industry belongs to the cottage sector, it can be conveniently started with a modest capital.

Match Industry – A Backdrop

The origin of the safety match industry in India goes back to the beginning of this century. Around 1910 immigrant Japanese families who settled in Calcutta began making matches with simple hand – and power – operated machines. Local people soon learned the necessary skills and a number of small match factories sprang up in and around Calcutta. These small match factories could not meet the total requirements of the country however, and India began to import matches from Sweden and Japan. During the First World War, when Swedish matches could not be imported, the Indian market was fed mainly by imported matches from Japan and by the locally made ones which followed the Japanese pattern introduced in Calcutta. After the war, factories in Calcutta were unable to compete with imports, and handmade match production shifted to Southern India, especially in the Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu State. This shift was due to the pioneering efforts of P. Iya Nadar and A Shanmuga Nadar who went to Calcutta to learn the process from Purna Chandra Ray, a local businessman, who had learned the trade in Germany. The Nadars set up a number of manual match production units in the extremely poor regions of Tamil Nadu, where a combination of the dry climate, cheap labour and availability of raw materials from nearby Kerala created the ideal conditions for match production. The first sulphur match that would burn when brought into contact with a rough surface was produced in South India in 1923, and the first safety match, in the form we know today, in 1932. Mechanization came to the Indian match industry in 1924 when Messrs. Wimco Ltd started operations in 1924 as a unit of the multinational Swedish Match Company. Wimco is still the only representative of the large scare sector in wooden match manufacturing and is the only fully mechanized match factory in the country.

Impact of Govt. Policies

As a result of the policy measures described above the Indian match industry boomed. Between 1926 – 28 and 1949 the number of factories increased from 27 to 192. Since that time, there has been a continuous expansion of the hand – made sector whose share of the market has shot up from 22% in 1949 – 50 to 50% in 1969 – 70 and now constitutes 82%. With Wimco's production level frozen and growing population fueling an increase in demand estimated at 6% per annum, the handmade sector will clearly increase even further in the future. The cottage sector under the coordination of the Khadi Village & Industries Commission (KVIC) has been selected to be major growth sector in the future.

The Government is aware that the policy of differential excise levies acts as a positive disincentive for small units to expand their production and even encourages some bigger units to go in for deliberate fragmentation. No satisfactory solution which would strike a balance between the legitimate interests of the small sector and prevention of abuse of official policy has been developed. There are a number of match producers who have fragmented their units to get the benefit of concessions, but at the same time there is growing trend towards centralized ownership of many smaller units. In the two major Southern match centers, Shivakasi and Kovilpatti, 18 families known as the "Match Kings of India," now control almost 67% of the total match production in the country. Another result of government policies has been to severely limit the activities of Wimco in the mechanized sector. The increase in excise duties initially proposed in 1979 represented seven times the Company's profits in 1977.

Match Industry in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh

The Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh has been chosen as a sample unit for the study. As per the information available at District Industries Centre (DIC) Chittoor and according to the directory of small industries, Chittoor, the total number of match making units in the district was only 30. As the total number was very small, a census sampling method was followed and all the industrial units in the district were surveyed. The schedule designed for the collection of data from match industrialists widely covered the objectives. The proprietor of the match industry was taken as the principal respondent for the purpose of the study of each unit. The survey was con-

fined to the match industries of Chittoor district only.

The multifarious maladies that are encountered by the match units in the study area are highlighted here as under.

1) Soft Wood

The first and foremost problem encountered by the match industry in the district is the inadequate availability of softwood. A majority of the respondents, 83.33 percent, have reported that the required soft wood for preparation of matches was either not available or inadequate. The mechanized sector has cornered about 85% of softwood from the country's forests and they are in a near monopoly position. The mechanized units can procure this at a more moderate price than the non – mechanized units.

2) Match Paper and Match Wax

Another major problem confronted by the match industry in the study area is non – availability of match paper and match wax. The well equipped, affluent match units are manufacturing these materials themselves by establishing separate units. But the non – mechanized units have to purchase them at exorbitant prices. Majority of the respondents, 73.3 percent, covered in this study reported that it has become inevitable on their part to purchase these materials by paying the highest percentage of central excise duty which enhanced their manufacturing cost. Even though these people bought these materials at exorbitant prices, the materials were often of sub – standard quality.

3) Timely Finance

Much finance may be available. But it may not be available when the need arises. Regarding the problems of finance, a majority of the respondents, 76.66 percent, expressed that the necessary working capital was either not available on time or was inadequate. Owing to the hard and fast rules of banks with regard to security, they are unable to get finance from the banks and it has become a serious drawback for the match industries.

4) Preparatory Chemicals and Glue

It is reported that the procurement of preparatory chemicals and glue has become an arduous task for these match units. With regard to the supply of preparatory chemicals and glue, the intermediaries are playing a predominant role. About 66.6 percent of the respondents reported their dissatisfaction with the non – availability of preparatory chemicals and glue and the exorbitant prices charged by them.

5) Lack of Strategic Marketing

The study revealed that the marketing of match products has become a big burden for them. As these units are running with the financial assistance of borrowed funds, it became

imperative on their part to improve their marketing strategies. Marketing for them has a wider connotation. It does not only involve the disposal of final products. Strategic marketing also involves intensive research in the tastes of the public, demand and the factors influencing the changes in demand. But these poor match manufacturers are not keeping in view the changes and tastes of consumers.

6) Remedial Measures

We have discussed a plethora of maladies that are encountered by the match industrial units in the study area. A few remedial measures are given below.

The implementation of these suggestions, it is hoped, will improve the working conditions of the match units and match industrialists can overcome the cited maladies very easily.

- 1) The state industrial infrastructure corporation may procure the match paper and match wax from the producers at rational prices, and distribute the same to the match industrialists at subsidized prices in optimum quantity.
- 2) The state Industrial Development Corporation may purchase softwood from the concerned forest authorities and hand it over to the civil supplies department to distribute among the match units in sufficient quantities at concessional prices.
- 3) The bank managers should be motivated to lend to the needy units on the basis of the schemes launched and give the applicants the full benefits of the exemptions allowed by the Reserve Bank of India regarding security, subsidy, margin money, guarantee etc.
- 4) In order to increase the supply of preparatory glue and chemicals like chlorate and potash the District Industries Centre (DIC) should procure them from the manufacturers at controlled rates and supply them to the match units at reasonable prices.
- 5) The present era is the age of advertisement and publicity. These poor match manufacturers cannot pay higher costs of advertisements for the media. In order to create a regular demand for the products of these poor match manufacturers, the Doordarshan may arrange for commercial advertising at concessional rates. In addition, the Government may provide a subsidy to these industrialists to meet a certain portion of the advertising costs.

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