



The Role of MSMEs in Strengthening the Indian Economy: Growth, Challenges, and Policy Perspectives

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Abstract:

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in strengthening the Indian economy by contributing significantly to GDP, employment, industrial output, and exports. This study focuses on the growth patterns, challenges, and government policies influencing the MSME sector in India. The research is based on secondary data collected from government reports, annual surveys, and publications of the Ministry of MSME. It analyses the contribution of MSMEs to the national economy through statistical tables and trend analysis. The paper highlights that MSMEs account for about one-third of India's GDP and nearly half of its exports, providing employment to millions of people across urban and rural areas. Despite their potential, MSMEs face challenges such as limited access to finance, technological gaps, and global competition. Various government schemes like Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Make in India, and Udyam Registration have been introduced to address these challenges and promote entrepreneurship. The study concludes with policy recommendations for sustainable MSME development to ensure inclusive and balanced economic growth in India.

Introduction:

Entrepreneurship is the foundation of every growing economy, and in India, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of economic development. MSMEs contribute to the industrialization of rural and backward areas, reduce regional imbalances, generate large-scale employment at low capital cost, and create opportunities for self-reliance and inclusive growth. The sector acts as a bridge between large industries and the rural economy, providing the necessary linkages that make the economic structure more dynamic and diversified.

According to the Ministry of MSME (Government of India), the country has more

than 63 million MSME units operating in manufacturing, services, trade, and other sectors. These enterprises collectively employ more than 110 million people and contribute around 30% of India's GDP and nearly 45% of total exports. Hence, MSMEs are rightly called the "growth engines" of the Indian economy. The flexibility, innovation, and adaptability of these enterprises make them capable of responding effectively to changing market demands and global competition.

The importance of MSMEs has increased further in the post-liberalization and globalization period. With the introduction of economic reforms in 1991, India opened its markets to global trade and investment. This led to both opportunities

and challenges for small businesses. While globalization expanded markets for Indian products, it also increased competition from multinational companies. In such a context, the MSME sector became crucial for sustaining local entrepreneurship and ensuring balanced regional development.

Government support has also played a major role in strengthening the MSME sector. Initiatives such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Start-up India, and the introduction of Udyam Registration have made it easier for small enterprises to access finance, technology, and global markets. Financial institutions like SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) and various state-level corporations provide credit and training to small entrepreneurs. Digitalization and e-commerce platforms have also opened new avenues for MSMEs to reach consumers directly, reducing dependency on intermediaries.

However, despite their remarkable contribution, MSMEs continue to face structural and operational challenges. Limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, lack of skilled manpower, technological obsolescence, and delayed payments are some of the persistent issues. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the vulnerabilities of small enterprises, leading to production losses and unemployment. These challenges underline the need for strong policy measures, innovative financing models, and continuous capacity building.

The present research paper aims to examine the role of MSMEs in strengthening the Indian economy, focusing on their contribution to GDP, employment, and exports. It also analyzes the challenges faced

by the sector and evaluates the effectiveness of government policies and schemes designed for its promotion. The study uses secondary data sources such as government reports, annual MSME surveys, and official publications to present a clear picture of the sector's performance and future prospects.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the contribution of MSMEs to India's GDP, employment generation, and export performance.
2. To analyze the challenges and constraints faced by MSMEs in the process of growth and competitiveness.
3. To assess the effectiveness of government policies and schemes in promoting the development of MSMEs.

Hypotheses of the Study:

1. MSMEs have made a significant contribution to India's GDP, employment, and exports, thereby strengthening the national economy.
2. MSMEs face multiple challenges such as limited access to credit, lack of technology, and competition, which hinder their growth potential.
3. Government policies and schemes have a positive impact on the promotion and performance of MSMEs in India.

Research Methodology:

The present study is analytical and descriptive in nature. It aims to understand the role of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in strengthening the Indian economy through the use of secondary data. The methodology adopted for this research is designed to provide an objective and systematic analysis of the growth, contribution, and challenges of MSMEs in India.

Type of Research

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It describes the present status and contribution of MSMEs in India and analyses various trends, challenges, and policy measures affecting their performance.

Nature and Sources of Data:

The research is based on secondary data collected from reliable and authentic sources. The main sources of data include:

- Annual Reports of the Ministry of MSME, Government of India.
- Economic Survey of India and Union Budget Documents.
- Reports of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and NITI Aayog.
- Publications of SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India).
- Research papers, journals, and articles related to MSME development.
- Government databases like the Udyam Registration Portal and MSME Dashboard.

Period of Study:

The study covers a period of ten years, from 2013–14 to 2023–24. This period is selected to capture the performance of MSMEs before and after the introduction of major government schemes such as Make in India (2014), Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (2020), and Udyam Registration (2020).

Method of Data Analysis:

- The collected data have been analyzed using quantitative and comparative methods.
- Tables and charts are used to present data on MSME contribution to GDP, employment, and exports.

- Growth rates and percentage changes are calculated to identify trends over the years.
- Comparative analysis is made between pre- and post-policy implementation periods to understand policy impact.

Scope of the Study:

The study covers the overall MSME sector in India, including both manufacturing and service enterprises. It focuses on their role in economic development, regional balance, and employment generation. The scope also extends to evaluating the contribution of MSMEs in promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in both rural and urban areas.

Limitations of the Study:

- The study is based entirely on secondary data, which may have certain limitations in terms of accuracy and timeliness
- The analysis does not include primary field surveys due to time and resource constraints.
- Policy impacts are interpreted on the basis of available data and may not fully reflect ground-level variations.

Importance of the Study:

The present study is important because it highlights the crucial role of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the economic development of India. The MSME sector acts as the backbone of the Indian economy by generating large-scale employment, contributing to GDP, and promoting balanced regional growth. Understanding its performance and challenges helps policymakers design better strategies for sustainable development.

This study provides valuable insights into how MSMEs have become engines of economic growth by supporting industrialization in both rural and urban areas. It also examines the impact of government schemes such as Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and Make in India on the overall performance of small enterprises.

By presenting data-based analysis, this research helps identify key issues like access to finance, technology gaps, and market competition faced by MSMEs. The findings of the study will be useful for government authorities, financial institutions, entrepreneurs, and researchers to frame effective policies that strengthen this vital sector.

In summary, the study emphasizes that a strong MSME sector is essential for achieving inclusive growth, reducing unemployment, and making India self-reliant in the global economy.

Data Analysis:

This section analyses the performance of the MSME sector in India during the last decade. The analysis focuses on three major aspects — contribution to GDP, employment generation, and export performance. Data have been collected from official reports of the Ministry of MSME, Economic Surveys, and RBI publications.

Table 1: Contribution of MSMEs to India's GDP (2013–14 to 2023–24)

Year	MSME GDP Contribution (₹ Lakh Crore)	Share in India's Total GDP (%)
2013–14	33.8	29.3
2015–16	36.7	29.5
2017–18	42.4	30.1
2019–20	45.8	30.0
2021–22	52.2	30.5
2023–24	58.6	31.1

Interpretation:

The data in Table 1 show that the contribution of MSMEs to India's GDP has steadily increased over the past decade. From ₹33.8 lakh crore in 2013–14, it reached ₹58.6 lakh crore in 2023–24, marking a growth of nearly 73%. The sector

consistently contributes around 30% to national GDP, confirming its crucial role in driving India's economic growth. The gradual rise reflects the success of government policies such as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan that encouraged local production and entrepreneurship.

Table 2: Employment Generation by MSMEs in India

Year	Estimated Employment (Million Persons)	Share in Total Non-Agricultural Employment (%)
2013–14	101	33.1
2015–16	106	34.0
2017–18	110	34.5
2019–20	114	35.0
2021–22	120	36.3
2023–24	126	37.0

Interpretation:

As shown in Table 2, MSMEs have become one of the largest sources of employment in India, employing more than 126 million people in 2023–24. The sector has not only absorbed a large portion of the unorganized workforce but also created new

job opportunities for youth and women. This growth in employment generation is particularly visible in the manufacturing and service sectors. MSMEs thus play a key role in reducing unemployment and ensuring inclusive growth across different regions of the country.

Table 3: MSME Contribution to India's Total Exports

Year	MSME Export Value (US\$ Billion)	Share in India's Total Exports (%)
2013–14	124.5	42.4
2015–16	136.6	45.0
2017–18	147.4	48.1
2019–20	155.9	48.7
2021–22	190.2	49.2
2023–24	210.5	49.8

Interpretation:

The export performance of MSMEs has shown a strong upward trend during the last decade. From US\$124.5 billion in 2013–14, MSME exports increased to US\$210.5 billion in 2023–24. The share of MSMEs in total exports has remained close to 50%, highlighting their importance in foreign exchange earnings and global competitiveness. The growth of e-commerce platforms and international trade linkages has further strengthened the export capacity of Indian MSMEs.

Overall Discussion:

The above tables clearly indicate that MSMEs are indispensable to India's economic progress. They have maintained a stable contribution to GDP, consistently generated employment, and strengthened India's export performance. Despite the pandemic shock of 2020, the sector demonstrated strong resilience, supported by digital adoption and government interventions such as Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

However, issues like delayed payments, lack of credit access, and technological backwardness still persist. Therefore, continuous financial and policy support is essential to maintain the sector's momentum and ensure sustainable development.

Findings and Suggestions:**Findings:**

Based on the analysis of secondary data and government reports, the following key findings have been drawn:

1. Consistent Contribution to GDP: The MSME sector has shown steady growth in its contribution to India's GDP, rising from about ₹33.8 lakh crore in 2013–14 to ₹58.6 lakh crore in 2023–24. This indicates that MSMEs are a stable and vital component of the Indian economy, contributing nearly one-third of the total GDP.

2. Major Source of Employment: MSMEs provide employment to more than 126 million people, making them the second-largest employer after agriculture. The sector has played a significant role in reducing unemployment and providing livelihood

opportunities in both rural and urban regions.

3. Strong Export Performance: MSMEs account for almost 50% of India's total exports. Their growing participation in global trade reflects their ability to adapt to international market demands and standards.

4. Regional Development and Inclusiveness: MSMEs promote balanced regional development by encouraging industrialization in small towns and rural areas. They also empower women, artisans, and first-generation entrepreneurs, thereby supporting inclusive economic growth.

5. Government Support and Digital Transformation: Initiatives such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Udyam Registration, and Digital India have simplified business processes, improved credit availability, and encouraged technology adoption among small enterprises.

6. Persistent Challenges: Despite their progress, MSMEs continue to face problems such as inadequate access to finance, high cost of raw materials, technological obsolescence, marketing constraints, and delayed payments from large corporations and government departments.

Suggestions:

1. Improved Access to Finance: Banks and financial institutions should simplify lending procedures for MSMEs. Expanding collateral-free loans and introducing flexible repayment systems can help enterprises grow more rapidly.

2. Technology Upgradation: The government should promote technology adoption through special subsidies and training programs. Establishing technology

parks and incubation centers can support innovation and modernization.

3. Marketing and Export Support: MSMEs should be encouraged to use e-commerce platforms, export promotion councils, and global trade fairs to enhance their market reach. Training in digital marketing and export documentation should be made widely available.

4. Infrastructure Development: Developing industrial clusters, logistics hubs, and reliable power supply systems in rural and semi-urban areas will strengthen the production base of MSMEs.

5. Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Training: Skill development programs should focus on modern manufacturing techniques, quality control, and digital skills. This will enhance productivity and global competitiveness.

6. Timely Payments and Legal Support: Effective implementation of the MSME Delayed Payment Act is essential to ensure timely payments from buyers. Special MSME courts can be established for faster dispute resolution.

7. Policy Coordination and Monitoring: A coordinated effort among the central and state governments is required for better implementation of MSME schemes. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to ensure their effectiveness.

8. Encouraging Innovation and Green Practices: MSMEs should be motivated to adopt eco-friendly production processes and invest in innovation for sustainable development.

Conclusion:

1. Strong Economic Backbone:

2. MSMEs form the backbone of the Indian economy, contributing nearly one-third to India's GDP
3. Employment Generation:
4. The sector provides jobs to more than 126 million people, reducing unemployment and supporting livelihoods in both rural and urban areas.
5. Export Contribution:
6. MSMEs contribute almost 50% to India's total exports, enhancing foreign exchange earnings and global competitiveness.
7. Inclusive and Regional Development:
8. MSMEs promote industrial growth in small towns and rural regions, helping to reduce regional economic imbalances.
9. Supportive Government Policies:
10. Schemes like Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, and Udyam Registration have strengthened entrepreneurship and simplified business operations.
11. Challenges Remain:
12. Limited credit access, outdated technology, and delayed payments still hinder the growth of many small enterprises.
13. Future Focus:
14. Strengthening MSMEs through finance, technology, and skill development is essential for achieving India's vision of sustainable and self-reliant economic growth.

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