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## Lend a Hand to the Handlooms

Dr. Rajendra Mohan Gonela\*, Krishnaveni.S\*\*, Dr. Sudhir Ravindran\*\*\*

*Geographical Indication is a unique class of Intellectual property which has been accorded a distinct status by the International Intellectual Property regime. The reason behind such a specialized protection is that they are traditional products, produced by rural communities over generations that have gained a reputation in the markets for their specific qualities. The indicators contribute to protect the brand names of valuable products, maintain and improve standards through a common rule and can be seen as an instrument to fight against fake and imitation goods. GI can constitute as a worthwhile marketing tool for producers of such goods. India has a rich cultural heritage and is home to many varieties of handloom from different states, which has resulted in a precious wealth which forms basis for innovation. Each state produces handlooms which have unique material and designs. They are a result of knowledge which has been passed on to them from generation to generation specific to the locality. This article analysis the problems which plague the Handloom industry suggests how proper use of GI as a tool can help revive and ensure survival of the industry.*

### Introduction

Handloom forms an important part of generational legacy in India and exemplifies the richness, which has been kept alive by skilled weavers engaged in the age-old tradition of weaving. Currently the Handloom industry is being plagued by multi faceted problems. Handloom is the cultural heritage of our country and hence it is imperative to protect and promote the sector. Intellectual Property Rights can provide a solution for recognition of handloom

goods and to revolutionalise the handloom industry. Improved recognition by Intellectual Property protection could lead to increased usage of handloom goods.

### Historical perspective of Handloom

The origin of the art of weaving in India is shrouded in the mists of antiquity<sup>1</sup>. Fragments of woven cotton, bone needles and spindles have been discovered at Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa, the ancient seats of the Indus Valley Civilization<sup>2</sup>. Even the RigVeda (1500 - 1000 B.C) refers

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1 Handloom a rich Heritage of India -Needs Protection and Promotion by Monika S.Garg, IAS, Manoj Jain, B.B. Paul, S. Ulaganathan available at [http://handlooms.nic.in/hl\\_heritage\\_india.pdf](http://handlooms.nic.in/hl_heritage_india.pdf)

2 Growth &Prospects of HandloomSector in India By Dr. Soundrapandian found in <http://www.nabard.org/fileupload/DataBank/OccasionalPapers/OC%2022.pdf>.

to golden woven fabric hiranyadrapi. Epic literature (Mahabharata and Ramayan (1000-600 B.C.)) mentions pearl-fringed fabric manichira<sup>3</sup>. Hazrat Khwaja Bahudin Nakshaband Bhokhari Rahamtulla is credited with being the creator of the Nakshband (Design Template for weaving) that completely revolutionized the art of weaving<sup>4</sup>. The foundations of the Indian textile trade with other countries is also said to have begun as early as the second century B.C. A hoard of block-printed and resin-dyed fabrics, mainly of Gujarati origin, found in the tombs of Fostat, Egypt, are the proof of large scale export of Indian cotton textiles in medieval times<sup>5</sup>. The above facts are testimony that the threads of handloom has its roots in prehistoric times in history. Understanding the way in which handloom sector has kept pace with the changing times is not just a matter of academic curiosity but it is also indispensable to identify and understand the varied facets of it<sup>6</sup>.

#### Significance of the Handloom Sector

Handloom Sector is decentralized, unorganized and rural based, which plays an important role in the country's economy. It is one of the largest economic activities, after agriculture. As per the Handloom Census of 2009-10, there are 23.77 lakh handlooms, employing 43.31 lakh handloom weavers and allied

workers<sup>7</sup>. The Handloom Sector supports a large section of weavers and allied workers who belong to weaker sections. The contribution of Handloom Sector to the textile production, employment and export earnings is very significant<sup>8</sup>.

The strength of handloom lies in innovative designs, which cannot be replicated by the power looms. The traditional handloom weaving in India has been kept alive by generations of traditional skilled weavers. It is because of such inimitable designs and distinct weaving techniques that the handloom sector has managed to withstand the onslaught of the powerloom and the mill sector in the country. Some of the excellent work of arts transformed on fabrics by the adept weavers are Kanchivaram of Tamil Nadu, Baluchari and Jamdani of West Bengal, Paithani of Maharashtra, Chanderi and Meheswari of Madhya Pradesh, Muga of Assam, Patola of Gujarat, Kani and Shehtoosh of Kashmir, Tie & Dye Vichitrapuri and Bomkai of Orissa, Bandhini of Rajasthan, Brocades of Varanasi, Balrampuram of Kerala, Pochampally of Andhra Pradesh etc. Besides, handloom has the ability to make wide range of customized products in lesser quantity by frequently changing the designs, colours and textures.<sup>9</sup> Handlooms do not cause noise, air or

3 Handicrafts – Continuity and Change Chapter 24.2. –History of textiles in India Found in <http://www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/36693/1/unit%2024.pdf>

4 History of handloom- Found in <http://www.tantuvi.com/history.htm>

5 Indian Textile – History- Found in <http://handicraft.indiamart.com/history/indiantextiles.html>

6 Handloom, A Rich Heritage of India – Needs Protection and Promotion Monika S.Garg, IAS Manoj Jain, B.B. Paul, S. Ulaganathan Dated - 16.07.2012 Found in [http://handlooms.nic.in/hl\\_heritage\\_india.pdf](http://handlooms.nic.in/hl_heritage_india.pdf).

7 Handloom, A Rich Heritage of India Needs Protection and Promotion Monika S.Garg, IAS Manoj Jain, B.B. Paul, S. Ulaganathan Dated - 16.7.2012. Available at [http://handlooms.nic.in/hl\\_heritage\\_india.pdf](http://handlooms.nic.in/hl_heritage_india.pdf)

8 Report on Growth and prospects of the Handloom Industry. Study Commission by the Planning Commission By Seemanthini, Nirnajana . Found in [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/sereport/ser/stdy\\_hndloom.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/sereport/ser/stdy_hndloom.pdf) Last visited on 04.01.2013

9 <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/37/3642/plotting-and-studying-the-problems-faced1.aspxfhbcb>

water pollution. They do not consume power, a scarcity these days, especially in rural areas where most of the handlooms are located. Further, handlooms mainly use natural fibres like cotton, wool, silk, jute, etc. and thereby making handloom products eco-friendly.

Realizing the significance of Handlooms the Government passed "The Handlooms<sup>10</sup> (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985". It was enacted with a view to protect the livelihood of millions of handloom weavers and rich cultural heritage of Indian Handloom industry from encroachment of the powerloom and Mill Sector<sup>11</sup>. To ensure this an enforcement machinery was set up. The primary function of the enforcement machinery is inspection of powerlooms to find out whether there is any violation of the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985 by producing articles reserved for handloom sector. The Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms (Enforcement Wing) takes legal actions against the violations and thereby safeguards the interests of handloom weavers

#### Handloom and Geographical Indications

Each region in India is known for a specific handloom product that is unique in design and style. What is woven is in fact inseparable from where and how it is woven. In other words this sector is a

*In case of motion marks, the marks are represented by a moving image or clip which identifies a particular source or origin with reference to a product of service*

goldmine of Geographical indication.<sup>12</sup> Geographical Indication (GI) is one of the six Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). GI impart information on the source of the goods bearing them and other attributes such as product quality or characteristics<sup>13</sup>. The quality of the product as indicated by the indication of Geographical origin is related to specific natural and human factor that is peculiar to a locality or region. The important characteristics of Geographical Indications include collective monopoly (held collectively by producers), remains with the public (public domain) non transferability (cannot be produced by others) and thus promote sustainable livelihood, non excludability (individuals from the region cannot be easily excluded from enjoying the benefits), non rivalry (the enjoyment of GI by one does not diminish the same from another) and perpetuity

10 Handloom has been defined as follows: As per the Section 2(b) of The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for, Protection) Act, 1985, "Handloom" means any loom, other than powerloom.

b) As per the Bureau of Indian Standards, "A hand operated machine for producing cloth by weaving. In some instances, the shedding is performed by foot operation."

11 The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Protection) Act, 1985, [http://handlooms.nic.in/hl\\_act\\_reservation.htm](http://handlooms.nic.in/hl_act_reservation.htm)

12 A GI informs consumers that a product comes from a certain place and has special qualities due to the place of origin. It may be used by all producers or traders whose products originate from that place and which share typical characteristics

13 IPR and the Handloom Sector. Challenges in the implementation of GI by Soumya Vinayan, JIPR Vol. 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2012 Pg 55 available at [http://nopr.niscair.res.in/bitstream/123456789/13411/1/JIPR%2017\(1\)%2055-63.pdf](http://nopr.niscair.res.in/bitstream/123456789/13411/1/JIPR%2017(1)%2055-63.pdf)

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(as long as the goods-place-quality link is maintained) the GI is of great value.<sup>14</sup>

### The Need for GI in the Handloom Industry

One of the reasons the GI Act came into effect in 2003 was the serious threat that fake handicrafts and handlooms posed to the livelihood of thousands of artisans. Mass-produced fake Pashmina shawls, Kashmiri carpets were flooding the Indian market from both within and outside the country. Imitation products were also being sold abroad. This severely impacted the artisans. Looms were deserted because of acute poverty and diminishing demand and many artisans committed suicide. By helping producers differentiate their products from others in the market and stamping them "original," GI seeks to increase producer's income, prevent misappropriation of products, protect traditional knowledge and enhance rural development. The principal statute governing GI in India is the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, and it was brought into force on 15 September 2003. This is a *sui generis* legislation intended to give better protection to GIs of India. The registration is done by the Geographical Indications Registry at Chennai.<sup>15</sup> The total number of GI products registered in the country now stands at 220.<sup>16</sup>

### Looming Disaster

India occupies a prominent place in the world as far as number of handlooms and the varieties of traditional handloom products are concerned. India produces 85 per cent of the handlooms of the world, producing variety of products using all

kinds of fibers and yarns of varying counts to produce the widest range of products. The other countries having handlooms include Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Norway, West Indies, Indonesia etc. which produce the handloom products in a very limited quantity mainly for their internal consumption. India's export of handloom products increased from US\$ 185.9 million in 2010-11 (April-October) to US\$ 324.1 million in 2011-12 (April-October), registering a growth of 74 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Though statistics show that India has been exporting handloom goods worth millions, the pathetic plight of the weavers render a totally different story. Their handspun silks and cottons are sold for thousands and sometimes hundreds of thousands of rupees and top names endorse their products. But the humble hands that weave classy, elegant fabrics that the world admires are living in penury. The centuries-old art behind them is dying a slow death because weavers are unable to make both ends meet. The number of India's handloom weavers is on the decline as low remuneration and rising costs are making traditional worker look to other trades. The Government has woken up to their problems. With a sudden spurt in inflation and a sea change in standards of living, it is impossible to sustain handloom weavers even with Government subsidies and various welfare Schemes.<sup>18</sup>

At present, in the whole of Textile industry, the Handlooms-cottage sector has to co-exist with other two sectors, namely unorganized power loom sector

14 Handloom- available at <http://www.ibef.org/exports/handloom.aspx>

15 Geographical Indications in Indian Handloom Sector <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/20/1985/geographical-indications-in-indian-handloom-sector1.asp>

16 Available at <http://ipindia.nic.in/girindia/>

17 Handloom Industry in India Available a <http://www.ibef.org/exports/handloom-industry-india.aspx>

18 Plotting and Studying the Problems Faced by the Handloom Industry Using Ishikawa Diagram By : R.G. Panneerselvam & Dr. L.Rathakrishnan available at <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/37/3642/plotting-and-studying-the-problems-faced1.asp>

and organized mill sector. If we look at it globally, due to the huge competition of these two sectors, many developed countries gave up the handloom industry and there are no handlooms exist at present in many of the countries. In India to, number of handlooms in different clusters is decreasing day by day. In the last fifteen years it has come down to 43.32 lakhs from 65.5 lakhs Handloom workers engaged in this sector.<sup>19</sup>

As the handloom industry occupies an important place due to the economic importance, it has been realized that India cannot ignore this industry as other countries did. On the other hand, India has to pay much more attention to safe guard this industry. The Central Government has introduced numerous Schemes to revive the industry along with registering important GI goods in the country. To understand the Indian scenario better we shall choose Andhra Pradesh as a sample as it is one of the proactive states in the field of GI and is the only one to have an IPR facilitation cell housed in the A P Technology Development and Promotion Centre (APTDC). Besides, handloom products like Pochampally Ikat, Gadwal, Narayanpet, Mangalgiri, Venkatagiri, Siddipet Sarees, Andhra Pradesh has many more products under GI protection — Kondapally Toys, Silver Filigree, Nimmalakunta Leather Puppetry and the Tirupati Laddu, among others.<sup>20</sup>

### A Case study of Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh is home to 1.77 lakh households involved in weaving and allied activities, according to the 2009-10 handloom census report. They constitute a significant 12 per cent of about 15 lakh households involved in commercial handloom work across the country.<sup>21</sup> A demographic profile of families working in the handloom sector in the State is indicative of the deep crisis in their lives. About 88 per cent of these households in Andhra Pradesh have below poverty line (BPL) cards; 42 per cent of workers have never attended school; and the State records the highest level of indebtedness among handloom households with 47 per cent or 0.8 lakh households in the red.<sup>22</sup>

Such exploitation, coupled with disastrous government policies favouring mills and powerlooms has pushed weavers into conditions of destitution, malnutrition and starvation. Spurts in yarn prices unmatched by an increase in product prices lead to wage cuts which are often the last straw. Crushed under mounting debts, some weavers take their own lives.

### Use of Handloom cloth in Temples- Scope for promoting Handloom and GI

In this moment of crisis the Central Government has been taking various steps to safe guard the interest of Handloom weavers. The Integrated

19 Found in <http://post.jagran.com/Is-Indian-handloom-industry-dying-a-slow-death-1323857051>. last visited on 03.01.2013

20 GI Protection. Gain for some, pain for others- Available at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/gi-protection-gain-for-some-pain-for-others-109102100011\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/gi-protection-gain-for-some-pain-for-others-109102100011_1.html)

21 AP handloom weavers are in a crisis brought on by policy blindness and emphasis on powerlooms by Neeta deshpande. Available at <http://realindianews.blogspot.in/2012/02/livelihood-issues-looming-disaster.html>

22 Andhra Pradesh Handlooms Found in <http://www.bharatonline.com/andhra-pradesh/art-crafts/handlooms.html> Last visited on 04.01.2013

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Handloom Development Scheme was introduced which held within itself Cluster Development programmes, Marketing Incentives, Training for Officials etc, Institutional credit for Handloom sector was introduced. Mill gate Price Scheme enabled agencies to obtain yarn at fair prices. All these Schemes and efforts will go down the drain if the usage and consumption of handloom goods does not increase. If the Government issues a direction that all Government sectors were to use only handloom goods for their usage, the demand for handloom goods would increase. A suggestion to this effect was made by the Union Minister for Textiles<sup>23</sup> encouraging utilization of handloom goods in temples. If such a direction is issued it will create a great bearing on production of handloom cloth. If implemented by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and other temples in AP and they decide to procure only handmade cloth for use in Pooja rituals, it would augur well for Geographical Indications (GI) recognised handloom cloth which is aplenty in AP, as well as in the country. There are lakhs of temples in the country, small and big. There are estimated to be about 37000 temples in AP alone.

Let's take a look at the larger picture in AP. Out of the above temples, there are about 1300 temples which have an annual income of more than Rs 5 lakhs each. The total income estimated from these temples is around Rs300 crores, excluding that of TTD. The annual income of TTD alone is around Rs1700 crores in 2011.<sup>24</sup> There is no record of the quantity of cloth these temples (all put together) are estimated to use in the form of saris, dhotis and other cloth in the rituals involved in poojas and also

during blessing ceremony to VIPs during their visits to the temples. However a very rough and modest estimate of 1% usage out of the temples' total income towards cloth would workout to around Rs 20 crores in AP alone. At the national level a demand of Rs200 crores or more for the cloth would be an understatement and it would revolutionize the Handloomsector.<sup>25</sup> By even a very modest estimate, the quantum of handloom cloth required by the major temples alone runs into lakhs of metres. The Handloom & Textiles Department would do well to consult and convince the TTD & Endowment Department and assess the requirement of various types of cloth, enter into an MOU/Agreement with them to supply the cloth. Later they need to procure yarn, identify good working weaver societies and entrust weaving work to them. Since the demand is likely to be high, weavers living in neighbouring villages may also be inducted\affiliated and given work. The Government of AP should encourage such innovation by putting in place appropriate support mechanisms, such as Funds, decentralised procurement processes, etc. They may also access funds from Government of India taking cue from the statement of Minister, Textiles, GOI (24<sup>th</sup> October, 2011, Deccan Chronicle) that the budgetary allocation for the handloom sector will be given top priority in the next annual Union budget.

In this context, the Government of India has enormous opportunities in promoting Geographical Indications(GI) recognised handloom cloth to give a flip to such cloth production. There are number of GI registered brands producing large quantities of handloom cloth in the country. Some well known names are Pochampally Ikat (AP),

23 Deccan Chronicle 24, 2011

24 Andhra Pradesh State temples grow richer -found in <http://telugunewsroom.com/andhrapradesh-state-temples-grow-richer>

25 Found in [www.nabard.org/DataBank/OccasionalPapers/OC%2011.pdf](http://www.nabard.org/DataBank/OccasionalPapers/OC%2011.pdf)

Tussar(Bihar), Mysore Silk (Karnataka), Chanderi Fabri(MP), Kancheepuram Silk(TN), Kotpad Fabric(Odisha), Kota Doria(Rajasthan), Benares Silk(UP), Sholapur Chaddar(Maharashtra), Kullu Shawl(HP), etc. While identifying good societies, GI registered Societies obviously would find their way into the list as they are active and aware of the developments taking place in their sector. They may be given preference and encouraged by Government by allocating larger chunk of weaving work. This would not only create an awareness about GIs and its advantages but also helps the weaver to live with dignity since more wages would be earned by them due to the increased economic activity. This would go a long way towards sustaining weaving activity and the Geographical Indication products which also helps to showcase our culture, history and the fine art to the world.

India with a vast and diverse population with limitless forms of handicrafts including textiles should launch a campaign for identifying unique items for GI registration and marketing to boost economic activity which contributes in the long run in bolstering rural development. The Policy makers should not look at export markets alone. The domestic markets have huge potential which are not tapped methodically/scientifically. There needs to be a strategy for such an initiative. There is a crying need for constituting a Task Force at National level for promoting Geographical Indications in the country which have the potential to boost the economic activity especially in the rural areas. Geographical Indications registration should not be an end in itself. It needs to be nurtured very carefully and marketed with zeal and vigour, lest it becomes ornamental and remains only on paper. The products will be extinct in no time. Since this is a new area every opportunity needs to be seized where demand for production is spotted. Finally if the villagers are happy and

contended, the migration to Urban areas in search of work could be arrested which would decongest the Urban areas which are already sagging under their own staggering weight.

*The inclusion of Geographical Indications (GIs) under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement of WTO has been acclaimed by developing countries for its potential to boost rural development, create wealth and protect traditional knowledge*

**Conclusion.**

The inclusion of Geographical Indications (GIs) under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement of WTO has been acclaimed by developing countries for its potential to boost rural development, create wealth and protect traditional knowledge. The premium consumers are willing to pay for the GI registered product as it is inextricably linked to the quality of the product. This calls for a thorough re-organization of the supply chain to adhere to not only quality but also to ensure that the revenue arising out of GI is distributed equally along the supply chain. If an initiative of supply of handloom cloth to Government Departments is introduced at the national level it would augur well for the weavers and we may rest assured that good days have dawned on handloom cloth in general and Geographical Indications in particular.

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