



**A STUDY ON FEW CASES OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE GOODS
REGISTERED AS GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION**

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ABSTRACT

Culture, tradition, and knowledge are intangible and often unwritten concepts, making them vulnerable to being forgotten over time. Consequently, indigenous peoples and local communities have increasingly called for systems that can promote and protect age-old knowledge, cultural expressions, and traditional practices. In response to these concerns, **Traditional Knowledge (TK)** has been brought under the ambit of intellectual property protection. TK holders fear that their knowledge may disappear if younger generations are unwilling or unable to inherit and preserve it. Moreover, individuals and corporations may misuse TK by attempting to secure intellectual property rights over such knowledge, which can unjustly restrict its use—even for the original custodians.

Unlike other forms of intellectual property rights, **Geographical Indications (GIs)** are granted not to a single individual or company, but to a group, community, organization, or competent authority. GIs can be renewed indefinitely, with each renewal lasting ten years. GI protection recognizes the reputation, quality, and goodwill associated with a product originating from a specific geographical region. Thus, both TK and GI frameworks aim to safeguard knowledge and products rooted in particular localities.

This study focuses on selected examples of **Traditional Knowledge-based goods registered as Geographical Indications**, and examines the challenges involved in protecting them. The case studies include *Aranmula Kannadi*, *Kanchipuram Silk Saree*, *Banarasi Brocade*, *Chikuwa Rice*, *Muga Silk*, and *Kota Doria Sarees*. Several issues arise when registering TK under the GI framework, such as the requirement of demonstrating established reputation, proving a distinct area of origin, and the exclusion of certain traditional goods that do not meet rigid criteria. These challenges highlight the need for more inclusive and robust mechanisms to ensure the effective protection of traditional knowledge and community-based heritage products.

Keywords: Traditional Knowledge, Culture, Knowledge, Geographical Indications

1. Introduction

The bio-cultural knowledge of tribal populations and local communities represents a rich source of unique products in India, a nation that encompasses ten distinct biogeographic zones. These products play a vital role in reducing poverty, strengthening local economies, conserving biodiversity, preserving traditional knowledge and cultural practices, and promoting community cohesion. Indications of origin, such as Geographical Indications (GIs), are applied to products that originate from a specific region and possess qualities, characteristics, or a reputation intrinsically linked to that place.¹

Geographical Indications (GIs) are recognized as a form of global intellectual property under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). As a member of the WTO, India has operationalized this mandate through the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which has been in force since 2003.² GIs promote local production and support the mainstreaming and upliftment of rural and tribal communities. It is important not to confuse GI tags with other forms of intellectual property rights (IPRs). While IPRs typically protect individual creators or inventors, GIs safeguard collective rights belonging to a community, group, or region.

At present, India has 236 registered GI products, and more than 270 additional applications are under consideration. Recently, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry introduced an official GI logo and tagline to strengthen the identity and recognition of GI-certified products. In addition to geographical indications, traditional knowledge plays a crucial role in the developmental framework of many countries, especially in the Global South. Geographical Indications (GIs) are perhaps the only form of intellectual property that can directly safeguard traditional knowledge. For centuries, local farmers, artisans, and weavers have relied on their indigenous wisdom,

¹ Belletti, Giovanni, Andrea Marescotti, and Jean-Marc Touzard. "Geographical indications, public goods, and sustainable development: The roles of actors' strategies and public policies." 98 *World Development* 45 (2017).

² Kireeva, Irina, and Bernard O'Connor. "Geographical indications and the TRIPS Agreement: what protection is provided to geographical indications in WTO members?." 13 *The Journal of World Intellectual Property* 275 (2010).



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innovative techniques, and creative skills to cultivate food, harvest medicinal plants, and produce diverse textile materials. However, much of this knowledge falls outside the conventional intellectual property regime, as it is collectively owned, orally transmitted, and not protected by existing legal mechanisms.

Given that the quality, reputation, and distinctive characteristics of many traditional products are intrinsically linked to their geographic origin, GIs offer a viable and culturally appropriate tool for protecting these ancient and community-based practices.³ In many cases, it is argued that the protection of GIs can bring significant social and economic benefits to producers whose goods embody traditional knowledge. As several major Asian countries have enacted laws to safeguard Geographical Indications, there is growing interest in understanding the nature of these protections and their potential impact on the socioeconomic conditions of the communities involved.⁴ Since there are many products with the GI tags in India, this study has chosen to study only a limited number of cases to determine whether GIs can promote socio-economic change and protect traditional knowledge.

2. Benefits of Geographical Indications Protection for Traditional Knowledge

A well-structured system of GIs helps preserve traditions, cultures, and indigenous know-how by creating a strong linkage between Geographical Indications and Traditional Knowledge (TK). Through this framework, products such as Thanjavur paintings, Bastar iron crafts, Hyderabad Haleem, and Warli paintings—all rooted in centuries-old traditional knowledge—gain enhanced recognition and market value. This not only strengthens the economic position of local communities but also ensures the long-term preservation of their cultural heritage and artisanal practices.⁵ Local communities can derive substantial economic benefits from GI registration due to the unique nature of Geographical Indications. A GI tag helps create niche markets for products distinguished by their special characteristics, quality, or established reputation. A notable example is the Pinggu peach from China, renowned for its sweetness and vibrant color. Cultivated for over a century in the outskirts of Beijing, this peach variety has gained premium market value and wider recognition through its GI status.⁶ Due to their GI registration, their products are in higher demand, increasing their market value (from RMB 1.6 to RMB 4) and their economic return as well. Traditional arts, crafts, and recipes are not the only products protected by GI. Agricultural products utilizing traditional knowledge are also protected⁷. Traditional Knowledge (TK) and indigenous know-how play a crucial role in various stages of production for several globally recognized products. A notable example is Roquefort Cheese from France, a blue cheese renowned for its characteristic blue veins, sharp flavor, and distinct aroma. Its production involves culturally rooted practices such as feeding sheep according to traditional methods and aging the cheese in natural limestone caves. Similarly, products like Monsooned Malabar Robusta Coffee, Mysore Sandal Soap, and Feni are created through unique combinations of traditional techniques and region-specific environmental conditions. These goods exemplify how TK contributes to the identity, quality, and value of GI-certified products.

3. Few Cases of Traditional Knowledge Goods Registered under Geographical Indications Several noteworthy TK-based products in India have been registered under the GI framework. These include Assamese Silk, Bengali Silk, Kanchipuram Silk, Bengali Rice, Uttar Pradesh Silk, and Banarasi Brocade from Uttar Pradesh, among others. Each of these products reflects the rich cultural heritage, craftsmanship, and geographical uniqueness of their respective regions⁸. These are only a few examples of GI Registration that have been chosen for this study; there are numerous others.

³ Aprile, Maria Carmela, Vincenzina Caputo, and Rodolfo M. Nayga Jr. "Consumers' valuation of food quality labels: the case of the European geographic indication and organic farming labels." 36 *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 158 (2012).

⁴ Das, Kasturi. "Socioeconomic implications of protecting geographical indications in India." *Available at SSRN 1587352* (2009).

⁵ Singh, Kirti. "Geographical indication as a tool for protection of traditional knowledge with special reference to protection of 'Cashmere' in Kashmir." *Available at SSRN 2115257* (2012).

⁶ Hoang, Giang, et al. "The impact of geographical indications on sustainable rural development: A case study of the Vietnamese Cao Phong orange." 12 *Sustainability* 4711 (2020).

⁷ Jumde, Akanksha, and Nishant Kumar. "Protection of traditional art forms under geographical indications law: a case study of Madhubani and Sujini art forms of Bihar, India." 16 *Journal of Intellectual Property Law & Practice* 647 (2021).

⁸ Nomani, Md Zafar Mahfooz, and Faizanur Rahman. "Bio Piracy of Traditional Knowledge Related Geographical Indications: A Select Study of Some Indian Cases." 3 *Manupatra Intellectual Property Reports (MIPR)* 135 (2016).



3.1 Muga Silk:

Mahatma Gandhi once remarked that Assamese women weave fairy tales into their clothing, highlighting the artistic depth and cultural richness embedded in Assamese textiles. A wide range of garments and accessories—such as kurtis, shirts, handbags, and lehengas are crafted using traditional Assamese butis and widely sold across Assam. One of the most iconic ensembles created with these motifs is the Mekhela Chador, celebrated for its elegance and intricate designs.

Traditional Assamese dress materials such as White Paat with colored woven butis, Golden Muga, and Warm Eri form the foundation of numerous clothing varieties. Each fabric carries its own identity: Paat for its natural sheen, Muga for its golden lustre and durability, and Eri for its warmth and cultural significance. Together, they reflect the exceptional craftsmanship and heritage of Assamese weaving traditions.⁹ However, at present, no GI protection exists for Paat or Eri silk; only Muga silk has received recognition through a registered GI tag. Muga silk is highly valued for its exceptional durability and its naturally elegant golden lustre. Often referred to as the “queen of all fabrics” by the Assamese people, it holds deep socio-economic and cultural significance in the region. Historically, the weaving of Muga silk in Assam dates back to the earliest phases of Assamese civilization. The Muga silk tradition is closely intertwined with the customs, rituals, and cultural identity of Assam. It is widely believed that the Tai-Ahoms introduced and nurtured the Muga culture in the region, embedding it firmly within the textile heritage of Assam.¹⁰ During the Ahom period (1228–1826), silkworm rearing and cloth production emerged as two of the most significant industries in Assam. The remarkable weaving skills of Assamese artisans produced fabrics of fine texture, intricate designs, and harmonious colours. These skills were carefully preserved and transmitted across generations, forming the backbone of Assam’s textile heritage. The Muga culture, in particular, embodies several traditional practices and techniques that hold deep social and cultural importance for the Assamese community. Unfortunately, despite its rich legacy, the Muga culture is currently in a state of decline. Assam has been producing Muga silk since ancient times, though the exact period of its origin remains uncertain. What is clear, however, is that Muga weaving is one of the oldest known crafts of the region. For centuries, it has flourished as a vibrant cottage industry, supported by traditional knowledge systems, community practices, and local environmental conditions uniquely suited to Muga silkworm cultivation.¹¹ Until recently, Muga silk was produced exclusively in Assam, a region long celebrated for its high-quality silk fabrics and thriving participation in international trade. Historical accounts indicate the prominence of silk in Assamese society. For instance, Hamilton observed that nearly three-fourths of the Assamese population wore garments made from four varieties of silk produced locally, demonstrating the deep cultural and economic relevance of sericulture in the region.

Even ancient texts reference this tradition. Kautilya, in his *Arthashastra*, noted that in early Assam, silk fabrics were produced from the cocoons of specific insect species. This documentation illustrates the long-standing history and indigenous expertise associated with silk production in Assam.¹² Historical references indicate that three varieties of Dukula silk were prevalent in ancient eastern India. The first variety, produced in Vangaka (present-day lower Bengal), was white in colour and exceptionally soft in texture.

The second variety, originating from Paundraka (North Bengal), was distinguished by its bright blue colour and equally soft feel. The third variety, produced in Suvarna Kudya (present-day Assam), possessed a natural golden hue and remarkable softness—traits that closely resemble the qualities of present-day Muga silk. Across regions such as northern and southern Myanmar, eastern India, and the Kumaon Hills, several species of silkworms—both domesticated and wild—produce different types of silk. In Assam, the golden yarn used for authentic Muga fabric is derived from a unique species of silkworm native to the region.

During the Ahom regime (1228–1828), the silk industry of Assam witnessed significant growth and refinement. The ruling Ahom kings demonstrated great interest in promoting sericulture, which became an integral part of the

⁹Goswami, Diganta, Bipul Rabha, and Vijay Veer. "Muga Silk-The Golden Thread of Assam." *Bioprospecting of Indigenous Bioresources of North-East India* 279 (2016).

¹⁰ Phukan, R., and S. N. Chowdhury. "Traditional knowledge and practices involved in muga culture of Assam." (2006).

¹¹ Singha, Ranjit, and Surjit Singha. "Women’s Empowerment through the Silk Industry of Assam, India, and its underlying Economy." *21 Journal of International Women's Studies* 11 (2020): 9-31.

¹²Tikader, Amalendu, Kunjupillai Vijayan, and Beera Saratchandra. "Muga silkworm, *Antheraea assamensis* (Lepidoptera: Saturniidae)-an overview of distribution, biology and breeding." *110 European Journal of Entomology* (2013).



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Tai-Ahom cultural traditions after their arrival in Assam in 1228.

Their patronage played a crucial role in strengthening and sustaining the Muga silk heritage.¹³ Silk production in Assam is presently concentrated in Sualkuchi, a town in the Kamrup district. Located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River and about 35 kilometers from Guwahati, Sualkuchi has traditionally been known as the “City of Clothes” (Vastra Nagari) due to its dense concentration of cottage-based handloom industries. The region has a long and illustrious history of producing elegant and sophisticated textiles such as Muga, Paat, Eri, Nuni Paat, and the traditional Gamocha. It is common to find a loom in nearly every household in Sualkuchi, and the rhythmic sound of weaving looms can be heard throughout the town—a sound that embodies the cultural essence of Assam. Assam’s Muga silk is one of the rarest and most exclusive silks in the world, produced only in Assam. Its most distinguishing feature is its natural golden-yellow colour, which sets it apart from all other varieties of silk. The term “Muga” itself is referenced in a book of Assamese fables as meaning “yellowish”, reflecting both its distinctive hue and its cultural significance.¹⁴

Muga silkworms are believed to date back to prehistoric times, and they are extremely sensitive—unable to tolerate even minimal levels of pollution. Muga silk is produced by the semi-domesticated silkworm *Antheraea assamensis*, known for yielding one of the strongest natural fibres in the world. Completely natural and organic, Muga silk derives its exceptional quality from the pristine environment and traditional methods of cultivation.

The silkworms are reared on natural Som plantations, which serve as their primary host plants. Farmers traditionally use a bamboo-made triangular device known as a “chaloni” to transfer the worms from one plant to another once the leaves of a host tree have been consumed.

To prevent the larvae from descending the tree and escaping, barriers are tied securely around the trunk as a protective measure. For the cocooning stage, leaves of Singari, Bholoti, Azar, and similar plants are used to create a jali of dried leaves. Cocoons formed on Singari leaves are especially prized for being compact and lustrous. Even the pierced cocoons of Muga silk are utilized to produce ghisra, a type of spun Muga yarn.

The embroidery on Muga silk garments is elaborate and culturally significant, featuring motifs of flowers, leaves, and traditional Assamese patterns. Bihu motifs such as the japi (traditional hat) and pepa (musical instrument), along with Assamese jewellery designs like junbiri and dugdugi, lend exceptional beauty and uniqueness to the fabric. In Assam, sarees and kurtas made from Muga silk are commonly referred to as “mekhela-sadar.”¹⁵

Assam’s natural resources have endowed the region with the majestic and exclusive Muga silk. Because of its regal appearance, exceptional durability, and limited production, Muga silk has become exceedingly rare and valuable. One of its most remarkable qualities is that it grows more lustrous with time—the fabric’s natural sheen actually enhances with every wash, making it even more beautiful as it ages.¹⁶

It is no surprise that Muga silk commands one of the highest prices in the world. Owing to its rarity, durability, and distinctive golden sheen, Muga silk is cherished in Assam—so much so that many middle-class Assamese women value it as highly as gold ornaments. In recognition of its unique qualities and deep cultural significance, Muga silk from Assam was granted Geographical Indication (GI) status in 2007. At the time of registration, approximately 27,878 individuals were engaged in the production of Muga silk and related dress materials, highlighting its vital role in the local economy and artisanal livelihood.

3.2 Gamosa:

Culturally significant objects and artifacts hold a wide range of beliefs, prides, and identities. A Geographical Indication (GI) tag has been awarded to one such Assamese symbol, the Gamosa¹⁷. The Gamosa, a traditional

¹³ Agrarian system of medieval Assam. Concept Publishing Company. Gogoi, J. (2002). https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Agrarian_System_of_Medieval_Assam.html?id=ITvmPLv5_V0C (last visited on March, 25 2023)

¹⁴ Protection of Traditional Knowledge in the State of Assam and Role of Geographical Indication. Gogoi, M., & Kaushik, I., *International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Topics*, ISSN, 2581-6187 (2021), VOL, 2(4), p.p, 35-41.

¹⁵ Textbook of Fabric Science: Fundamentals to Finishing. Sekhri, S., *PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd.* (2022). <https://www.phindia.com/Books/BookDetail/9789391818692/textbook-of-fabric-science-sekhri> (last visited on April, 2 2023)

¹⁶ Women's agency and social change: Assam and beyond. Deka, M. *SAGE Publications India*. (2013). <https://sk.sagepub.com/books/womens-agency-and-social-change> (last visited on April, 3 2023)

¹⁷ Goroka: Cosmography and the Shared Account in Assam. Dowdy, S. M. *The University of Chicago*. ISSN, <https://ijikm.com/>



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Assamese textile and an enduring symbol of Assamese cultural identity, has been formally recognized in the 124th eographical Indications Journal, which recorded its inclusion in the GI Registry. According to the journal published on October 24, the Gamosa is a distinct handloom product that represents the unique cultural heritage of Assam. The Gamosa holds deep cultural significance for the Assamese people. It is prominently featured in various social, religious, and ceremonial contexts, and is considered an essential emblem of Assamese identity. Traditionally, the Gamosa functions as an embroidered towel—its name deriving from “Gatro Marjoni,” meaning a cloth used to wipe or cleanse the body after bathing.

The classic Gamosa consists of a hand-woven white cloth adorned with striking red motifs on both borders. Typically, it measures approximately two feet in width and four feet in length. The application for its GI tag was submitted by the Institute of Handicraft Development, Golaghat district, on October 16, 2017, marking an important step in protecting this culturally significant textile¹⁸.

Under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (Section 13), the application for the GI registration of the Gamosa was accepted. During the Bihu festival, men and women wear Gamosas with red borders (known as Pari) and floral motifs on both sides—either as headgear or wrapped around the waist.

The GI Registry journal states that Gamosas bearing the names “Krishna”, “Ram”, or “Hari” are used as shawls around the neck or thrown over the shoulders when visiting a Namghar (temple hall). Furthermore, the journal reports that there are nine distinct types of Gamosas produced in Assam.

3.3 Chokuwa Rice -

Chokuwa rice from Assam has also been GI-tagged along with Gamosa rice. In religious and social ceremonies, this rice is used. Journalists have referred to Chokuwa rice as “a unique gift of nature” from Assam¹⁹. This variety of rice is virtually unknown outside Assam. Chokuwa rice, semi-glutinous winter rice belonging to the Sali group, has been cultivated in the region for centuries. It is characterized by a low amylase content (12–17%) and possesses several distinct agronomic traits.

Chokuwa rice varieties are generally tall, photosensitive, and long-duration crops, though they tend to be low yielding. Despite this, they differ significantly from other Sali rice varieties in terms of both plant structure and grain characteristics. A GI application for Chokuwa rice was filed by A. Seuj Satirth of Dimow, located in the Sivasagar district, on December 14, 2016.

Rice holds deep cultural significance in Assam, playing an essential role in numerous religious and social ceremonies. However, Chokuwa rice is not typically consumed as a staple food. Instead, it is reserved for preparing highly valued traditional delicacies.

One of the most remarkable features of Chokuwa rice, as noted in the GI Registry journal, is that it softens simply by soaking in ordinary water. This unique property is a defining characteristic of this special rice variety.

3.4 Kanchipuram Silk Saree:

A Kanchipuram saree is considered indispensable in the trousseau of a South Indian bride. Women traditionally prefer wearing these sarees during festivals, ceremonies, and other special occasions, and they are also cherished as gifts for birthdays, anniversaries, and milestone events. Often hailed as the queen of silk sarees, the Kanchipuram saree is admired worldwide for its exceptional strength, rich texture, and majestic appearance.

Crafted from pure mulberry silk, a hallmark feature of the Kanchipuram saree is its contrasting border and pallu, which are woven separately and then interlocked with the body of the sari. The broad, intricately designed borders—often in colours and patterns distinct from the main fabric—lend the saree a sophisticated and regal charm.²⁰. The Kanchipuram saree is widely regarded as the heaviest and most opulent among all silk sarees.

0041- 9494, VOL, 36, p.p, 345 (2017).

¹⁸ Geographical Indications as a tool for facilitating preservation of traditional products & processes with concurrent economic benefits: A case study of Muga in Assam. Hussain, A., Saikia, J. B., Goswami, S., Deb, P., & Ganguli, P. (2018).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345721308_Geographical_Indications_as_a_tool_for_facilitating_preservation_of_traditional_products_processes_with_concurrent_economic_benefits_A_case_study_of_Muga_in_Assam (last visited on March, 25 2023)

¹⁹ Vinayan, Soumya. “Geographical indications in India: Issues and challenges—An overview.” 20 *The Journal of World Intellectual Property* 119 (2017).

²⁰ Rao, PVL Narasimha. *Kanchipuram: Land of Legends, Saints and Temples*. Readworthy, 2008.
<https://ijikm.com/>



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Depending on the intricacy of the design, craftsmanship, and quality of materials used, prices typically start at around ₹25,000 and can reach up to ₹4, 00,000 or even higher.

At the heart of its excellence is mulberry silk, one of the finest and highest-quality silks in the world. When made from 100% pure mulberry silk, the fabric becomes exceptionally luxurious, durable, and naturally lustrous. Its long, smooth fibres and pure white colour contribute to its superior refinement. Mulberry silk also enhances the saree's aesthetic appeal by imparting a soft, radiant sheen and a subtle richness of colour.

An added advantage is that mulberry silk is hypoallergenic and completely natural, making it safe and comfortable even for individuals with allergies. Its texture and appearance evoke a sense of elegance and elevate the wearer's overall mood and presence. Kanchipuram, located in the northeastern and coastal region of Tamil Nadu, has a long-standing heritage of silk weaving.

Ancient Sangam literature (1 B.C.–6 A.D.) refers to the skilled artistry of Kanchipuram weavers, while the Vilavatti inscription (575–600 A.D.) documents the collection of taxes from these weavers, underscoring the industry's historical importance. Today, the Kanchipuram silk saree remains the district's most renowned craft. Handloom weaving is the principal occupation of the region, and the artistry and technical skills associated with Kanchi saree production have been passed down through generations of master weavers²¹. Hand weaving has become an integral part of the cultural identity of the people of Kanchipuram and serves as a primary source of livelihood for many families. According to local belief, the tradition of weaving Kanchi sarees traces its origins to the descendants of Sage Markandeya, who is revered in mythology as the master weaver of the gods.

Today, the weaving community in Kanchipuram comprises around 5,000 weaving families, with nearly 45,000 skilled artisans engaged in the production of these exquisite handwoven sarees. The majority of these weavers belong to the Padma Saliya and Pattu Saliya communities. All the processes involved in saree production such as warping, spinning, and dyeing are carried out locally by traditional weavers. One of the signature varieties of the region is the Murukku Pattu, known for its heavy texture and durability.

Kanchipuram is also renowned for its thousands of ancient temples, each distinguished by unique architectural styles. This sacred heritage has deeply influenced the region's weaving traditions. It is believed that sarees were once woven within temple premises centuries ago. Over time, many dynasties patronized the art and architecture of Kanchipuram, with Krishnadevaraya, the illustrious ruler associated with the Vijayanagara Empire, playing a particularly important role in promoting Kanchipuram silk. The city's rich cultural legacy continues to thrive today, supported by tourism and the flourishing handloom industry.

Reflecting this heritage, motifs inspired by Indian temples, sculptures, and traditional art forms are intricately incorporated into the designs of Kanchipuram sarees, further enhancing their artistic and cultural value.²²

Traditional art forms such as Warli paintings are also incorporated into Kanchipuram sarees. Warli, one of Maharashtra's oldest tribal art traditions, is characterized by its distinctive geometric patterns and depictions of daily life. Similarly, Kanchipuram sarees sometimes feature Kalamkari designs, a renowned art form of Andhra Pradesh created through intricate hand-painting using special pens (kalam). By integrating these diverse artistic traditions, Kanchi sarees emerge as rich and magnificent creations that embody the cultural heritage of various regions of India. While they play a vital role in preserving and promoting traditional and folk arts, Kanchipuram weavers also continuously explore innovations and contemporary design experiments to keep the saree relevant and appealing in modern fashion.²³

The designs of Kanchipuram sarees draw inspiration from natural elements, religious texts, and temple sculptures. Many of these sarees depict scenes from ancient epics such as the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and the Bhagavad Gita, reflecting the deep cultural and spiritual heritage of the region.

Some of the most popular border patterns include Gopuram, Rudraksham, Mayilkan, and Kuyilkan motifs.

https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Kanchipuram.html?id=GF0QEAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=yhttps://www.exotici ndiaart.com/book/details/kanchipuram-land-of-legends-saints-and-temples-ihd002/ (last visited on Feb, 25 2023)

²¹ Giri, V. Mohini, ed. *Living death: Trauma of widowhood in India*. Gyan Books, 2002. <https://www.bagchee.com/books/B3915/living-death-trauma-of-widowhood-in-india> (last visited on April, 15 2023)

²² Savithri, G., and P. Sujathamma. "Geographical indications to traditional silks of India." *3 Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* 221 (2013).

²³ Mohapatra, Nihar. "A management approach to Sambalpuri sari with a sign of cultural facets." *5 Odisha Review* 130 (2014).

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Traditional sarees often feature floral patterns, checks, stripes, and intricately woven temple borders. Various symbolic motifs—such as peacocks, parrots, chariots, lions, leaves, the sun, and the moon—enhance the aesthetic richness of the fabric.

Today, Kanchipuram sarees are produced in a wide range of vibrant colours, often adorned with heavy gold zari weaving on the borders and pallu, adding to their grandeur and timeless appeal²⁴. Modern Kanchipuram Pattu sarees are often embellished with kundans, crystals, and beads, reflecting contemporary tastes and evolving fashion trends. In addition, computerized jacquard borders have become increasingly common. On average, a single weaver requires about 20 days to complete one six-yard Kanchipuram saree.

These sarees are traditionally handwoven using pure mulberry silk. The weaving process involves setting up the loom with a throw shuttle and employing the classic Adai technique. The Korvai method is used to create contrasting borders, while the Petni technique is used to weave the pallu. Typically, three shuttles are used for weaving the contrasting borders on both sides of the saree, and one shuttle is used for weaving the body.

The warp is prepared using two-ply silk threads, while the weft uses three-ply silk threads, contributing to the saree's strength and durability. The mulberry silk used in these sarees is sourced primarily from Karnataka, while the gold and silver zari threads come from Gujarat. Heavy silk lends the fabric its distinctive luster, smoothness, and luxurious feel. Although the dyes are procured from various parts of India, Kanchipuram sarees are particularly renowned for their rich brocades and ornate gold borders.

To stiffen and thicken the yarn during weaving, artisans apply a locally prepared rice starch solution known as kanji. Contemporary designs may also include intricate embroidery, and the pallu is often adorned with traditional motifs, ancient paintings, or depictions of deities and divine symbols, further enhancing the beauty and cultural depth of the saree.²⁵

The body of a Kanchipuram saree typically differs from its pallu in both design and colour. The pallu is woven separately and then attached to the body using a smooth and sturdy interlocking technique. This joint is marked by a characteristic zig-zag pattern, which visibly indicates the point of connection. The strength of this interlocking ensures that even if the body of the saree tears, the border remains intact, a hallmark of authentic Kanchipuram craftsmanship. However, the market for traditional Kanchipuram sarees is increasingly challenged by polyester power-loom sarees, which are cheaper and lighter.

These sarees locally known as Apoorva and produced mainly in Karnataka offer low-cost alternatives that appeal to a large segment of consumers. To meet changing market demands, manufacturers are now producing sarees with simpler designs, lighter shades, and reduced prices. Additionally, blends of cotton and silk are being introduced to make the fabric more affordable. In some cases, the body is woven with cotton threads while the borders are made of silk. To further cut costs, lighter zari is now being used in place of the traditional heavy gold zari.²⁶

To diversify the market, Kanchi silk is now used not only for sarees but also for furnishings, churidar sets, silk bed sheets, and pillow covers. In many northern states of India, Kanchipuram sarees compete directly with Banarasi sarees. Banarasi sarees are often preferred in these regions because they offer greater ornamentation, lighter fabrics, and highly intricate designs, all of which are in high demand among consumers²⁷. Silk weaving using techniques similar to those employed in crafting Kanchipuram sarees is also practiced in Rasipuram, Mannarkudi, Kumbakonam, and Arni.

The sarees produced in these regions are generally lighter than the traditional Kanchipuram sarees. Given the high cost of authentic Kanchi silk, many consumers prefer to feel and examine the sarees before making a purchase.

To avoid falling victim to counterfeit products, consumers must exercise caution while buying Kanchipuram

²⁴Sengupta, Nirmal, and Nirmal Sengupta. "Traditional cultural expressions, expressions of folklore." *Traditional Knowledge in Modern India: Preservation, Promotion, Ethical Access and Benefit Sharing Mechanisms* 127 (2019).

²⁵ Kasinathan, Kumaraguru. "A sustainable synergy of traditional and CAD based silk saree designing/production." *Fashion & luxury: Between heritage & innovation* (2011)., Retrieved from http://www.iffii.com/downloads/past_conferences/IFFTI%20ABSTRACTS%20BROCHURE,202011 (last visited on April, 20 2023)

²⁶ Prakash, A. Arul, and A. Selvendran. "A study on present scenario of silk handloom industry in Kanchipuram district Tamil Nadu." *Scope Int. J. Sci. Hum. Manag. Technol* 26 (2017).

²⁷ Norris, Lucy. *Recycling Indian clothing: Global contexts of reuse and value*. Indiana University Press, 2010.<https://iupress.org/about-iu-press/> (last visited on April, 18 2023)

<https://ijikm.com/>



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sarees. It is advisable to purchase directly from certified weavers or original producers, as this not only ensures authenticity but may also offer a better price. Kanchipuram sarees have been protected by a Geographical Indication (GI) tag since 2005–2006, ensuring that legal action can be taken against sellers of fake products.

According to GI specifications, authentic Kanchipuram sarees must be woven only within the Kanchipuram region and must meet predefined standards relating to weight, zari composition, and weaving technique. Genuine zari used in these sarees should contain 57% silver and 0.6% gold. Consumers can further verify authenticity by checking for the Silk Mark Organization label, which certifies that the fabric is made of pure silk.

3.5 Banarasi Brocade:

Banaras became renowned for its intricately designed brocades during the Mughal period, around the 14th century. Today, it remains one of the most significant weaving centers in the world. Brocade weaving in Banaras is cluster-based, with weaving communities spread across various parts of the Banaras district and several adjoining districts.²⁸

Banarasi brocades are traditionally woven exclusively by city weavers, and the craft is concentrated in several key weaving centres, including Varanasi, Mirzapur, Bhadohi (Sant Ravidas Nagar), Chandoli, Chunar, and Chakia. The majority of brocade weavers reside in Varanasi and its surrounding areas, particularly in neighbourhoods such as Madanpura and Ahaipur.

These localities are believed to be the original hubs of brocade weaving, from where the craft gradually spread throughout the city. Recognised as one of India's richest centres of weaving traditions, Banaras is celebrated worldwide for its exquisite brocade sarees and dress materials. Its intricate silk brocades and luxurious sarees have earned it a distinguished reputation as a global textile city.

The weaving clusters in and around Banaras produce a diverse range of sarees, including Jangla, Tanchoi, Vaskat, Cutwork, Tissue, and Butidar varieties. These sarees are crafted with silk warps and silk wefts, often brocaded with additional weft threads to create elaborate patterns featuring motifs such as bel (creepers), floral vines, bells, and traditional buttas. They are widely regarded as some of the finest sarees in India.

Banarasi sarees are renowned not only for their high-quality silk but also for their opulent zari work, often woven with silver and gold brocades. Their hallmark features include intricate, interwoven foliate and floral motifs, which contribute to their timeless beauty and enduring demand²⁹. A Banarasi silk saree is considered indispensable in an Indian bride's trousseau. Women across India wear these sarees at major ceremonies and festive occasions, often pairing them with traditional gold or silver jewellery. Over time, changing consumer preferences have encouraged weavers in the Banaras cluster to introduce new designs, patterns, and product variations.

Today, in addition to sarees, the cluster produces a wide range of items such as home furnishings, silk dhotis, stoles, scarves, mufflers, mats, dress materials, wall hangings, curtains, cushion covers, tablecloths, napkins, and runners to meet domestic and international market demands.

According to the GI certificate, Banarasi silk products fall into four categories:

1. Silk embroidery
2. Textile goods
3. Silk brocades
4. Silk sarees and dress materials

GI certification for Banarasi sarees and brocades covers six districts in Uttar Pradesh: Varanasi, Azamgarh, Chandauli, Jaunpur, Mirzapur, and Sant Ravidas Nagar (Bhadohi). These regions are now the *only* legally recognized centres for producing authentic Banarasi sarees.

The GI tag encompasses a wide variety of products, including silk brocades (such as Amru), textile goods like art fabrics, bed covers, tissue and cutwork sarees, butidar sarees, as well as silk sarees and dress materials such as *jamdani*, *jangla*, *jamawar tanchoi*, and intricately embroidered silk sarees.

In 2006, an intensive campaign was launched to obtain Geographical Indication (GI) status to safeguard the authenticity and heritage of Banarasi sarees. The Human Welfare Association (HWA), a local NGO, played a

²⁸ Shukla, Pavrina. "The grace of four moons: Dress, adornment, and the art of the body in modern India." 97 (2007). <https://iupress.org/about-iu-press/> (last visited on April, 12 2023)

²⁹ Chaudhary, Meghna, Bhawna Agarwal, and Meena Bhatia. "Socio-economic condition of small-scale producers in Varanasi: A case of Banaras brocade and saree." (2021). <https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/58959/1/JIPR%2026%285%29%20286-294.pdf> (last visited on April, 14 2023)



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pivotal role in the process, with significant facilitation support from UNCTAD³⁰. Over the past decade, more than 300 Geographical Indications (GIs) have been awarded to various products through the support and facilitation provided by UNCTAD to producer groups. Inspired by a series of UNCTAD-led meetings in early 2006, representatives of the Human Welfare Association (HWA) initiated the formal process of securing GI registration for Banarasi sarees.

To build awareness about the importance of GI protection, HWA organized a workshop that brought together traders, exporters, and government officials. The workshop emphasized that GI tags serve as crucial markers of authenticity, helping handcrafted products achieve wider recognition and acceptance in both domestic and global markets. By enhancing the credibility of such products, GI certification was expected to ensure better market positioning and higher price realization for producers.

On 4 September 2009, the Banarasi saree received its GI tag under the registered name “Banaras Brocades and Sarees.” Prior to this, in July 2007, the Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai received nine applications for GI registration from the following entities:

1. Banaras Bunkar Samiti
2. Human Welfare Association
3. Joint Director, Industries (East Zone)
4. Director of Handlooms and Textiles, Uttar Pradesh
5. Handloom Fabrics Marketing Cooperative Federation
6. Eastern UP Exporters Association (EUPEA)
7. Banarasi Vastra Udyog Sangh
8. Banaras Hathkargha Vikas Samiti
9. Adarsh Silk Bunkar Sahkari Samiti

These collective efforts played a pivotal role in ensuring legal protection for Banarasi weaving traditions and strengthening the economic prospects of hundreds of thousands of artisans across the region³¹. After a long wait of more than two years, the world-famous Banarasi Saree and Brocade finally received GI status on 4 September 2009. Before this recognition, the absence of a GI tag made it difficult to distinguish genuine Banarasi sarees from imitation products that closely resembled them. The widespread availability of pirated and machine-made copies not only misled consumers—often forcing them to pay inflated prices for inferior products—but also caused significant loss of market share for the original artisans and manufacturers of authentic Banarasi sarees.³²

Authentic handcrafted Banarasi sarees were steadily losing market share to cheaper, power-loom-produced alternatives. Several factors contributed to this decline, including poor-quality imitations, competition from Kala silk and Chinese silk, and the widespread circulation of counterfeit products that lacked authenticity. For instance, “Kela silk” threads—made from the resin of banana trees and polished to resemble gold or silver zari—were often used to deceive customers into believing they were purchasing genuine Banarasi sarees.

This proliferation of counterfeit products created information asymmetry, preventing consumers from reliably distinguishing authentic sarees from fake ones. Consequently, the reputation and economic viability of traditional Banarasi weaving suffered a sharp decline. The introduction of the Banarasi Sarees GI tag thus became essential to protect the heritage craft, restore consumer confidence, and promote the livelihoods of skilled artisans.

3.6 Aranmula Kannadi:

³⁰ Chaudhary, Meghna, Bhawna Agarwal, and Meena Bhatia. "Socio-economic condition of small-scale producers in Varanasi: A case of Banaras brocade and saree." (2021). <https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/58959/1/JIPR%2026%285%29%20286-294.pdf> (last visited on April, 14 2023)

³¹ Chaudhary, Meghna, Bhawna Agarwal, and Meena Bhatia. "Socio-economic condition of small-scale producers in Varanasi: A case of Banaras brocade and saree." (2021). <https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/58959/1/JIPR%2026%285%29%20286-294.pdf> (last visited on April, 14 2023)

³² Verma, Servjaeta, and Nandita Mishra. "Recognition and marketing opportunities of a “GI” tag in handloom product: A study of Banaras brocades and sarees." (2018). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336471583_Recognition_and_Marketing_Opportunities_of_a_GI_Tag_in_Handloom_Product_A_Study_of_Banaras_Brocades_and_Sarees (last visited on Feb, 5 2023) <https://ijikm.com/>



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The state of Kerala in India has a rural place named Aranmula in its Pathanamthitta district. In this rural area, a special metal mirror (combined with tin and copper) is known as —Aranmula kannadil³³. Metal mirrors possess exceptional qualities that distinguish them from ordinary glass mirrors, making them highly valued as gift items. These mirrors are crafted exclusively by a small number of traditional families. The craft is believed to have been introduced to Kerala nearly 500 years ago by Viswakarma bronze smiths who migrated from Tirunelveli.

What makes these metal mirrors unique is that, although they resemble glass mirrors in appearance, their highly polished metal surfaces reflect images directly rather than refracting light. The exact composition of the alloy—a carefully guarded mixture of tin and copper—is a family secret passed down through generations.

Artisans also use special clay sourced from Aranmula, with the proportions varying depending on the specific location within the region. The resulting copper–tin alloy is prized for its rare brittleness, brilliance, and silver-like sheen, giving the metal mirror its distinctive reflective quality and aesthetic appeal³⁴. When the metal mirror is carefully cleaned and polished, it develops an exceptional ability to reflect light with remarkable clarity. The precise combination of tin and copper, along with the proportions of clay used in the mould, has been a closely guarded secret for generations.

Even if the alloy composition were discovered, replicating the mirror would still be nearly impossible without the deep knowledge, skill, and experience possessed by the traditional artisans.

For decades, the craft has remained under the exclusive control of a few family groups, whose reputation and mastery have sustained the lineage. Although the raw materials themselves are not expensive, the production and polishing processes demand immense craftsmanship, making the mirrors highly valuable. As a result, even a small Aranmula metal mirror typically costs more than ₹2,000 (about \$50), while larger ones can exceed ₹25,000 (about \$600).

Despite earning a modest profit, artisans believe the returns are insufficient to fully compensate for the level of skill and labour required. Given their limited profit margins, the Geographical Indication (GI) status has the potential to greatly improve the socioeconomic conditions of genuine producers—provided that the product is protected from mass-market duplication. Today, Aranmula Kannadi has gained both national and international recognition. However, because of its high price, it was historically accessible only to the elite. The market is now flooded with imitations and duplicate versions, posing a serious challenge to authentic producers and undermining the traditional craft³⁵.

Duplicate Aranmula mirrors are extremely difficult to detect unless they are examined and polished by the original artisans themselves. This makes the process of identifying counterfeits highly challenging. Producers have generally refrained from taking legal action against counterfeiters, partly because the presence of duplicates has not yet significantly reduced their market share.

Recently, however, the artisans formed the Aranmula Metal Mirror Nirman Society to safeguard their collective interests. The famed Aranmula Kannadi has also been registered as a Geographical Indication (GI) under the new Act by the Parthasarathy Handicraft Centre. Notably, even in the GI application, the secret techniques of moulding and casting were not disclosed, underscoring the importance of preserving this traditional knowledge.

The uniqueness of the Aranmula Kannadi lies in its specialized combination of casting and moulding processes, which requires extraordinary skill, precision, and craftsmanship. It is this mastery—refined over generations—that makes the authentic Aranmula mirror an unparalleled and culturally significant product³⁶. According to the GI application, several highly confidential steps are involved in the moulding and casting processes, and these techniques are known only to the traditional artisans. The clay used in the Aranmula Panchayat area plays a crucial role in shaping and casting the mirror, and its quality is considered superior to that found elsewhere.

The case study clearly shows that artisans are able to maximize their economic benefits by directly manufacturing and selling the mirrors themselves. Their traditional knowledge—passed down through generations and carefully

³³ Chaudhary, Meghna, Bhawna Agarwal, and Meena Bhatia. "Socio-economic condition of small-scale producers in Varanasi: A case of Banaras brocade and saree." (2021). <https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/handle/123456789/58959> (last visited on April, 3 2023)

³⁴ Basole, Amit. "Authenticity, innovation, and the geographical indication in an artisanal industry: the case of the Banarasi Sari." 18 *The Journal of World Intellectual Property* 127 (2015).

³⁵ Das, Kasturi. "Prospects and challenges of geographical indications in India." 13 *The Journal of World Intellectual Property* 148 (2010).

³⁶ Shekhar, Anushkaa, and Pritha Banerjee. "Geographical Indication: Analysis in Light of Aranmula Kannadi." 11 *Supremo Amicus* 52 (2019).



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Vol. : 20, Issue 2, 2025
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guarded—remains a key factor in preserving the product's authenticity. Because these processes are kept secret, the distinctive quality of the Aranmula Kannadi remains unmatched, preventing others from reproducing it. The case of Aranmula Kannadi thus underscores the importance of maintaining secrecy around traditional knowledge as an effective strategy for protecting culturally significant products and ensuring the continued livelihood of artisan communities.

3.7 Kota Doria Sarees:

Originally developed in the state of Rajasthan in the western part of the country, Kota Doria is a unique weave. Kota district was originally home to the weavers of this fabric³⁷. The handloom weaving tradition of Kota Doria was historically patronized by the Royal family of Kota.

The fabric is distinguished by its unique check pattern, which has become its signature design. The weaving communities are primarily located in the Hadoti region, comprising the districts of Kota, Bundi, and Baran, where generations of weavers and their families have practiced this traditional craft. Decades ago, the number of handlooms in this region was nearly four times higher than it is today. However, the rise in production costs and the increasing use of power looms led to a significant decline in demand for handwoven sarees. As a result, the number of weaver families dropped dramatically—from about 10,000 families in earlier years to only 1,000 families by 2010 (CUTS International, 2010). In addition to weavers, many other workers in these districts provide essential support services, including dyeing, warping, and sizing.

As part of its cluster development initiatives, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) supported the weavers in pursuing Geographical Indication (GI) registration. UNIDO began the GI application process in 2003. The Kota Doria Hadoti Federation (KDHF)—the registered umbrella body representing all Kota Doria weavers—played a central role in motivating individual artisans and various weaving associations to unite under a single platform. These included the Kota Women Weavers' Association, the Master Weavers' Association, and several smaller village-based groups.

Out of the approximately 1,600 weaver families spread across the region, UNIDO successfully educated nearly 700 families about the benefits of GI registration. UNIDO also collaborated with the Rajasthan Urban Development Authority (RUDA), a state government body responsible for non-farm rural development, proposing a partnership to strengthen the GI initiative and support the long-term sustainability of the Kota Doria weaving tradition³⁸. The mandate of RUDA included establishing artisan and farmer clusters, strengthening the capacity of handloom weavers, and improving their overall economic well-being.

In supporting UNIDO's initiative, RUDA played a crucial role by educating the Weavers' Association on how to manage the federation and assisting in the preparation of the GI application. As a result of these efforts, the Kota Doria Hadauti Federation (KDHF) submitted its GI application in July 2004, and the federation received the GI registration certificate in July 2005 (Das, 2020).

In collaboration with KDHF, RUDA developed targeted strategies to promote authentic handwoven Kota Doria sarees and counter the growing market for power-loom versions. RUDA conducted extensive awareness activities involving weavers, master weavers, traders, businesses, and relevant government departments to build understanding of the importance and benefits of GI protection.

Together with KDHF and various women weavers' organizations, RUDA organized seminars, workshops, and door-to-door outreach programmes across Rajasthan and major metropolitan cities in India. In 2008, RUDA commissioned the Rajasthan Chamber of Commerce and Industry to assess the economic and social impact of GI registration on Kota Doria sarees.

Weavers expressed pride in the fact that Kota Doria is the first product from Rajasthan to obtain GI status. The GI tag not only boosted confidence among artisans but also encouraged many weavers, who had previously migrated to cities in search of employment, to return to their villages. Remarkably, in the two years following GI registration, weavers reported a three-fold increase in their earnings, demonstrating the significant positive impact of the GI initiative³⁹.

³⁷ Gopalakrishnan, N. S., P. S. Nair, and A. K. Babu. "Exploring the relationship between GIs and TK: An analysis of the legal tools for the protection of GIs in Asia." *ICTSD Programme on Intellectual Property Rights and Sustainable Development, International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, Geneva, Switzerland* (2007). https://www.iprsonline.org/resources/docs/corea_Oct07.pdf (last visited on Feb, 9 2023)

³⁸ Shekhar, Anushkaa, and Pritha Banerjee. "Geographical Indication: Analysis in Light of Aranmula Kannadi." *11 Supremo Amicus* 52 (2019).

³⁹ Ashby, Mike, and Kara Johnson. "The art of materials selection." *6 Materials today* 24 (2003). <https://ijikm.com/>



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As a result of obtaining GI status, master weavers have gained significant confidence, which has strengthened their ability to negotiate better prices with both national and international buyers. The demand for authentic handwoven Kota Doria sarees has grown, and weavers are now able to sell their products at higher prices when they use the KDHF logo, which certifies authenticity. For example, while one meter of power-loom-woven Kota Doria fabric sells for around ₹70, the price rises to roughly ₹130 per meter for GI-registered, intricately handwoven Kota Doria fabric.

Public awareness campaigns organized by RUDA helped consumers recognize the KDHF logo and understand the superior quality of genuine Kota Doria products. However, continued efforts are needed to expand consumer awareness further. Nevertheless, RUDA's initiatives have contributed to improved market positioning, and handwoven sarees now command higher prices.

The presence of the official logo assures customers of the saree's authenticity, enhancing their confidence in the product. With increased income, weavers have been able to improve their living standards, send their children to school, and build proper houses for their families. According to the study, Kota Doria weavers still require stronger support from traders and law-enforcement authorities to safeguard their interests effectively.

However, a study conducted in 2010 by two researchers from CUTS International—a global research and advocacy organization operating in India, Africa, Europe, and Vietnam—presented a slightly different picture⁴⁰. The value chain analysis conducted by CUTS International reveals that, although GI recognition has helped distinguish authentic Kota Doria sarees from power-loom imitations, most weavers have not benefited significantly from this development. According to the study, the primary beneficiaries of the GI status are the master weavers. Out of nearly 1,600 weaver families, only about 50 were master weavers, and these individuals were closely associated with KDHF. Their proximity to the federation allowed them to benefit more directly from government initiatives and support from external agencies during the organization and promotion processes.

The study also examined the socio-economic background of weavers. It noted that a large proportion of Kota Doria weavers belong to the Ansari community, the majority of whom practice Islam. Women form a substantial part of the workforce—approximately 75 percent—and many of them have low literacy levels, which further limits their capacity to negotiate with traders, access institutional support, or fully benefit from the GI framework⁴¹. Most Muslim women engaged in the production of sarees and Kota fabrics work from within their homes. Typically, each household owns one handloom, and two to three family members participate in the weaving process.

On average, women can produce around five sarees per month. The master weavers hold significant control over the Kota Doria trade because they possess the buying power and act as intermediaries between weavers and the market. They bring in orders, supply raw materials, and serve as the primary point of contact for producers. Weavers depend on master weavers not only for work but also for guidance and instructions, learning techniques and patterns directly from them.

In Kota city, master weavers sell their products through wholesalers and retailers, while in other regions they often engage in door-to-door sales to reach retailers. This structure places considerable influence—and much of the economic benefit—in the hands of master weavers rather than the artisans who physically weave the sarees⁴².

According to the CUTS study, master weavers typically do not have formal contracts with retailers in advance. As a result, they bear the responsibility of finding buyers for their products on their own, with no guaranteed returns until the sarees are actually sold. The study also highlights that the protection offered by the GI status has been limited, particularly in safeguarding the traditional Kota Doria market. Due to inadequate financial resources and limited outreach, GI holders are unable to take effective legal action against the widespread presence of counterfeit and imitation products.

Furthermore, the study points out that the feudalistic governance structure within the Kota Doria value chain affects

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223096174> The art of materials selection (last visited on April, 7 2023)

⁴⁰ Pant, Ruchi. "Protecting and promoting traditional knowledge in India." *International Institute for Environment and* (2015). <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/16576IIED.pdf> (last visited on April, 13 2023)

⁴¹ Srivastava, Surabhi. "Women empowerment through protecting and promoting biocultural heritages-case analysis of Kota Doria." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 2.8 (2016): 1-5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jsi> (last visited on April, 23 2023)

⁴² Pant, Ruchi. "Protecting and promoting traditional knowledge in India." *International Institute for Environment and* (2015). <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/16576IIED.pdf> (last visited on April, 13 2023)



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price determination, often leaving women weavers with very low earnings. To improve the sector, the study recommends making the production system more demand-driven. Retail brands such as FabIndia and Anokhi could play a transformative role by sourcing high-quality, made-to-order products directly from weavers, thereby bypassing master weavers and ensuring better returns for artisans.

The findings indicate that well-positioned GIs can significantly enhance revenues from biocultural products and help revitalize traditional production systems. However, for traditional products to reach wider markets and to be clearly distinguished from fake and duplicate goods, external support from government bodies, NGOs, and market facilitators is crucial. The report also warns of the risk that powerful traders within the value chain may monopolize the benefits, underscoring the need to ensure that the additional revenue generated from direct retail linkages is equitably shared with poor, unorganized producers.

A relevant example comes from Pochampally, a well-known handloom village in the Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh, famous for its Ikat silk and other tie-and-dye textile materials. For many years, Pochampally weavers have used the name “Pochampally” to market their products. Here, a handloom tie-and-dye silk sarees manufacturers’ association and a handloom weavers’ cooperative society play a central role in regulating weaving activities, ensuring quality, and supporting local artisans⁴³. The Ikat technique was introduced to Pochampally from Chirala, a city in Andhra Pradesh, during the period of the Nizam’s rule. Traditionally, this technique was used to produce Rumal, a cotton fabric that was exported in large quantities to countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Burma.

In 1960, Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, then Chairperson of the All India Handicrafts Board, encouraged the weaving of the first *cotton saree* in Pochampally using this traditional technique. Her successful intervention marked a turning point, leading to the production and marketing of sarees under the name “Pochampally Handloom.”

Today, material sourced from various parts of India is used to create Pochampally sarees and other handloom items. These sarees are widely admired for their vibrant colour combinations and intricate designs, achieved through the weavers’ traditional “tying and dyeing” (Ikat) technique, which requires great precision and artistic skill⁴⁴.

Before weaving begins, sections of bundled yarn are carefully tied and dyed according to a predetermined colour pattern. Historically, this tie-and-dye (Ikat) technique was treated as highly confidential and was practiced exclusively by the male members of weaving families. Today, however, the Society is making efforts to train younger generations of weavers to preserve and continue the tradition. Despite their exceptional skill, weaving communities in Pochampally face severe socio-economic challenges. A single saree, which may take a family up to 45 days to weave, sells for only around ₹2,000 in the market. Until recently, producers were largely unaware of legal mechanisms to protect their intellectual property rights.

Although duplicate products are difficult to identify through technical means, the design itself often reveals whether an item is authentic or counterfeit. Weavers typically monitor nearby markets to detect imitation products. In one notable instance, they acted against Arvind Mills, a local powerloom manufacturer that was printing Pochampally designs. Following the intervention of the traditional producers, the Andhra Pradesh Government shut down the mill. With the enactment of the new law, Pochampally Ikat has now been officially registered as a Geographical Indication (GI).

Many weavers mistakenly believe that filing for GI recognition grants them patent-like rights over their designs, and although they are not fully aware of the provisions of the Geographical Indications (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, they are taking extra precautions to maintain the quality of their products. The GI status is critical for the survival of the thousands of rural families whose livelihoods depend on this craft.

However, the traditional Ikat technique remains unprotected, as it is widely known within local industry circles and cannot be kept secret. The Arvind Mills case demonstrates that legal action against the misappropriation of traditional knowledge is possible, but it also highlights a major gap: GI protection alone is insufficient to safeguard such products in international markets. More comprehensive and coordinated mechanisms are needed to protect

⁴³ Sharma, Ruppel W., and Shraddha Kulhari. *Marketing of GI products: Unlocking their commercial potential*. Centre for WTO Studies, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, 2015. <https://wtocentre.iift.ac.in/contactus.asp> (last visited on April, 16 2023)

⁴⁴ Kawamura, Yuniya, and Jung-Whan Marc De Jong. *Cultural appropriation in fashion and entertainment*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/cultural-appropriation-in-fashion-and-entertainment-9781350170568/> (last visited on April, 9 2023)
<https://ijikm.com/>



traditional knowledge globally and prevent exploitation by commercial entities.

4. Challenges faced by Geographical Indications for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge

There are a few limitations to the use of Geographical Indication as a tool to protect traditional knowledge, so it cannot be used as a comprehensive tool. Firstly, geographical indication can only be used in certain cases for the protection of traditional knowledge⁴⁵. Since Geographical Indications protect only tangible goods, many forms of intangible traditional knowledge—such as methods of healing illnesses, techniques of dyeing cloth, or the performance of folk music—cannot be protected under the GI framework. However, a GI can be granted for products derived from traditional knowledge, such as medicines, dyes, or recorded forms of traditional songs and dances.

It is important to note that while GIs help identify the geographical origin of a product, they do not necessarily preserve the underlying traditional knowledge held by a community. Instead, they function primarily as a market-based tool that certifies where a particular good comes from, rather than safeguarding the cultural knowledge, practices, and skills that produce it⁴⁶. As a result, generic or widely shared geographical indications lose much of their effectiveness in protecting traditional knowledge. GI protection is most suitable for knowledge and products that originate from a specific geographical location and are closely tied to that region's identity. When traditional knowledge is dispersed across multiple regions and not confined to a clearly defined area, it becomes extremely difficult to protect it through GIs.

For example, the Ayurvedic system of medicine cannot be protected under GI law because it is not associated with a single, identifiable geographical region. Instead, it is practiced widely across India and even beyond, making it incompatible with the territorial requirement of GI protection.

Furthermore, geographical indications serve only to identify the origin of goods. If consumers do not consider the place of origin important or relevant when making purchasing decisions, then GI protection has limited practical value. In such cases, the GI label may not contribute significantly to preserving traditional knowledge or enhancing the marketability of the product⁴⁷.

Thus, geographical indications can function as effective tools of protection only when the associated goods possess strong commercial reputation and market value. Without consumer recognition or demand, the GI label alone cannot ensure meaningful protection or economic benefit for traditional communities.

Ultimately, the successful safeguarding of traditional knowledge requires the establishment of a *sui generis* system—a dedicated, comprehensive legal framework with specific safeguards and protection mechanisms tailored to the unique nature of traditional knowledge. Such legislation would go beyond the limitations of GIs and provide a more holistic, culturally sensitive, and effective means of preserving and protecting traditional knowledge for future generations⁴⁸.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Geographical Indications (GIs) should extend beyond merely protecting product names and their origins to also safeguard the traditional knowledge embedded within those products. Intangible cultural heritage—such as traditional medical practices, textile dyeing techniques, music, dance, and other art forms—must be preserved to ensure rightful recognition and respect for the communities that created and sustained them.

To achieve this, a *sui generis* system is essential, as it provides a dedicated legal framework specifically designed to protect the unique characteristics of traditional knowledge. Such a system not only upholds and maintains traditional practices but also guards against their unauthorized use, commercial exploitation, or misappropriation. Despite the existence of several legal provisions, weak implementation and enforcement have hindered the

⁴⁵ Decotignie, J-D. "Ethernet-based real-time and industrial communications." 93 *Proceedings of the IEEE* 1102 (2005).

⁴⁶ Bramley, Cerka. "A review of the socio-economic impact of geographical indications: considerations for the developing world." *WIPO worldwide symposium on geographical indications*. Vol. 22. Lima, Peru: WIPO, 2011. https://www.wipo.int/edocs/mdocs/geoind/en/wipo_geo_lim_11/wipo_geo_lim_11_compilation.pdf (last visited on April, 11 2023)

⁴⁷ Ilbert, Hélène, and Michel Petit. "Are geographical indications a valid property right? Global trends and challenges." 27 *Development Policy Review* 503 (2009).

⁴⁸ Geographical indication as a tool for protection of traditional knowledge with special reference to protection of Cashmere in Kashmir. Singh, K., Available at SSRN 2115257 (2012). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2115257 (last visited on March, 13 2023)



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effective protection of traditional knowledge in practice.

There is an urgent need to strengthen legislation and enforcement mechanisms to prevent the misuse of traditional knowledge and to ensure that the originating communities receive equitable benefits from their intellectual and cultural heritage. Robust legal systems will play a crucial role in preserving these invaluable traditions for future generations. While GIs cannot protect intangible cultural expressions—such as stories, folklore, songs, dances, music, and poetry, since they are not considered “products”—GI registration still serves as a powerful tool for cultural protection and economic empowerment.

It promotes cultural recognition, enhances product value, and generates livelihood opportunities for local communities. Currently, the protection of traditional knowledge tends to rely on defensive mechanisms, such as India’s searchable database of traditional medicinal formulations, which prevents the wrongful patenting of indigenous knowledge.

Although patents can protect new inventions based on traditional knowledge, they often fail to qualify because they typically do not meet two of the three key patent requirements: novelty and inventive step. In such cases, GI protection becomes a more appropriate and effective alternative, especially for community-based products deeply rooted in specific geographical and cultural contexts. By securing GI registration for products derived from traditional knowledge, communities not only gain economic advantages but also enhance public awareness, strengthen cultural identity, and contribute to the preservation of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.