

Recognition and Marketing Opportunities of a “GI” Tag in Handloom Product: A Study of Banaras Brocades and Sarees

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Geographical Indication of Goods is an element of Intellectual Property Right which attributes goods to its geographical origin. These goods may fall under diverse categories as agriculture, natural goods, manufactured goods, food products, textile and handicraft items. Darjeeling Tea was the first product to get GI status and till date 303 products have received GI tagging in India. Legal protection through “GI” tag prevents similar products from taking the unfair advantage. Despite measures by Government to protect the indigenous treasures, the economic potential of most of the products remains underutilized. The study discusses about recognition and marketing opportunities of ‘*Banaras Brocades and Sarees*’, a handloom product that received GI tag in year 2009. The study discusses current industry trends and market drivers for handloom products w.r.t *Banarsi Saree*. Though initiatives have been taken to protect the authentic art of weaving, and awarding ‘GI’ status had been landmark in this regard, but there is lack of planning and implementation of post GI measures in order to realize the commercial potential of same. In order to leverage the commercial benefits of ‘GI’ tag, the study recommends strategies for brand building and marketing of ‘*Banaras Brocades and Sarees*’ for Indian and international markets.

Keywords: Geographical Indication, *Banarasi Sarees*, handloom products, global market, brocades, cottage industry, weaving industry, branding and marketing initiatives, UNCTD, USTAD, NIFT, Make in India

Geographical Indication (GI) is covered under Articles 1 (2) and 10 of Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property and under Articles 22 to 24 of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement. India is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and it enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999 which came into force with effect from 15 September 2003.¹ 301 products have received GI registration so far. Presently the Government of India has concentrated all efforts on pre- GI awareness and registration of the GI product with less emphasis on post registration activities like branding, promotion, distribution channel and export. Studies conducted worldwide prove that by leveraging the regional or geographical associations, most of the products worldwide have not only carved a distinct identity, but also commanded a premium in the global market.

As per a consumer study conducted by the EU Commission,² it was estimated that approximately 40% of the consumers were ready to pay a premium

amount of up to 10%, if the product was available with the guarantee of origin. The same was also validated while commanding a premium of \$14.40 per kg for *Jamaica Bru Mount Coffee* over the benchmark prices by Columbia Mills. More such inferences can be drawn from *French Cheese, French Wine, Italian Toscano Oil, Australian Wine* and others, all of which have been able to command a premium and are major revenue drivers for people associated with it, especially after the post-TRIPS period. Such global trends are clear indication towards the fact that if the products are registered, they can be major boost towards promoting free trade. Moreover, IPR protection may not only promote community ownership but also be an important determinant in commanding premium prices.

In India, GI registrations have been awarded in diverse areas like agriculture, textile, handicrafts and even manufactured items.³ GI in the area of textile and handcrafted items are of prime importance as it provides shielding to the artisans by preserving the genuineness of craftsmanship and also improves the livelihood of artisans.⁴ It discourages substitution and enhances better financial outcomes for the artisans.⁵

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Though there are many specialty products associated with handloom industry, it has seen decline over a period of time owing to low cost alternatives and changing fashion trends. With awarding of Geographical Indication to preserve and recognize the traditional knowledge and further boost received through the “Make in India” campaign, it is expected that traditional handloom industry may regain its unique identity. Since origin of most GI products in the category of handloom can be traced to rural areas like *Pashmina* of Kashmir, *Bhagalpuri Silk* of Bihar, *Kanchipuram* of Tamil Nadu, *Patola* of Gujarat, *Pochampalli* of Andhra Pradesh and *Jamdani* of West Bengal; they can be an important contributor in promoting the rural economy and thus bridging the disparities between the rural and urban India. The handcrafted products with GI certification can command premium at major export markets like Turkey, UK, USA, Germany, France and others. Most of the time artisans have been unable to leverage its commercial potential due to various reasons. Cheap imitations available at low cost pose great threat to their authentic art. The exports of such products are also not adequately incentivized. The potential to boost the branding and, thereby, the commercial value of such products remains underutilized.⁶

Role of GI in Enhancing Product Utility⁷

The GI not only secures the identity of the product but also provides authenticity and legal protection to it, thus protecting the producers against counterfeit products and unfair competition. Apart from this, consumers are able to make informed decisions and are not misled by imitation products. Few major roles of GI tag in enhancing product utility are:

Recognition Benefits

Since Geographical Indication attributes goods to their physical origin, it becomes an important driver in recognizing the traditional knowledge on a larger platform.

Protection of Cultural Identity

The GI tag is instrumental in protecting the cultural identity as it provides recognition to the indigenous products. The recognition thus provided not only preserves the traditional craft but also safeguards it from factory automation, thus protecting the economic livelihood of craftsmen.

Value Creation for Local Communities

GI tag also has an important role to play in creating value for local communities as the products produced

are deeply rooted in tradition, culture and geography. Recognizing the product through GI tag protects indigenous craft as well as traditional knowledge.

Enhanced Brand Value

For emerging economies, recognition of indigenous knowledge and resulting product is of high significance, as most of the products are crafted by people who belong to rural or sub-urban communities, and have minimal information and resources to invest in branding activities. Recognition of products through the GI tag helps in enhancing the brand value of their traditional craft.

Command Premium in Global Market

The geographical limitation on production of product through GI tag and official recognition of its historical and cultural significance is instrumental in sparking the demand for the product in international market. It thus has a role to play in boosting the exports along with commanding premium in global market.⁸

The need of the hour is to take advantage of our indigenous knowledge and leverage the benefits associated with GI certification. This can be done by identifying the current best practices and innovations adopted by producers and traders for enhancing sales of selected GI products, assessing the shortcomings and gaps in efforts made so far for unlocking the commercial potential of selected GI products and devising measures to leverage the commercial potential of such products. Programs to promote the branding and marketing of GI products in domestic as well as international markets need to be designed and implemented for unlocking their commercial potential.⁹ In light of same, the paper discusses specific case of ‘*Banaras Brocades and Sarees*’.

Recognizing ‘Banaras Brocades and Sarees’ through Geographical Indication Tag

In order to recognize the authenticity of *Banarsi Saree* and restore its market, an aggressive campaign for obtaining ‘Geographical Indication Tag’ was started in 2006. The key role in the entire process was played by a local NGO, Human Welfare Association (HWA), with facilitation from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). UNCTAD is known for facilitating producer groups to protect their unique products by obtaining GI registration and owing to its efforts, about 300 Geographical Indication were awarded to various products in India in a span of 10 years.

Representatives of HWA attended meetings of UNCTAD in early 2006, post which the process of obtaining GI for *Banarsi Saree* was initiated. A sensitization workshop was conducted by HWA to emphasize on the importance of GI tag, which was mainly attended by Government Officials, traders and exporters. The center point of the campaign was to highlight how GI tag, as mark of authenticity, will help in getting better recognition and acceptance in both global and national market, along with building strong brand image for the handcrafted product, thus resulting in better price for the product. The process culminated with *Banarasi Sarees* getting GI tag on 4 September 2009, under the registered name of “*Banaras Brocades and Sarees*”.¹⁰ For the GI registration, nine organisations -- Banaras Bunkar Samiti, Human Welfare Association Joint Director, Industries (Eastern Zone), Director, Handlooms and Textiles, Uttar Pradesh, Handloom Fabrics Marketing Cooperative Federation, Eastern UP Exporters Association (EUPEA), Banarasi Vastra Udyog Sangh, Banaras Hath Kargha Vikas Samiti and Adarsh Silk Bunkar Sahkari Samiti -- had applied to the Chennai-based Geographical Indication Registry in July 2007. And, after a long wait of over two years, the world famous *Banarasi Sarees* and *Brocade* got GI status on 4 September 2009.¹¹

Geographical Area

The Banaras city is the main center of weaving. The brocade weaving of the Banaras is cluster based and scattered all over the Banaras district and some adjacent districts. The weavers of the product belong to the city only. The main centers of the brocade weavings are at Varanasi, Mirzapur, Bhadohi (Sant Ravidas Nagar), Chandoli, Chunar and Chakia. But among all, Varanasi city is the most important centre of brocade weaving and more than 85 percent weavers belong to the Varanasi city and its neighboring area only. Out of the different areas of the Varanasi, Madanpura and Ahaipur are two most significant areas of the brocade weaving. It is believed that the brocade weaving in the city initially started in these two areas and subsequently embraced by the other families.

Product Profile

Banaras is one of the rich weaving craft centre of India, famous for Brocade saree and dress material. The exclusive and intricate silk brocades and sarees of

Banaras has made it world famous. Among the different varieties of sarees produced in the centres, some exclusive varieties of the sarees are *Jangla*, *Tanchoi*, *Vaskat*, *Cutwork*, *Tissue* and *Butidar* which are made of silk warp and silk weft, on plain or satin ground base, brocaded with extra weft patterns in diverse layouts introducing *Buties*, *Bells*, *Creepers*, *Buttas* in ground, border and anchal for getting splendid appearance.¹² With the change in time and consumer liking, the weavers of the cluster are also undertaking deviations in the design and pattern of the product along with product diversification. In order to cater to the need of the overseas and domestic buyers, the weavers of the cluster are also producing home furnishing, silk dhotis, stole, scarf, muffler, mats, dress material, wall hanging, made ups like curtain, cushion cover, table cover, napkins, runners

Importance of GI tag for Recognition of *Banarasi Sarees*

In absence of GI tag, it was difficult to differentiate the original *Banarasi Sarees* from similar looking imitation products available in the market. While the original producer suffered from loss of market for their authentic products, consumers ended up paying inflated prices for pirated products. Lack of authenticity, stiff competition from ‘*Kela Silk*’ and ‘*Chinese Silk*’, along with sarees produced on powerloom was eroding the market share for the original handcrafted *Banarasi Sarees* that deserved the actual share. Information asymmetry thus produced lead to sharp decline in original *Banarasi Sarees*. Recognition of *Banarasi Saree* by awarding GI tag was thus imperative to protection of traditional craft and its revival.

Weaving Industry of Banaras

The handloom industry¹³ in India has a significant contribution towards employment generation as well as plays an important role in preserving the cultural identity (Liebl and Roy 2004).¹⁴ It is the second largest employment provider catering to primarily rural population after agriculture. The textile industry of Banaras employs more than 2 lakh workers in weaving and other allied activities, with an approximate annual turnover of INR 30000 million, with its specialty being *Banarasi Sarees* (Varman and Chakrabarti, 2011).¹⁵ As per handloom census of 2017, Varanasi had close to one lakh weavers (Table 1).

Table 1 — Handloom Census, 2017

Parameters	All India	UP	Varanasi
Number of handlooms	2377331	80,295	31,378
Number of handloom weavers	4331876	2,57,783	95,439

Even though the product enjoys high reputation in domestic and international markets, but falling demand of handloom products, inappropriate compensation, lack of appropriate measures to leverage the commercial potential by weavers has led to miserable condition of weavers, who are facing poverty.¹⁶ A rough estimate of dealers in Varanasi have reported that the turnover of hand-woven *Banarasi Silk* has reduced from INR 30 billion to INR 5-7 billion in last 7-8 years. Also out of the total turnover of handloom which is approximately INR 80-100 billion, the share of *Banarasi Silk* accounts for 15 percent only. With changing market dynamics, the industry is facing severe crisis at multiple fronts, which needs intervention in order to revive the sector and leverage its actual commercial potential. The major features of the industry are:

Disaggregated Cottage Industry

The cottage industry in India is quite fragmented and disaggregated which applies to *Banarasi Sarees* as well. The business of preparing *Banarasi Sarees* is traditional in nature, which is being practiced for many years. The structure is unorganized, comprising of weaver, master weaver and traders. Weaver forms the base link of the entire hierarchical chain and is responsible for execution of the designs handed over by master weaver.¹⁷ The master weaver is the middle man between trader and weaver who supplies finished sarees procured from weavers to traders. The weavers do not have direct access to the consumer market and have been following the traditional route of business for many years.

Limited Scope for Automation

The size and structure of the industry is quite large, therefore investing in automation, processing, yarn dyeing; packaging of the finished product and other allied processes is restricted. In the entire supply chain, there has been minimal application of technologically upgraded equipment and process enhancement.

Shortage of Skilled Weavers

Since the product is handcrafted in nature, manufacturing of sarees requires highly skilled labours who know the traditional art of weaving. Due

to inadequate compensation being received by the weavers, most of them have shifted to other jobs, thus leading to shortage of skilled labours.¹⁸ The industry is therefore slowly inching towards extinction.^{19,20}

Changing Taste and Preferences

Lured and influenced by western trends, younger Indian women have moved away from sarees, thus leading to overall decline in demand.²¹ Moreover, their usage of *Banarasi Sarees* is more skewed towards contemporary designs and cost effective stuff. To add to this, producers of handloom made *Banarasi Sarees* have not been quick enough in adopting contemporary designs to keep pace with changing taste and preferences of consumers. Over a period of time, minimalist innovation in product form, designs, colour and texture of the product, packaging and selling has been witnessed.

Lack of Access to International Markets

The marketing of *Banarasi Sarees* is done following traditional practices and is mostly limited to India. Most of the sarees that are produced are sold to end consumer following the traditional channel of distribution. So far minimal efforts have been taken to make the product export ready and export it to international markets.

Lack of Strong Brand Building Activities

There have been no significant brand building initiatives from government or value chain partners in order to promote *Banarasi Saree*. Moreover, there have been no strategic alliances with value chain partners.

Issues and Challenges – Banaras Brocades and Sarees

The main varieties of *Banarasi Sarees* are *Katan* (Organza), *Shattir* and *Kora* (Georgette). There are many reasons of decline of brocade. There has been a decline in demand of handloom products, primarily owing to high cost associated with the product. Moreover handlooms have been incurring huge losses due to faster and cheaper production of look-alike imitation sarees on powerloom. For a silk which a weaver takes 3-6 months to make are made in few days on machine. Though GI regulation clearly specifies that any product which is not made on handloom does not come under the category of *Banarasi Brocade*, yet the biggest challenge emerges from imitation products produced on machines. Moreover, still old designs are practiced and no new innovation in designing of sarees has been

introduced.²² Second very big reason of the downfall of the *Banarasi Brocade* is the increase in price of raw silk, import of cheaper silk from China and falling market demand.²³ There is limited access to adequate resources as raw material and others, and they hardly get any financial or technical support, which limits the supply.

Most weavers are poor and end up working under the contract system. They often get inappropriate wage rate and most of the time do not receive timely payments. Producing a good quality saree on handloom takes about two to six months, but the value which actually comes in the hand of the artisans is quite less. There is no fixed price tag for a weaver's product which they can claim and are often exploited at the hands of master weavers or contractor for which they work. Such exploitation is forcing the weavers to resort to other means of livelihood. Also in our country the biggest drawback of export trends is that the artisans are not in direct contact with exporters. They lack market information and have no direct access to end users²⁴, which leads to gap in demand and supply. Artisans rarely know what exactly the demand of the market is and also major part of the profit never reaches artisans. Further, most skilled weavers do not have identity cards to claim benefits of various schemes that are introduced for them, and to add to it, there is minimal percolation of state run schemes at ground level. Apart from this, there is lack of authentication as weavers are unaware about importance of India handloom brand, Handloom mark,²⁵ GI tag and Quality assurance measures, which can help them, command a better value for their products. Introduction of GST is likely to add up to their woes, as manufacturing cost will increase though wholesaler is not likely to pay more for the products.

This would lead to shrunken margins for the weavers. One more reason which has been identified is the lack of space for display and storage. Because the product is not displayed properly they are unable to get good price of their product. Most of the times they do not have good working conditions or dedicated workplaces and are forced to work in open areas. Further, noises erupting from power looms or handlooms pose various health hazards like hearing impairment, mood swing and others.

Another very big reason of the downfall of the industry is the crisis of electricity. Since last few years the condition of electricity has improved in the

state but still the condition is not very promising. Because of frequent power failure the weavers are unable to work. They work on shift basis and because of power failure their work is affected. The conditions of weaver need immediate attention and steps should be taken to save this great art of our country.

Role of GI in Enhancing the Marketing Opportunities

GI tag can be used to leverage recognition and differentiation opportunities for the associated product. Developing a GI based brand would benefit both the producers as well as consumers. Whereas, it would help the seller in creating a unique identity for the associated brand; it would provide users with assurance about quality, authenticity and uniqueness of the product. The seller may benefit from commanding a premium and thus exploiting the commercial potential of the product while the user benefits from social recognition provided by branded GI product over non-branded products, and facilitates purchase decision by the customer. GI based branding would also help in overcoming unfair competition from imitation and counterfeit products. Recognition of Branded GI products by customers will help in creating a brand pull, thus resulting in increased demand for the product.

There has been limited effort by the government to promote and advertise these GI products in either the domestic or international market. Without such promotion, it is unlikely that a GI product will achieve its full potential. One of the major issues with GIs is that consumers are not aware how the GI tag is supposed to convey information regarding the special characteristics, quality or reputation of the concerned product. Therefore, it requires government or private effort to advertise, improving communication between the producer and the consumer and filling in the other gaps created by information asymmetry. The objective of branding should be to communicate unique and superior value of product to target customers. Marketing of the core product should be done along with its heritage and culture rooted in its geographical origin.

Current ‘Post GI’ Measures for Leveraging Commercial Potential of ‘GI’ Tag

Various initiatives have been taken by the Government and private players to revive *Banarsi Sarees* and leverage its commercial potential post GI registration. Few initiatives are as follows:

Government Initiatives

Various Government initiatives have been taken in order to promote *Banarsi Sarees*. The first step was opening up of a National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT)²⁶ with the aim that it would help in integrating and upgrading the products of weavers, so that they are more contemporary in nature and in line with the changing taste and preferences of the consumers.²⁷ Upgradation of Skills and Training in Ancestral Arts/Crafts for Development (USTAD), an INR 17 Crores initiative was launched by government with an aim to preserve and boost available traditional skills and ensure better access to market. The move was initiated in order to revive the traditional handicraft which had gradually been losing its charm. Ahmadabad based National Institute of Design along with others will be mentoring the craftsmen in designing various programs that would ensure better acceptance of handicraft products. Though not specifically for *Banarsi Sarees*, but to promote the entire range of handlooms, Priyanka Chopra was roped in as Brand Ambassador, so that people can be motivated to adopt saree wearing culture.²⁸ Construction of proposed 6 Common Facility Centre (CFC) is also underway to promote the handloom heritage.²⁹ These facility centres will not only provide skill development opportunities to the weavers but will also be one-stop technical assistance for weaving, dyeing and designing, along with procurement of raw material at 10% subsidy. Apart from this, organizing of various regional art and craft exhibitions and handloom expo by government has been instrumental in providing boost to handcrafted *Banarasi Saree*.

Initiatives by Private Players

Various private players have also extended their contribution towards revival of *Banarsi Sarees*. Flipkart³⁰ introduced a dedicated online portal to promote *Banarsi Sarees* by the name '*Flipkart – Karigar ke Dwaar*'. Flipkart also conducted workshops for the local weavers to help them understand the jargon of online commerce.³¹ It also provided the marketing support, cataloguing and packaging services as well as statistics on retail market trends to help gain more customers. Amazon partnered with India's textile ministry to promote handlooms and empower weavers - "*Authentic handloom products have always found resonance with shoppers. Our partnership with Amazon India will allow weavers to satiate this demand by making their products available in all corners of India. Weavers*

will also get the right value for their offerings through this direct sales channel." The products were displayed in their specialty store – Crafted in India. Next in the series was Paytm which launched a ten crores project to promote 'Make in India' products like handicrafts, though not directly aimed at benefitting only BanarsiSaree. Presence of bigger players like *FabIndia* has also positively impacted the revamp of the product, making it available to the urban customers nationwide and even to international markets.

Suggestive 'Post GI' measures for Leveraging Market Opportunities

For successful marketing of GI based brand – '*Banaras Brocades and Sarees*', there is a need to revamp core product offerings along with adoption of measures for branding and distribution. There is also need to implement strategic initiatives in order to educate the producers about leveraging the benefits associated with GI tag while bridging the information asymmetry and communication gap between producers and consumers. Few suggestive initiatives are:

Revamping Product Offerings

The first step should be revamping the product offerings in order to appeal to modern age customer. New product offerings as designer suits, dupatta, stole, scarves, designer tops etc can be introduced to expand the range offered. The traditional saree can be experimented with more contemporary designs and colour variations in order to keep pace with changing taste and preferences of the consumers. Along with this, modern dresses and customized offerings can be brought in add an element of newness. There is also a strong need to develop western outfits with *Banarsi* weaving technique to suit the international clientele

Branding Initiatives

The objective of GI based branding should be to build the information asymmetry and improve communication between producers and consumers. Measures should be taken communicate the benefits associated with GI tag along with crafting a unique identity that resonates well with target customers. Following initiatives are suggested towards creation of '*Banarsi Saree*' Brand-

Building Strong Brand Identity of Aspirational Lifestyle Brand

The first step should be elevating the *Banarsi Saree* from a cottage industry product to a fashion and lifestyle concept. The branding elements must focus

on building an aspirational brand image of a lifestyle brand that resonates well with the modern age consumer.³² Further, though the core brand identity must focus on aspirational value across regions, at the same time it must be responsive to the specific needs of any particular customer segment by incorporation of element of customization.³³ Apart from this, participation by leading fashion designers can be increased in order to reinforce its brand identity synonymous to a lifestyle brand.

Repositioning

Rather than being solely perceived as supplier of traditional *Banarsi Sarees*, the industry must reposition itself to align with the taste and preferences of the modern age customer.³⁴ Dress material and contemporary fusion forms provide a huge marketing opportunity for the product, which must be tapped.

Introducing Banarsi Mark

Though Government has promoted measures like *Handloom Mark*, but there is no provision of a *Banarsi Mark*. GI Logo specific to *Banarsi Saree* or a *Banarsi Mark* can be developed to provide authenticity to the original handcrafted product. Compulsory inclusion of Banarsi Mark on all GI verified *Banarsi Sarees*, in order to differentiate the original product from counterfeit products will build a strong *Banarsi Saree* brand. Such tags can be distributed free of cost to the weavers, who should be made aware to incorporate these tags while weaving the product. This will boost consumer buying confidence in the brand, and help in passing benefits to actual makers of the product.

Creating Brand USP

Since the product is handcrafted, its uniqueness and exclusivity can be marketed as strong Brand USP for the *Banarsi Saree* Brand.

Strong Brand Awareness

Strong brand awareness for the product should be created through Ad campaigns, celebrity endorsement and engagement and putting up hoardings at vantage and high visibility points. Strong promotion in all trade shows and government fairs, along with dedicated display at international airports can also be introduced in order to promote the same to international clientele.

Building Online Presence

Strong online presence can be built by creation of dedicated portal by government, where products of

different weavers can be displayed. Though the Government of India already introduced a similar portal by the name of ‘*Banarsi Saree Project*’³⁵ but it could not pick off due to unfeasible returns. Measures should be taken to take the payment in advance before the product is shipped so that losses are not incurred by buyers. With enhanced focus on digital capabilities, and leveraging the power of social media, a strong online presence can be built, which will help in establishing a strong consumer connect especially with youngsters.³⁶

Distribution

Vertically Integrated Production Model

A vertically integrated production model must be adopted by the producers so that different processes across the entire supply chain are streamlined and integrated. There should be direct control on each step of supply chain starting from procurement of raw material to supplying of finished products. This would help in establishing better economies of scale and fasten the production process.

Setting up Strong Distribution Channel

A nationwide strong distribution channel must be setup in order to promote the sarees. Different channel partners as agents, distributors, retailers and others must be appointed to exclusively promote the distribution process. Network of marketing consultants and sales executives must be established to oversee the process.

Educating channel partners

The channel partners must be educated about the product’s features attributes and benefits, along with branding initiatives.

Building Retail Presence

Over the years concept stores like *FabIndia* and *Nalli* have been instrumental in linking the producers of traditional handloom products with urban consumers who have shown increased fascination for authentic handcrafted products. Enhanced range of *Banarsi Sarees* can be made available at these stores to boost the brand. Further, dedicated conceptual retail stores or designer outlets on similar lines as *Sewa* or *Nalli* should be introduced so as to build exclusive retail presence for *Banarsi Saree* brand.

Development of Rural Heritage Resort

In order to promote the handcrafted product, Rural Heritage Resort can be established in Varanasi, which

can provide exclusive display and sale of GI based products of the region. The same can be promoted through exclusive branding campaign focusing on importance of rural tourism or can be linked with 'Incredible India' campaign of Government of India.

Exporting to International Markets

Export sales should be promoted by specialized business development executives appointed for overseas business. Selective countries as USA, UK, Germany, Australia and European Union can be targeted for same. Apart from this, dedicated online portals must be introduced to cater to international markets.

Proposed Strategic Initiatives

Linking Weaver to Entire Chain

Focus should be on creating awareness at the level of weaver about the relevance of GI, so as to leverage the commercial potential associated with handcrafted product. Financial support can be provided to weavers for their participation in conferences and workshops.

Creation of Design Centres

Modern and contemporary design centres can be established where large pool of designers can be engaged to create exclusive designs to suit the new age customer. Each of the designs can be customized to bring in an element of exclusivity along with optimizing its production to suit the specific handloom weaving type. This would lead to mass production and supply of handloom fashion products on a large scale.

Industrial Scale Handloom Parks

Though there are many clusters set up in Banaras and nearby areas, where *Banarsi Saree* is produced on handloom, but there is no synergy between clusters with respect to design of product, design of loom, procurement of raw material and linkage with market. An industrial scale handloom would ensure that there would be synergy across these functions, along with consistency in fabric quality and dyeing. Bulk buying would result in better discounts, thus leading to better unit economics. Such industrial scale loom setup would not only produce consistent quality handloom fabric on mass scale but also have more concentrated market linkages to cater to demands generated throughout the year.

Skill Enhancement Centres

Increase of design centres and industrial scale handlooms across the country would result in

increased demand for weaving talent. Existing weavers who have mastered the craft of handloom weaving can be used for training the new age weavers, leading to a strong revenue based employment model. These weavers can be trained on various aspects as product development, design development, printing and dyeing. Along with this, they can also be trained on aspects as market awareness, matching the product to suit customer needs and increasing the production efficiency. Imparting such skill enhancement training to weavers would solve twin purpose of reviving a handloom product along with addressing the employment and wages issue.

Common Facility Centre

Creation of a common facility centre on outskirts of Banaras has already been approved by Government of India. Similar model can also be replicated by private players so as to benefit the weavers at large. The centre should be one-stop shop for all the needs as availability of raw material, improved frame looms and dyeing facilities, sampling and design, printing, finishing packaging and labelling. It should also have a business information centre that can provide guidance regarding domestic and export marketing activities.

Recommendations

In order to preserve the art of handloom weaving, the weavers should have easy access to marketplace. Good quality raw material should be freely available to the weavers, along with adequate initiatives towards standardization of material. The weavers should be provided with better working conditions and get higher wage rate. They should be getting unique identification number or *Weaver I Card*, so that they are entitled to benefits of various government welfare schemes.

As far as recommendations to Government are considered, first and foremost, there should be proper implementation of Government policies. It is required to put an effective check on violation of GI rights of *Banarsi Silk* products so that the weavers get actual benefit of their products. There is provision of fine and imprisonment upto 3 years, if any retailer is found selling an imitation product under the name of *Banarsi Saree*, but same should be implemented strictly to deter people from selling imitation products. Further, government should legislate mandatory usage of *Banarsi Saree Mark*, so as to

clearly differentiate the authentic products from the imitation products. Moreover, *Banarsi Sarees* should be given strong visibility in all state emporiums along with retail presence at major tourist destinations and national capital.

Government should also develop a dedicated ‘*Banarsi Silk Cluster*’. In this, different segments such as weaving, dying, design creation, production, value addition, packaging, wholesale marketing, retail marketing, overseas marketing and institutional marketing need to be organised and looked after by specialised agencies in a specialised ‘*Banarasi Silk*’ cluster. This would not just bring fresh investments into the respective functions, but also infuse specialisation into operations. This specialisation and investment would also help the industry get away from the duplication of work and bring in more uniformity in the final output in terms of process and quality, ensuring the brand and the goodwill of *Banarasi Silk* products industry is sustained.

The Government should foster public-private partnership to address the absence of a support system. Ideally, the industry needs a few players in every segment of the entire supply chain so as to revamp the *Banarsi Sarees*. Increasing awareness amongst consumers regarding *Banarsi Saree* must be the prime focus of policymakers along with industry associations. Further, aggressive measures like awareness workshops should be taken to sensitize the weaving community to increase their participation towards registration process of GI, so as to ensure that they are able to realize the commercial potential of the product.

Conclusion

Granting of GI tag to *Banaras Brocades and Sarees*, has been the first step to protect the age-old skill. The government has been focusing on several awareness campaigns to create awareness amongst weavers about the significance of GI tag, but minimal efforts have been taken towards leveraging the post registration benefits. The weavers mostly remain unaware about the benefits and are not able to claim the actual value of the product that they deserve. Falling income of the weavers, shrunken margins and competition from cheap imitation products is deterring the weavers to continue with the profession. The need of the hour is to revive the sector by creating a strong brand value for the *Banarsi Saree* brand that is in line with the changing taste and

preferences of the consumer, aggressively promoting the product at multiple consumer touch points, setting up a strong distribution channel and above all, taking apt measures to increase the market access of weavers to end consumers in order to leverage the optimal commercial value of their handcrafted product. Drawing insights from global practices to promote GI products, measures should be taken to promote ‘*Banaras Brocades and Sarees*’, by apt intervention from government, public-private partnership and private players, in order to restore the glory that product commanded.

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