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Kashmir pashmina - A journey of standardization through geographical indication

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Abstract

Kashmir Pashmina is famous throughout the world for its fineness, warmth and elegance. It is derived from mountain goat known as *Capra Hircus*. Kashmir Pashmina has been registered under Geographical Indication (GI) Act in the year 2005. GI is an important tool for providing legal protection to traditional knowledge employed in the development of product from a particular geography and thus safeguards the interests of stakeholders. Implementation of GI in Kashmir Pashmina has potential to ensure development of a distinct brand image for this craft. To boost the potential of Kashmir Pashmina industry, effective implementation of GI in Kashmir Pashmina along with its promotion and publicity is very inevitable. This paper provides overview of Kashmir Pashmina, its production process, registration of Kashmir Pashmina under GI Act and enforcement of GI through labelling and certification.

Keywords: Kashmir pashmina, geographical indications, craft, standardization

Introduction

Kashmir is known globally for handicrafts. The State has a history of rich crafts being practised since centuries. These crafts are known for their intricacy and exclusivity. The contribution of these crafts to economy is presently estimated to be Rs.3, 000 crores. Though, there are about 16 crafts being practiced presently, however, crafts like Pashmina, Kani, Sozni, Carpets, Walnut wood, Paper-machie, Crewel and Chain-stitch occupy an important place due to their contribution to economy and towards generating employment opportunities.

Handicraft industry enjoys the status of being number two in terms of providing employment opportunities to approximately 5 lac people associated with it directly or indirectly after agriculture. However, the handicraft industry of the state has not been able to reach the deserved heights due to various factors.

Globally, there is huge demand for the regional handicrafts of Kashmir. However, competition from imitations and look alikes of other countries has marginalised the share of Kashmir handicrafts. Thus, the need is to safeguard the inherited originality of the regional handicrafts through a mechanism that will ensure protection of the handicrafts of Kashmir as well as help in developing distinct brand identity.

Geographical Indication (GI)

The commercial sustainability of traditional practices and produce in the world has been protected by a mechanism such as the GI Act under the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement of World Trade Organization (WTO). It has proved to be an effective method of protecting similar traditional crafts. Many places in the world have been able to protect their traditional knowledge through GI and are getting premiums for their products. Examples are Scotch whisky, Persian Carpets, Darjeeling Tea, Basmati rice etc. This protection has helped in discouraging production and marketing of fake products and imitations in the name of original goods.

Over the recent past, Geographical Indications (GIs) have emerged as a significant form of intellectual property rights in the Indian context. In view of the commercial context of handicrafts, adequate legal protection of GIs has become necessary to prevent their unauthorised utilization.

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The illegitimate practice of using geographical names not only damages reputation of original products, but also deprives the genuine right holders of the returns on investments for developing goods and its reputation in the market (Kulkarni *et al.*, 2011) [3].

In order to safeguard the interests of the stakeholders of the regional handicraft industry, Craft Development Institute, CDI Srinagar facilitated formation of "Tahafuz", a society of handicraft artisans and practitioners to register following 06 (six) crafts under GI:

- Kashmir Pashmina
- Sozini Embroidery
- Kani Shawl
- Khatamband
- Walnut wood carving
- Paper Machie

Though, presently sixteen crafts being practised in the region, it was observed that GI is more relevant for above mentioned crafts due to fact that these crafts are important in terms of their historical background, contribution to economy as well as their potential to be marketed globally. Further, among above registered crafts, Kashmir Pashmina is most important in terms of its high export potential and also due to the fact that cheap imitations of Pashmina are being produced almost everywhere in the world.

Though, Kashmir Pashmina has been registered under Geographical Indication (GI) Act, mere registration is not going to serve the purpose unless something concrete is done for protecting this traditional craft. It is necessary in today's competitive world to create an image of the product in the minds of the customer which requires that one's offering should be different from other competitor's offering which can be done by branding the product. The western customers give value to the handmade products and the Indian crafts can be branded in this way (Ghouse, 2012) [2].

Kashmir Pashmina

Kashmir Pashmina that is renowned for its delicacy and the weaves has attracted attention of the nations from all over the world since times immemorial. The use of this aesthetically crafted apparel has been the pride of oriental royalty and European lords. Despite upheavals, the Kashmir pashmina stays on the forefront of international textile craft. Pashmina is referred to the fabric woven from Pashm- the delicate fibre, which gives the Kashmir fabric its special properties and is produced by Himalayan mountain goats reared on high altitude pastures in Ladakh and Tibet, hundreds of miles from Kashmir. Pashmina is a down fiber or under coat derived from domestic goat known as *Capra Hircus* which is native to India (Von, 1963) [5]. The fabric has a special lustre due to its long, fine fibres, which are as thin as 12 microns. In comparison for a qualitative idea human hair is 200 microns and fine merino wool is 23 microns. The Pashmina related production from the State of Jammu & Kashmir at a present scale is estimated to an approximate annual turnover of Rs. 1000 crore of which Rs. 700 crore is from exports. Over 1,00,000 workers, including women spinners are directly engaged in the production of Pashmina in the valley and about 10,000 more are benefited by the industry, indirectly.

Traditional handcrafted pashmina is woven in Kashmir at India. It is entirely done by hand. But today a large percentage of pashmina shawls are machine woven in India,

Nepal and other parts of south East Asia. Shawls are being made from all sorts of material like wool, silk, angora wool, pashmina etc (Ishrat *et al.*, 2011) [6]. These machine woven shawls are competing with the hand-woven Kashmiri pashminas and driving them out of business. They are all being sold under the generic brand of pashmina. Therefore, more Kashmiri pashmina is being sold in the world than what Kashmir actually produces (Saha, 2005) [4]. Due to industrial revolution and mechanization, look alike of pashmina were produced in bulk throughout the world on machines. Over a period of time the fine traditionally made Pashmina has become synonymous to Cashmere that has already been standardized and benchmarked in the international markets. This growth of industrially produced pashmina globally known as Cashmere was further enhanced by the huge market demand worldwide. The regional pashmina industry, instead of developing a distinct market image and building upon its traditional strengths, took an unprofessional and non visionary approach of entering into a direct competition with these industrially developed goods. As a result, the traditional brand image of Kashmir Pashmina not only got diluted, but it also resulted in loss of competitive advantage that was inherited to traditional goods because of their unique nature.

Facts and figures indicate that raw Cashmere of around 14000 -16000 tons are annually produced from countries like China, Mongolia, Nepal, Scotland and USA of which China alone is presently the largest producer supplying 7500-12000 tons per year. Mongolia with around 3000 tons, Afghanistan around 1000 tons while countries like Iran, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Tibet, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan produce only around 480 tons every year. However, with demand being far greater than supply, cheaper blends and replicas also comprise a major portion of this trade where they are sold as 100% Pashmina or Cashmere based goods. In contrast, as per the available information, Kashmir is producing only 40 to 50 tons of genuine, handmade Pashmina, annually.

The regional pashmina could not suitably compete with the mechanically developed pashmina commonly known as Cashmere in the international market. Therefore, need of the hour is to rebuild the image of Kashmir Pashmina with a focus on authenticity and consequently target the appropriate market segment. The desire for authenticity now occupies a central position in contemporary culture. Whether in search for selfhood, leisure experience, or in material purchases, there is a need to search for the real and the genuine (Fine, 2003) [1].

Production Process of Kashmir Pashmina:

The production process of traditional Kashmir Pashmina is done in 8 stages:

1. Procuring the Pashm wool
2. Preparing the Pashm wool
3. Spinning the yarn
4. Arranging the warp
5. Weaving of fabric
6. Clipping the loose threads
7. Dyeing (Optional)
8. Washing and Packing



Fig 1: Flow Chart of Kashmir Pashmina production Process

Kashmir Pashmina & GI

To protect the inherited traditional value of Kashmir Pashmina, Craft Development Institute CDI, Srinagar through “Tahafuz” facilitated registration of Kashmir Pashmina under Geographical Indication (GI) Act in 2008. The objective of this protection has been to discourage sale of cheap and imitated goods in the name of Kashmir Pashmina and safeguard the interest of the stakeholders associated with this craft. However, the institute has to face various challenges while getting this craft registered under GI. There was opposition from Kashmir Handmade Pashmina Promotion Trust (KHPPT) on the grounds:

- Eligibility and Right of Ownership.
- Registration in Class of Goods 23 & 25 in addition to Class 24.
- Originality of the Craft Technique.

The opposition was later settled with KHPPT and parameters for measuring genuineness of Kashmir Pashmina were mutually agreed. Parameters are

- Made up of fibers obtained from under fleece of mountain goat *Capra Hircus*
- Fineness of fiber up to 16 microns
- Hand Spun
- Hand Woven

Implementation

Differentiation between original pashmina and fake is quite challenging and can't be done manually. As part of enforcement and using the GI Registration received for 'Kashmir Pashmina' for commercial benefits, a Pashmina Testing & quality Certification Centre (PTQCC) has been established, under the aegis of CDI. The Centre would address the current need of testing genuine Pashmina and Hallmarking of the same, in order to compete in the international market. The centre has been set-up with a funding received under the ASIDE (Assistance to States for Infrastructure Development of Exports) Scheme, Ministry of Commerce, and Govt. of India.

To avail service of GI certification and labelling, each practitioner has to apply in GI Registry, Chennai (India) to

become authorised user of Kashmir Pashmina. Only authorised users of Kashmir Pashmina are eligible to avail labelling service. The GI registry after following codal procedures provide user certificates to applicants either as artisans, artisan manufacturers or traders. For the quality certification of Kashmir Pashmina goods, an effective mechanism has been devised to distinguish the genuine products from fakes through using the Nano-Technology Enabled Fusion Labels. Each label as depicted in Figure 2 has Covert (hidden; readable by using a Ultra Violet based instrument) and Overt (visible) information as well as a unique number that is used to record the particulars of the party to whom it has been issued to. Further, each secure fusion authentication label (SFAL) carries invisible nano particles known as Microtaggant (only visible by using an Infra Red based instrument) having a unique code formulated specifically for Kashmir Pashmina.



Fig 2: GI Labels

Benefits of GI in Kashmir Pashmina

The implementation of GI in Kashmir Pashmina is going to avail the following benefits:

- Increase in turnover and exports
- Premium price for products
- Better wages to artisans
- Differentiation from fake and imitated goods
- Recognition and prestige to stakeholders
- Brand Identity
- Conservation of heritage

Present challenges in implementation of GI

- Low awareness among the producers about GI and its benefits
- No promotion of GI registered Kashmir Crafts in national and international markets.
- Time consuming process of GI registration
- Shortage of handspun yarn as most of the women associated with spinning have abandoned this practice due to poor earnings.

Conclusions

The registration of Kashmir handicrafts especially Kashmir Pashmina under Geographical Indication (GI) Act is an important move towards protecting the inherent characteristics of these crafts and an important measure to safeguard the interests of all stakeholders most importantly the practitioners. Implementation of GI in Kashmir Pashmina will help in developing distinct brand image and will ensure premium price for handmade pashmina goods. Nevertheless, implementation of GI in Kashmir Pashmina faces series of challenges. The implementation requires

awareness among the practitioners about benefits of GI and promotion about genuineness of Kashmir Pashmina in national and international markets. Proper and efficient promotion through various media will help in increasing demand for Kashmir Pashmina.

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