

PRESERVING BENGAL'S TEXTILE HERITAGE

History and GI Status of Baluchari Sarees

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Abstract : The beautifully intricate mythological designs and stories are depicted on the fabrics like silk, cotton etc. in Baluchari making it a rich handcraft industry carrying unique style and traditional heritage of Bengal. It not only serves as a heritage but has been a community support as most of the weavers' livelihood depends on this industry. Its uniqueness has been encountered in both medieval and colonial period of Bengal and has attained much popularity during the eighteenth century as Bengal was then a thriving production centre for highest quality of silk. The product requirements change with the change in consumer's demand and wants. Today's younger generation, who gets attracted to more budget friendly picks, believes in more genuine product with governmental authentication if it claims the originality and authenticity of the product. It's here that the GI tagged products are recognized in both local to global market. This tagging helps to popularise and authenticate the product's originality, quality and popularity among the buyers.

The modern techniques have come up in many handloom industries in the present era which have been challenging them in terms of powerloom, production and demand may seem to have compromised but cannot be compared with the handloom design and quality. The renaissance period of Baluchari saree introduced new method of weaving (jacquard) which marked a significant change in the demand and production of the industry along with preserving its traditional nature and lustrous texture of the fabric, marking the royal legacy it holds since time immemorial.

This paper discusses about the historical change of the yarn and its popularizing throughout the ages, followed by the revival of the yarn with modernized techniques, while maintaining the traditional craft and artisanship. It also recognizes the fact that Baluchari handloom industry has got immense popularity in both national and international platform which has also impacted vehemently the weavers for they sustain the lives through this industry with the GI tagging. Hence, in today's technologically advanced framework, where a lot has been replaced by cheap and available resources, proper planning, promotion and popularisation of this art form is essential to preserve the art form, heritage and its economic importance for the industry and authenticity of the product.

IndexTerms - Baluchari saree, handloom industry, Geographical Indication (GI), Bengal textile heritage, craft revival.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian traditional textiles industry is one of the most oldest and vibrant sector in India and has been in existence since thousands of years. The ancient Indus Valley Civilization which was prevalent around 2500 BC, laid the foundation of Indian textiles heritage. Traces of cotton and silk textiles have been found during archaeological excavations of this period, which also show that techniques of textile production were evolving early in this period. Throughout the centuries, India's textiles industry saw many developments, and is now known all over the world for its highly skilled work, detailed designs and fine fabrics. In world trade, Indian textiles were much in demand and merchants from all over the world came to trade them. The Indian traditional textile is an integral part of the rich cultural heritage and economy of the Country since a long time. It has been existed since centuries and now it has become an important contributor to the growth and development of India. The wide variety of the industry, including cotton, silk, jute, woolen, synthetic textiles, the handloom and handicrafts sector, testify the vast creativity and craftsmanship in the Indian textiles tradition. The Indian textiles industry has ancient origins with elaborate textiles and exquisite fabrics woven and richly embellished with intricate designs. The rise of colonial powers posed a threat and an opportunity to the industry, as Indian textiles became famous worldwide and were also competing with the mechanized mills of the West. Yet, the industry experienced a revival between Independence and now, where the policy measures were taken to revive the traditional techniques, to promote exports and to attain sustainable growth. In the current situation the Indian Textiles sector plays a key role in the Indian economy. It is one of the key factors of GDP and also provides an important source of employment especially in the rural areas. The Swadeshi movement during India's independence movement was a pivotal point in resurging the indigenous fabrics and the use of hand spun and hand woven fabrics. Following Independence in 1947, the government of India realized the significance of textiles sector for economic development, employment creation and cultural heritage conservation. A number of policy measures were taken to encourage expansion of the industry such as setting up textile mills, modernising the technique of production and protecting the traditional handloom and handicraft units. Handloom and Handicrafts (HL&HC) have a special position in Indian Textiles Industry. It is renowned for its traditional methods and complex patterns as well as its use of master craftsmen in the rural community. Handloom products like handmade fabric, sarees and home textiles are not only in demand in the domestic market but also in the international market due to their uniqueness and cultural significance. The Indian government has been providing various subsidies to the textiles sector, such as financial assistance, infrastructure development, skill training, and export promotion measures in 2019.

Not surprisingly, careful attention needs to be paid to the use of the word culture when considering these complex issues. It is one of the more complex words in the English language according to Raymond Williams (Williams, 1988). Over the years the definition

and the meaning of the term 'culture' has changed time to time (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). The use of the term 'culture' can be broadly categorised into three types: 'culture as a process', 'culture as a way of life' and 'culture as the arts' (Williams, 1981, Chapter 1; Jackson, 2009, pp. 15–24). Individual beliefs, manners and customs which are evoked and nurtured are often referred to as 'culture as a process'. Through such perspective over the years, the understanding of the essential bond between individual and society has been provided. Even it has demonstrated how a society or an economy can at times require a mechanism for the induction of newcomers to the society and for their active involvement in the economy. It is by this process a society or an economy replicates itself. Otherwise there would be no means of preserving the commonness. Social cohesion would be put under threat by innate differences among people. Therefore, scholars with such a perspective instead of merely describing human behaviour, often tried to portray the social context within which people cultivate the behaviour so that culture can easily become identified with the context. Thereafter, along with growth of social science during the late nineteenth century definition of culture 'as way of life' came into being. The second main interpretation of culture was the need for comparing the end states of the cultural processes. In this aspect, anthropological and sociological studies which have often sought for instances of historical or geographical comparison, have exercised a great influence. Such studies have tended to focus on the customs and social practice of various cultures without probing the question of their origins or the way in which individuals have been inducted into them. They have been showing in their work that cultural processes produce various outcomes, and have often enhanced the convenience of reinterpreting culture not as a process, but as a state. Furthermore, there have been many times when these scholars have stressed that one has to learn the culture of the ordinary people as well as the philosophy of the intellectual elite. The view of culture as an informing spirit that drives and motivates other activities was then used. The static conception of culture was never opposed to the conception of culture as a process as most of these scholars realised that even the static ways of life result from a certain cultural process. Due to this reason, the main interest of these scholars revolved around the material level since much regular activity is bound up with material production but ideas remained as an important part of their approach. The use of the word culture, as it is today, is a very different one, however. The word 'culture' has become synonymous with the arts and particularly those that are seen as serious and deserving, or 'high culture,' and no longer represents a way of life. Unlike the other two definitions, culture now has a specialized meaning based upon which cultural activities are often distinguished from non-cultural ones (Benerjee, 2015, pp. 1–2). The etymological analysis of the word culture and the processes of its interpretation in particular are certainly interesting for us. Which of these definitions of culture is true of the society of craftsmen? Can we categorize culture only as accumulation of art forms? Is such separation of culture from economics is at all justified in case of craftsmen? The reason being, as Jackson (2009, p. 18) points out 'artistic endeavours have a material aspect; professional artists support themselves by patronage or selling their work and amateur artists need another way to make a living'. But, craft making activity is not different from any of such art activity. In fact, in most of the cases the artistry in the craft objects often emerge from a particular socio- economic environment. Therefore, if we do dichotomize these two aspects then the everyday world of craft economics is in complete opposition to the arts which are considered a form of recreation, a means of getting away from the mundane of work. Then, the economic system in the craft society, which is related to the production, distribution and consumption of material, is considered as activities outside of culture and not artistic activities. How culture and handloom is related- Culture and handloom sarees are closely connected to each other since handloom textiles are a platform to communicate and preserve the culture of communities (Benerjee, 2015). Handloom sarees can be analyzed as a material culture, which can shed light on the history, tradition, social practice, artistic expression, and economic life of a region. Each weaving community has unique fibres, colours, motifs, patterns, techniques and designs, some of which are culturally significant. Motifs could include, for instance, local nature, religious traditions, folklore or historical influences. Sarees are also used for important social events like wedding, festivals, religious ceremonies, and rituals, which make them a part of the community life. The several dimensions being-

Cultural Identity: Handloom sarees are a way for communities to maintain and communicate their cultural identity.

Traditional knowledge: The techniques of weaving, dyeing, motifs and craftsmanship are sometimes shared from one generation to another (Oley, 2022).

History and heritage: Saree traditions may offer a good indication of historical trade, migration, royal patronage and cultural exchange.

Social practices: Selection and use of a saree can convey customs, ceremonies, gender roles and social status.

Livelihoods: Handloom production provides livelihoods to the handloom weavers, and a significant impact on the economic and social life of weaving communities.

Sustainability: Handloom textiles can be explored as part of sustainability in terms of local materials, low energy production, traditional skills and sustainability in fashion.

The culture is changed: The culture of handloom is changing due to the changing design, changing consumer preferences, e-commerce and government initiatives.

Indian handloom industry took a radically impactful altered state with the shift in industrialisation and adjoining processes. It is said that the handloom industry is a sustainable economic model which requires low investment and has skill based competency over time. As part of the Industrialisation process, the whole system of handloom industry of India underwent a remarkable change. Being second in position after agriculture, the industry has its traditional inheritance time immemorial in parts of the country like Bengal, South India for its demand and quality assurance along with significant considerations for cotton industry. The handloom industry mostly marked as a rural venture requires essential awareness in regard to both skilled and unskilled practices to improve the quality of work like the various new technologically upgraded weaving practices, using different fabrics and specification and knowledge of products along with the indigenous practices will provide a holistically aid in development of the market and bring up the marking exclusivity of the indigenous handloom forms like Baluchari sarees in the contemporary platform. With the concept of local to global and the liberalization process, one of the major industries responsible for the national GDP and economic upheaval, and for providing employment in rural areas, has witnessed a remarkable change in the textile and clothing industry. The indigenous industry of Handloom is facing grave crisis in the modern era due to technological advancements as the market is being monopolized by powerloom industry, while the quality and uniqueness in the handloom industry is being compromised with innovation and style at a budget friendly price. Without such replication, handloom is the symbol of its diverse and versatile but flexible designs, batch production and sustainability, which is a lifeline for indigenous people.

Saree is an emotion; a traditional heritage and its cultural value is not only just confined to the style or an attire for women of Bengal but an unstitched yarn of fabric which holds the backbone of handloom (Pooja & Sofia, 2023). Its rich cultural heritage passing over generations signifies the masterpiece artistry from Dhakai Muslin to rustic charm of Tant handloom, Baluchari designs along with the embroidery of Kantha stitched drape, some of the refined living traditions of Bengal. It seems like the Bengal sarees are the centre of India's Fashion-forward story telling in this fast fashion trend. It portrays the strength and eternal tradition of Bengal's handloom heritage. Amongst these, Baluchari handloom industry has become significant in attaining popularity in both domestic and international platform.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts secondary research methodology and thus explores the link between saree and Indian culture. The information was gathered from secondary sources such as books, journal articles, research papers, government publications, websites of museums and culture heritage, and reliable internet articles. The study was done on the evolution of sarees, the handloom tradition in the different regions, weaving process, motifs, colours, cultural importance, and use of sarees in festivals and social events. Data from the various sources was compared and analysed to look for common themes, variations among regions and changes over time. The material gathered was then arranged thematically to gain insight into the role of the saree in cultural identity and the transmission of traditional knowledge. To increase the validity and reliability of the study, only credible and relevant sources were chosen.

III. HANDLOOM SECTORS

In rural India, handloom industry grew up and weaving became a secondary occupation for living after agriculture and flourished in groups, becoming a major part in local economic growth for both rural and urban lives. Products in demand in the local markets are mostly produced by the weavers whereas exclusive designed articles are produced occasionally as per customised orders from elite customers. As the handloom industry slowly developed several regional and indigenous styles and techniques came to the fore. Most of the styles taken up by the weavers have been found to be inspired by the Buddhistic or Persian designs like animals and plants, and the designs are now exclusive to the industry. Even in the contemporary products such art forms still prevail (Benerjee, 2015, p. 3).

The contemporary handloom industry shares a unique position in Indian economy amidst issues like low wages of weavers, no legal protection and government benefits like formal sectors, lack of unions to voice for the rights, the putting-out system, and leaving weavers vulnerable to exploitation. The Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) along with free trade provisions, a rise in vying amongst the textile industries can be traced both in local and global forums. But those historians, who have been restricted within the thought of industrialisation and de-industrialisation and also the researchers of anti-imperialist house in the country have tried to explain the influence and effect of the colonisation in handicraft market. Handloom craftsmanship acts like a resistant over the escalating tension between the traditional Indian identity and the modern techniques of industrialisation (Benerjee, 2015, pp. 4–5).

Historians have remained confined around the issues of industrialization or deindustrialization. The anti-imperialist vibe of Art and Craft Movement in India (e.g., Birdwood, 1880; Coomaraswamy, 1909) influenced a number of scholars who have tried to measure the impact of colonialism on Indian craft traditions (Guha-Thakurta, 1992; Mitter, 1997). Handloom is even seen as a political symbol in the increasing tension between Indian nationality and the process of industrialization (Cohn, 1996, p. 147; Ramagundam, 2004, p. 54).

The concept of trade and commerce has been presented with the barter system in the History of early human civilisations where mostly things have been exchanged in kind. Business and consumption are thought of as two sides of the same economic coin. Thus, in every civilisation, the behavioural pattern of the consumers is the driving force to carry forward a business. The business value chain is completely based on the consumer's craving to "Needs", "Wants" and "desires" and not just the effective production and manufacturing. The consumer behaviour can be segmented in three parts namely, Pre-Purchase, Purchase and Post-Purchase. In consideration the pre-purchase stimulates the exchange in business acting as the root while purchase and post-purchase act similar to stem and leaves.

3.1 Cultural Significance of the Handloom Sector

India's handloom sector is profoundly infused with the various cultures of the ethnic groups of the country. Weaving has been linked to the artistry of all times, the culture and tradition since ancient times. Mishra and Mohapatra (2020) studied and found that the intricacy in hand weave designs represents the culture and tradition of indigenous people. Boruah (2021) correctly noted that there is a specific weaving pattern in regions involving Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Godda, which has been passed down over the years and has been perfected.

The entrenched knot between cultural identity and handloom textiles is essential to promote the communities, preserve heritage and maintain socio-cultural assimilation in the country (Mahanta et al., 2024). The handwoven artistry isn't just a fabric print, but so much more. It evokes the emotional feelings of the region as manifested in the unique stories, traditions and belief of the region, which have been passed down over the ages (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2020).

Baluchari art form is being restored and preserved by the Bengal Government in Bishnupuri katan silk fabric. The new generation customers have to be attracted and GI tag has played a key role in maintaining the popularity of the product which has helped the handloom weavers in their living. The complex cloth work is not only confined to the making of sarees but also home furnishings, bags and wallets and with these collections it is gaining fame the world over. Thus, it is essential to understand motifs weaved in the Baluchari sarees so that it holds a pivotal place in the world of fashion, helping in employment, preserving the cultural heritage and sustainable living in the yarn of modern techniques.

IV. HISTORY OF BALUCHARI SAREE

The handloom industry of Bengal dates back to the days of the Guptas, and was later followed by the Mughal and colonial era. In the different districts, there are numerous kinds of cotton textile industries mainly at Shantipur, Phulia and Begumdewip, Nadia and Hooghly, Dhanekhali, Murshidabad, Bardhaman and Dhatrigargh, some famous centres of Bishnupur and Mirajpur silk saris

have caught the attention. Muslin fabric, being a silk variety fabric is of historical significance in the textile industry. Similarly, Baluchari saree also became popular.

In the Mughal era one could notice a surge in the demand of the Baluchari saree in the court and amongst other royal families of that time. The historical evidences show that the place Baluchar was the hub to reinstall the traditional Baluchari Saree which got a new structure from the artistry in the soil of Murshidabad in Bengal. Due to the forceful shifting of career of the craftsmen in absence of the patronage of art and economic and political factors in the colonial period, the industry succumbs to downfall. The sarees hold the stories and evidence of the socio-cultural political lives of the Mughal period, European activities, mythology as they uphold the depicted stories in the form of weaving style in the sarees.

The geographical origin of the saree derives its name (Baluchar to Baluchari) and upholds the socio-traditional heritage of the region, signifying importance of the textile industry and traditional heritage of Bengal. The artistry has changed from motif to story telling from regional to novel styles in Mughal age where the yarn has been emphasized as exclusive from other regional fabrics (Parthiban & Kandhavadvu, 2018). The first nawab of Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan was patron of the artistry of the Baluchari fabric and the origin of Baluchari saree can be marked in Murshidabad in West Bengal. In 1704, Nawab shifted his capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad and the proficient weavers of the art form preceded him to Baluchar and established themselves on the banks of river Bhagirathi on the undivided Bengal. Baluchar ('Balu' - Sand and 'Char' - Island) referred to the sandy bank of Murshidabad. The name of the Saree comes from the island of Baluchar (Mallick & Dhar, 2018). The island Baluchar was inundated by the Bhagirathi floods again and again in 19th Century and settlement there was not possible. Now it is known as Jiaganj Municipality in Murshidabad.

4.1 Golden Period

Its golden era was in the 18th century with the story and the artistry of its motifs keeping its heritage alive. With the trading policies founded by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan and geographical position of Murshidabad, Baluchari textile industry reached its zenith point. Murshidabad had been a land of high quality silk fabrics and a domain of sericulture since the early time. With the shift in capital, Murshidabad became the most promising centre for trade and commerce and hub of the craftsmen who visited from different parts of the world and settled there in the flourishing trade.

4.2 Downfall of Baluchari Saree Industry

The handloom industry suffered a collapse in the early 19th century because of the Industrial Revolution. The conversion of handloom to jacquard powerloom was a radical implosion in the booming handloom industry. The fate of Baluchari sector was no exception. This caused severe sustenance problems to a large-scale weavers, to sustain their life. So a larger portion didn't continue the art form and opted for more viable options in other career areas (Mukherjee, 2012).

4.3 Migration and Relocation of Baluchari to Bishnupur

However, in the latter part of the 19th Century, with the continued flooding, a shift occurred amongst the weavers of Murshidabad. The floods in Baluchar had a devastating impact which ultimately resulted in the demise of the Baluchari handloom industry in the region and challenged the life of the weavers, and affected the regular production of Baluchari.

In this crisis, nearly 200 kilometres away from the designated places, the Baluchari weavers set up their settlement in Bishnupur, Bankura (then capital of the Malla dynasty). The Malla kings patronaged the art of Baluchari saree, provided refuge and supported to revive and popularise it to the highest spot in the handloom industry in Bishnupur. Being highly patronaged by the art and industry form and weaving in Bengal, the Mallas contributed immense to the handloom sector in Bengal. In this period Baluchari saree production was very much thrived and the weavers used Tussar silk and embroidered design under the explicit Bishnupuri silk which overall depicted a transition, a changed Bengal through Islamic painting, which documented the stories of mythology.

The pioneers of the contemporary Baluchari sarees in Bishnupur, West Bengal like Dubraj Das, Hemachandra Bhattacharya, Gostha Karmakar and Mia Jan worth mention along with the several artists and weavers to help in reinstalling the handloom industry. They have contributed to the retrofitting of the industry in the market in the 19th century and brought in the customers.

4.4 Dark Period from 1903–1956

In 1903, the first weaver of Baluchari saree, Dubraj Das died leaving behind his craftsmanship, and gradually the industry started declining. No one was there to preserve his heritage craftsmanship and the art form being neglected, for over 50 years languished. The art form which ruled the industry without being nurtured, practiced and less inspired again immersed in darkness.

4.5 Revival of Traditional Baluchari in the 20th Century

It was in the year 1956 that the dying art of Baluchari was revived in West Bengal. Subho Thakur, a renowned artist and patron Hanuman Das Sarda (Chief Organizer, Sil Khadi Seva Mandal) invited Bishnupur master weaver Akshay Kumar Das to adapt the art from traditional Jala looms to Jacquard weaving. The transition is amazing in production efficacy and traditional historic motifs are still retained. This revival of this art form ensured its continuity to be passed on to the generations of people who are coming up in the times of modernisation (Banerjee & Chakrabarti, 2022).

Many design construction can be easily prepared to realize the desired diversified production. One of the standout features of a Baluchari saree is its attention to detail and exquisite craftsmanship of classic designs. To survive in this competitive market it is important to cater to the various population and meet the needs and be accepted by them, Computer Aided Designing (CAD) can help to facilitate in the creation of broad and acceptable design pattern (Karmakar & Agrawal, 2022).

V. BALUCHARI INDUSTRY

The handloom industry in India has a long history and is steeped in tradition, representing the country's cultural heritage and values. The handloom textiles of the country are characterized by their historical roots, high quality, complex designs and rich colours. Silk fabric plays a crucial role in the textile sector, with significant impact on India's economy. About \$2.75 billion is the present market value of Indian silk enterprises. Silkworms or sericulture is a flourishing industry in all over the country and is an integral

part of the culture of countries like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir. As a testament to India's rich heritage, this sector showcases the country's distinct and varied culture, the artistry and skill of its handloom textiles.

Indian silk is known for its unmatched glamour and timeless elegance around the world. Indian silk has held on to its status of being the finest and the most elegant fabric over the centuries. Among the variety of textile industry, the silk saree is the glittering gem of Indian textile industry. These sarees are closely connected with the traditional Indian attire and showcase the exceptional talent of the local weavers. It is the ultimate traditional dress for women in India, and it's a beautiful piece of expert workmanship. The rich hues and elaborate design patterns artisans produce long-lasting artworks that are singularly beautiful and hold sway in the local market. The handloom sarees are highly demanded throughout the nation due to the eternal demand, and the numerous weaving centres make a wide range of silk fabrics with their own regional style.

The rulers of Malla were very generous in extending patronage to Baluchari weave, which was spread to their Bishnupur. It was on the verge of extinction, though. It was tried to be revived by Central Government, Shubho Thakur and Hanuman Das Sarda. It is now doing well. Silk is the key and preferred material of the Baluchari Saree weavers. They get their silk yarns from the renowned silk producing area Malda and Murshidabad in West Bengal and imported silk from Bangalore. In addition to the traditional mulberry silk, they are now trying to use other types of silk such as tussar, nistari and the rare wild muga silk as the interlacing part of the weft. Traditionally, the weft of Baluchari was 3-4 ply untwisted silk while weft shedding was 2 ply, whereas today the weft is 2 ply twisted or untwisted silk and the shedding is 2 ply pre-twisted "organize" Bangalore silk. The heft and weight of the Baluchari saree is determined by the quality of the yarns. Factors determining the quality include the number of filaments and temperature during reeling. Unfortunately, the yarns available today do not meet the optimum specifications, which in turn has an impact on the quality and weight of the final product.

The historical region has a rich traditional heritage in handicraft artistry and diverse regional culture. Traditional saree designs are primarily inspired by nature, featuring patterns that mimic the shapes and textures of plants and animals.

Traditionally, the unique Baluchari Sarees are 5 to 6.5 mts. long with a width of 116 cm to 122 cm and have a weight determined by the artistry and amount of silk used for the zameen, border and pallu. However, each saree weighs around 400 gms and the most distinctive features of the saree are its detailing in the pallu, and border. 'Naksha Paar Baluchari', 'Mina-kara Baluchari', 'Chhoto Anchal Baluchari' are some of the variations.

With the demand and trend in the market, the Baluchari handwork is not just limited with the silk fabric but a cotton fabric has attained popularity in substantial amount in the market. The versatile craftsmanship of the handloom portrays its demand in contemporary period. The complex designs depend on efficient hands which turn them to the ancient handlooms on the silk or cotton fabric on which they are threaded. The creation of such narratives tapestries can take weeks of diligent work and they deserve to be paid their due. It's expensive but the wearable masterpiece adds to a wardrobe. It is the weaving of history onto the loom and the innovative techniques of the craftsmen, which have been kept with the timeless weaving ingrained in the classical soul of the art form.

A new unique product line incorporating different styles and materials may result in the growing of the Baluchari saree market. In the 19th century, there was a great change in the periphery of the market and, it became difficult for the traditional crafts to survive alone. Mechanization, commercialization, consumerism, fast urbanization and subsequent global economic processes are the factors that help the handloom industry, including Baluchari, to evolve. The passing of traditional skills and inherited knowledge to future generations can be difficult. Changing socio-cultural environment is the biggest challenge for traditional crafts like Baluchari to gain market access. Thus, in the present situation large scale enterprises must necessarily diversify product market.

Initially, the artisans endeavoured to include Western designs and motifs. However, it failed because it lacked local character and it was of poor quality. Baluchari industry has entered a new phase and it is expected there will be significant increase in the production of finished goods. Product diversity should combine a certain history with modernity; there should be a wide variety of colours and products outside of the show range. A focus should be given to the detailed designs of the new versions that are coming out, while retaining the traditional feel of the art form. Baluchari is perceived as a cultural phenomenon and a traditional one. As a basic strategy of the market, the Baluchari sector should diversify its products in order to remain competitive. In order to be a successful market strategy, the product needs to be unique and superior to other products. Specialized marketing or market segmentation in relation with customer customization should be included in the process. The wide variety of Baluchari products can be used in a composite fashion with other fabrics with weaving to add to the utility of the complex designs. It is important that a Quality Assurance system is present, in order to ensure a stable presence in the global market. In the present situation, it is essential to give proper promotion to Baluchari goods using the appropriate media. The Handloom products such as Baluchari are starting to be recognized digitally through online promotion. The arrangement of a buyer-seller encounter might be considered a promotional venue for the pertinent products. By collaboration with professionals and boutique owners can help to enhance the selling of the desired product range.

The post-colonial period initially emphasized Western influence as a consequence of revolution in the baluchari industry; however, the quality of this work was not very good in the international market. Those items were viewed as knock-off luxury items. The products lacked the local flavor, causing the products to be unable to satisfy the clients at national level. The bi-directional rejections forced the whole Baluchari market to enter a decline stage, in both quality as well as quantity. The changes brought by globalization and liberalization at a local and macro level has led to a positive transformation. The certainty of quality and genuineness of products and cultural relics is the main element to draw in choices of urban base customers who're inclined towards native indigenous work. In the recent years the revival of the Baluchari industry has been due to the enthusiasm of the people and the steps taken by the Government. In the past, weavers explored other means of livelihood, but now, following a range of interventions, they have returned to Baluchari with a new vision of improving these colourful cloths with an ethnic twist.

The Baluchari saree has been registered and got the GI tag in the year 2012 by the Office of the Commissioner of Textile, MSSET (Micro & Small-Scale Enterprises & Textile) Department under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999, by the Government of West Bengal. In order to bring back the everlasting glory of the Baluchari textile industry, 'Bishnupur Silk Khadi Seva Mandal' has taken up the task. The efforts of revival of the artistry can be done with the synchronised efforts of both Central and State authorities. The state government has begun the process to give a platform to live for the masterpiece weavers of handloom industry by introducing retail brands and cooperative apex bodies, such as Tantuja, Tantushree, Manjusha and

Biswabangla. The individual boutique owners are also playing a pivotal role in reviving the state of living of these weavers by working directly along with them and provide a thrust to the art form. As the growth of handloom industry, some of the weavers began their own independent business and thus broke away from the 'Silk Khadi Seva Mandal'. The new dimension of the artisan entrepreneur who are starting their own businesses are achieving huge popularity in both regional and national levels.

The organisational structure can be utilised as a three-tier structure, where the artisans work directly under the Silk Khadi Seva Mandal and Tantushree, second, a group of artisans may work as independent entrepreneur who employ their family members and third, some may be outsourced artisans working under the sub-contact of the Seva Mandal, who may route the finished product to the designated contractor.

VI. DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW IN INDIA

The concept of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) was brought to India from the west. The Indian Trade and Merchandise Marks Act 1884, was the first Indian Law regarding IPR. The first Indian Patent Law was enacted in 1856 followed by a series of Acts being passed. They are Indian Patents and Designs Act in 1911 and Indian Copyright Act in 1914. The Indian Trade and Merchandise Marks Act and Indian Copyright Act have now been replaced by Trade and Merchandise Marks Act 1958 and Copyright Act 1957 respectively. The first committee to study the existing Patents and Designs Act was formed by the Indian Government in 1948. In 1957, Government constituted a committee headed by Justice Rajagobala Ayyangar Committee (RAC) for revision of the Patent Law. Rajagobala Ayyangar Committee submitted its report on 1959, the report tried to balance the constitutional guarantee of economic and social justice enshrined in the preamble of the constitution. This report gave the procedure of Patenting of drugs. In this report, the policy of Patent system in India was stated (Prabu et al., 2012). At times, there has been a lot of discussion on the effects on developing countries of the strengthening of IPRs. The possible role of IPR in the developing countries varies as per intensity of technological activity. Developing countries went along with the TRIPS agreement for a variety of reasons, ranging from the hope of additional access to agricultural and apparel markets in rich nations, to an expectation that stronger IPR would encourage additional technology transfer and innovation. The long term benefits are however uncertain and expensive to implement in many countries, particularly in the poorest countries. There are grounds to assume that IPRs have a positive effect on growth prospects when enforced. On the domestic level, growth is spurred by higher level of innovations although this result tends to be fairly insignificant until countries move into the middle income bracket. On the other hand, it recognizes that the growth impact of IPRs have occurred at different times and across different parts of the world, countries have experienced high rates of growth under differing levels of IPR protection. Certainly in poorer countries there are short term costs to be borne from stronger IPRs, such as the increased cost of technology and protected products (Prabu et al., 2012).

VII. GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION (GI) AND TEXTILE PRODUCTS OF INDIA

Defining Geographical Indication (GI) as indicator to designate a product which is originating from a member country's territory or a specific region or locality within that territory, is the latest improvement in Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). The quality of the product, reputation or other characteristics are an essential part of the geographical origin of the product. Some of the demographic locations become prominent because of the products that are "made in this place" with distinctiveness and quality. The GI can be expanded to include the traditional and intellectual products. Handloom and textile is an industry based on the traditional heritage in the textile and garment industry. Many handloom products have peculiar locations and are common throughout the nation, such as detailed designs and artistic styles. In fact, every cluster of handloom has its own unique designs and complex techniques like Tie & Dye from Gujarat (Patola), Ikats from Pochampally or Orissa, Jari from Surat, Sarees & Brocades from Banaras, Chikan from Lucknow, Baluchari from West Bengal, Kanjivaram from Tamil Nadu or Chanderi from Madhya Pradesh. They have a clear and sustainable market in the local sector and some of them even managed to get into international market. The protection of markets of such producers is being threatened by imitation and duplication by unauthorized producers in the world market under the umbrella of WTO, thus endangering the livelihoods of the artisans because of unethical competition. The competition comes from local market as well as foreign competition. Thus, the protection of these artistic styles, their practitioners and the interests of consumers through the incorporation and implementation of Geographical Indications (GI) in the TRIPs Agreement and its subsequent legislation in the member countries would be an important tool to prevent infringement and stimulate revitalization of TK in the globalized age. The importance of intellectual property rights in protecting indigenous products has been depicted by the response of the international stakeholder to the number of products protected under the national legislation of the three countries (About 720 in the EU, 140 in Australia and an equal number in China).

GIs refer to the association of the quality, reputation and characteristic of a product to its geographical origin. GIs can be from agricultural products, manufactured products, natural and handicraft products, food and beverages. Protecting GI is the main goal to protect the traditional knowledge, to promote rural economy and to protect consumers against counterfeit or inferior products. There needs to be adequate protection of GIs through the law to limit their misuse, as they are capable of commercial exploitation. GIs have emerged as a significant type of intellectual property in India in the past few years with over 500 successful products registered until mid-2023 (Ghosh et al., 2025). The GI Act and subsequently GI Rules to implement it had several social, cultural, economic and political motivations. A major purpose of India's GI laws was to safeguard and maintain the cultural heritage of a particular geographic region. The GI laws were supposed to boost the growth of these areas through the encouragement of local industries, employment creation and infrastructure development. Lastly, the GI laws in India are in line with the international standards and agreements, including TRIPS Agreement. Such international recognition is crucial to enhance the international marketability of Indian GI products. The GIs make a product more competitive and marketable, and are very important in the global marketplace. Further, it also safeguards traditional knowledge, boosts export revenue margins and reduces the potential for unauthorized use of items. Protection of the GI products both domestically and internationally can have positive effects on the domestic economy. It ensures the authenticity of the product, guarantees its quality and tries to maintain its uniqueness. GI protection is the most effective means to harness a region's competitive advantage. Lastly as GI registration takes consumer attributes into account, it is also quite profitable for agribusinesses (Ghosh et al., 2025).

The GI Act, 1999 provides the definition of a GI as any goods with characteristics which can be linked to its geographical origin, in Section 2(1)(e). A GI can be registered for one or more of these items, and may include any types of goods that the registrar may specify, under Section 8 of the GI Act. Although Section 21 of the GI Act provides for exclusive use of the GI by the authorised users and also provides for raising complaints against infringement, there are no proper provisions for enforcement of these rights in the legislation (Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999; Ghosh et al., 2025).

7.1 Origin of GI Including TRIPS

Geographical Indication is a sign or an indication used to brand or tag a product so as to signify that the specific product comes from the specific place and that its specific characteristics, quality and reputation are due to its geographical origin.

The Geographical Indications of Goods Act of 1999 in India comply with the TRIPS Agreement, creates a customized form of protection regime to guard the products which possess special geographical qualities and reputation. This aims at safeguarding the producers and misuse of the registered GIs like the Darjeeling tea, Mysore silk, Baluchari sarees etc. This certainly shows India's intent towards the protection of the national heritage. GI tags not only boost incomes, generate sustainable livelihoods, and contribute to regional economic development but also help in promoting rural products and ensuring equitable prices, and in the conservation of traditional crafts, thus ensuring the preservation of the regional culture (Bramley, 2011).

Products that have a GI tag earn authenticity, gain credibility and inimitability which enables consumers to pay higher than average price for these premium products (Berenguer, 2004).

In fact, a GI tag is intended to certify under the law the quality and geographical uniqueness of a product, but the brand name of the region itself has tremendous force. Saying where a product comes from instills an emotional and cultural affinity towards the product as well as provide consumers with a sense of trust and pride in the authenticity of the product. Hence, the consumers can give more importance to "Darjeeling Tea" on the basis of its origin and not necessarily because of its GI label since the very place from where the tea originates is a place of credibility and tradition (Vinayam, 2015).

Geographic indications provide indispensable information towards protection of the identity as well as the quality of agro products associated with particular geographical regions. The only products that allow others to use their logos and names are GIs – like Champagne, Parmigiano-Reggiano and Darjeeling tea – which are legally protected and meet set stringent geographical quality and standards.

GI markings can enhance trust and confidence in a product and help mitigate the chances of an inferior purchase. The study portrays the managerial implications related to GI certification for the sellers of the traditional handloom apparel in India. Using GI Copyright as a marketing tool can show to the entire market and especially to consumers keen on quality that the legal copyright on the handlooms is valid hence increasing the trust of consumers and the willingness to purchase GI certified handlooms (Prathap & CC, 2020).

7.2 Protection of Market Through GI

It is observed that under the Geographical Indication Act, a few of the twenty textile and clothing items have been tagged under GI and few investigations have been carried out to understand the important changes in the market economy and dynamics. A research to see what effect has the registration had on traditional items in national and international markets.

In the year 2004, under the Geographical Indication Act, the Pochampally Ikat has been registered. An analysis based on the product from its date of registration till about a tenure of more than one and a half years later, the dynamics in the supply chain and manufacturing organisations marked statistical changes. Understood that initiation took place to identify the growth and successful increase of enterprises in the process of branding of Pochampally in the handloom industrial market. A comparative study should be made and documented before and after the GI tagging process because it will enable future researchers to explore and investigate the fields. Along with quality, GI marking enhances the reputation of the product, ensures the customers get the authentic product. There is a dire need to put up researches and investigations on the exclusive products after their branding and tagging under GI category instilled from January 1, 2005.

7.3 Rural Industry and GI

Many of the magical treasures of India that is seen everyday in the life of people have centuries of history behind them, if they didn't exist, where would they come from and how could they be made? GI protection only ensures that whatever knowledge is being carried on for centuries from generation to generation it remains protected and are not lost to cheap duplications and mass production of the same. Artisans understand that there is something special about the way they work, their creativity, skill and knowledge. GI simply enhances security and continuity of its trade.

GI tag translates to premium pricing and market value when marketed in the domestic as well as the international market and thus, boosts the local economy. Surveys say that customers are ready to pay 10–15% more for GI tagged products which happens to be a significant financial boost for farmers, weavers and artisans.

To promote Increase in Tourism there is a need to promote Village Tourism, where people within the country and foreigners visit the villages where the GI tagged products are available and are produced. The purpose of the visit is either to buy the GI tagged product which will be authentic for consumption or use or the other purpose is that people are curious to know how these products are made and what factors contribute in that product being the identity of that particular place where it originates from.

GI is supporting small industries and MSMEs. Most of the products with the GI tag are the products of small farmers, artisans, weavers and village level industries but the problem with them is that they don't have that kind of financial budget to market their products. Through GI they are given a group identity and legal recognition for their efforts. For instance, GI helps MSME's product to be protected from copying, as once the product gets a tag of GI, MSME's can use the name only from a specific region.

GI enables communities to collectively own their brand, giving them bargaining power to earn higher profits as previous middlemen would take all the profits while producers would receive only a fraction, thus preventing them from being exploited.

7.4 Handloom and GI: Case Study of West Bengal

Some market demand has been generated for the handicraft and handloom products from West Bengal due to the G.I. tags. Today the products inscribed with the G.I. mark, such as Baluchari silk sarees, Dokra craft and kantha embroidery are in demand all over the country and also internationally. This has led to an increase in demand, revenue growth and market potential for the MSMEs operating in the state.

West Bengal handlooms are a conversion of yarns to vibrantly coloured textiles displaying the weaver's skill and the rich heritage of the region. Unfortunately, the use of handloom is on the wane owing to competition with machine-made fabrics, change of taste and poor marketing (Bag, 2021). Cooperatives such as the West Bengal State Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society (WBGHWC), popularly known as 'Tantuja' are the backbone of the handloom industry as it helps the weavers and evens the balance of power with the middlemen. Weavers are empowered and tradition is preserved as consumers are looking to cooperatives for authentic products. Tantuja has contributed significantly towards promoting the diversity of handloom products in the state. The correlation between product quality, pricing and customer satisfaction in Tantuja brand is the main theme of this study. Survey results indicated that the customer satisfaction with the quality and price of the product was 58% out of 112 respondents from the Tantuja brand. The other 42% is accounted for by the regression model. The survival of handloom is dependent on able cooperative society and quality products. In order to sustain and flourish, cooperatives need to understand their customers' preferences and needs, which can help them to maintain this vibrant artistic legacy (Datta et al., 2025).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Baluchari saree has been one of Bengal's most lasting cultural and textile heritage, whose history stretches from the sandy banks of Bhagirathi in Murshidabad, over the years of royal patronage, colonial disturbance, migration, near extinction and a remarkable revival. This paper has mapped the Baluchari's multi-layered history, including its genesis under the Mughal nawabs, the golden age of 18th century craftsmanship, the debilitation brought by industrialisation and the Industrial Revolution, its migration and rehabilitation in Bishnupur under the patronage of the Mallas, and its restoration through the combined efforts of state institutions, artisan cooperatives and individual entrepreneurs in the 20th and 21st centuries.

A significant milestone in the journey of the Baluchari tradition towards legal and commercial protection is the award of the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2012 under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999. The GI framework based on the TRIPS Agreement has given artisans a means to validate their handicraft, to sell at higher prices in the market and to safeguard against general liberalization which has allowed for imitation of their craft. As can be seen from the case study of West Bengal, the recognition of GI has helped to increase the market visibility of traditional textiles and crafts such as Baluchari silk sarees, to empower financially the weavers and artisans and to foster economic development in the local area through the cooperative mechanism of different GI organisations like Tantuja, Tantushree, Manjusha, Biswabangla etc.

Baluchari is not only an economic important textile fibre but also a cultural one. The saree is a living story and within its intricate pallus and borders are encoded the mythological stories, Mughal miniature influences and socio-political transformations of Bengal over the centuries. Whether its motifs are taken from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, from court life, or from the influences of Europeans, they form a weave of historical documentation that links the wearer with all the art knowledge and community identity of his or her predecessors. Besides Baluchari, other allied textile forms like Swarnachuri have also recognized their value in the market, which substantiates the evolutionary and diversification process of Bengal's handloom sector.

However, there are still many challenges that lie ahead. Power loom and machine made cloths, skills transfer from generation to generation, non-uniform quality of yarns and low financial strength for the small weavers to market their products are still challenges to the sector sustainability. There are promising avenues for the industry to grow in the future that include the integration of Computer Aided Designing (CAD), diversification of products from sarees to accessories and home décor, digital promotion and direct buyer–seller interface.

To conclude, the conservation of Baluchari saree is a call of the hour, which requires policy support, advocacy and innovation in the market and empowerment of the community. The transformative potential of GI can only be achieved if it is complemented by capacity building for artisans, quality control, bigger cooperative structures, and effective domestic and export marketing. The Baluchari isn't merely a cloth; it's a valuable asset to Bengal's living heritage, and by preserving its future, we invest in the continuity of its culture and the resilience of the communities that have cherished it for centuries.

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