

The Untold Cultural Story of Wall Hanging: A Case Study of Geographical Indications (GI) Product from Varanasi

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Culture is characterised as anything performed by a group of people or a society that has diverse meanings, interpretations, and subjective. The medium through which people express their ability to fulfil themselves and therefore is considered a significant part of the development. Varanasi is blessed with several unique and highly skilled artisans who have been preparing antique handicraft products for generations; one such antique product is a wall hanging. Wall hanging products are priceless, which are being prepared by master weavers, and they are master among the masters. The unique quality of wall hanging attributable to its geographical origin was the basis for wall hanging to get the Geographical Indications tag in 2017. The basic objective of this study is to explore the hidden, potential, and untold cultural heritage and legal aspects of the Geographical Indications (GI) given to wall hanging and the challenges faced by wall hanging weavers in clusters of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Well-structured research questions related to livelihood and economic aspects, traditional and cultural dimensions, market dynamics, consumer behaviour, sustainability and existing challenges were asked and later analysed. Analytical and descriptive methods were used for the analysis to get the desired outcome. After the discussion, it was concluded that wall hanging weavers are working toward enriching the cultural heritage of India. The government and other institutions should focus on restoring Varanasi's wall-hanging cultural glory instead of redesigning it. The paper proposes a roadmap to improve the living standards of the wall hanging weavers by identifying and eliminating the hindrance in the path of their inclusive development. From expert opinion, Varanasi Wall Hanging as the GI tagged product is still underexplored, less competitive, limited market share, localised minor product and not visible to everyone. Wall hanging remains on the margins, and neglected from academic research due to the smaller area of influence, limited awareness, poor narratives, no policy attention and its restricted production.

Keywords: Geographical Indications, Priceless, Weavers, Cultural Heritage, Wall Hanging, Unique, Vocal for Local

India is one of the most diverse, artistically and culturally rich nations across the globe. The amalgamation of diverse skills and ancient techniques has led to some unique creations, including wall hangings.¹ Wall hangings hold a dominant position in several of the handicraft clusters in Varanasi. Wall hanging products are eco-friendly and include natural wool, jute, and dyeing in traditional patterns.² It started with an incident that around 70–80 years ago, a few weavers went to a fair and saw that foreigners and other people were keenly interested in buying wall-hanging products. These artisans have the idea of preparing wall hangings in their village, or locality, or cluster from there.³ Thereafter, they started collecting more details like kinds of raw materials, colours and many others, and finally started weaving wall

hangings. These Varanasi weavers have skilled hands and their wall-hanging work began flourishing and selling to different districts across India.⁴ Artisans work on a contractual basis with girastas, or vyaparee, or shopkeepers to produce a certain number of handicraft and handloom products. Several government schemes, such as USTAAD, Vocal for Local, and Geographical Indications (GI), played a significant role in improving weavers' living standards.⁵ This brings a new dawn in their lives through several immediate reforms. The strict implementation of the GI Act in Varanasi will revive the declining handloom and handicraft sector, restoring its golden period.^{6,7}

Weavers of Varanasi have a unique style of creativity, and people across India have an interest in decorating the walls of their workplaces or homes. Decorative wall hangings have been developed since

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ancient times.⁸ To understand the culture of any place, it is important to understand its history, which is a unique collaboration between yesterday and today.⁹ Before 1995, it was called the golden period of wall hanging, as it had reached its peak. In 1995 and before, wall hanging products, such as dari and wall hanging decorations, easily attracted customers due to their high demand in domestic and foreign markets.¹⁰ The reason for this was that hardship was less, money was more, raw materials were easily available, and inflation was less, compared to the present time. Wall hangings are foreign and metropolitan-oriented products, as they are more attracted to handloom and handicraft antique products. At present, all weavers including wall hanging weavers, are suffering from the financial crisis as they face several challenges in receiving money. Weavers are underpaid without any social security. If any mishap happens to their karkhana, they are solely responsible and compensation will not be given. Banks do not help actual weavers, as the handloom sector belongs to the informal economy and weavers fails to keep anything as the mortgage to take a loan from the bank.¹¹ When demand for any product is high, the revenue earn from wall hangings will also be high.¹² The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced across India on all handicraft products including wall hanging on July 1, 2017.¹³ In addition, handloom and handicraft products were never taxable under any circumstances, as it has been tax-free since the independence, which helped their exponential growth.¹⁴ Erstwhile, Wall hangings demand was high throughout the year, but now it has been restricted to February, June, and December in a year. It is limited to a certain eve and festivals, as its demand is still high during the Christmas month and the New Year celebrations due to its exquisite handwork karigari (Table 1). The role of the individual artisan and the Ministry of Textiles is to bring back their past glory by creating an environment that revives demand throughout the year rather than a limited number of months. Individual artisans can play their role through the diversification of wall hanging products, quality enhancement, skill upgradation, innovation, digital empowerment, market exploration, and collection support. The Ministry can play its role through capacity building, market expansion, GI branding, policy framework, welfare schemes, skill training, promotion, and export stimulation. There is huge hidden potential in wall hanging sector, and it is the right time to utilise it before it becomes too late.¹⁵

Varanasi is located between the Varuna River and the Assi River and on the left bank of the Ganga

Table 1 — Number of Active Wall Hanging Weavers from 1995 to 2025

Year	Number of Active Weavers
1995	1500
2000	1200
2005	850
2010	400
2015	300
2020	100
2025	50

Source Field Investigation 2021-2025

River.¹⁶ It is famous as the city of ghats, Mukti kshetra, the city of Pandas, handloom and handicraft nagri, and the city of light.¹⁷ Varanasi is the cultural capital of India, and according to Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva founded it.¹⁸ It lies between 25°20"N to 25°32" N and 82°59" E to 82°98"E coordinates, which is spread over an area of 1535 sq. km (Fig. 1).¹⁹ Banaras or Varanasi is known for its culture, tradition, and philosophy, and also known for its burning and learning. People believe that Varanasi is a gateway to attain salvation or moksha. It is the microcosm of India, the city of heritage, handicraft, handloom, culture, and religion that is glorified by legends and myths.²⁰

When observed through the lens of Geographical Indications (GI), The objective of the wall hanging product is far beyond their commercial and monetary values. The GI works as a framework to represent, signify, authenticate, and document the community's social, economic, demographic, spatial, cultural, and historical identity. Geographical Indications (GI) is associated with wall hanging products in a particular geographical region, where traditional knowledge, indigenous skills, local weavers, raw materials, and weather collectively shape the handicraft product. The GI relationship supports the establishment that the distinctiveness of wall hanging products is not accidental but the act of generational interaction between space, time, and weavers. This study focuses on the opportunities, challenges, and reviving aspects of invaluable treasures of wall hanging of incredible India. The study was conducted comply qualitative and quantitative techniques with more focus on primary data due to the shortage of secondary data. A participatory research approach was applied by involving the weaving community of Varanasi and potential respondents, which included

- Pilot survey
- Oral history

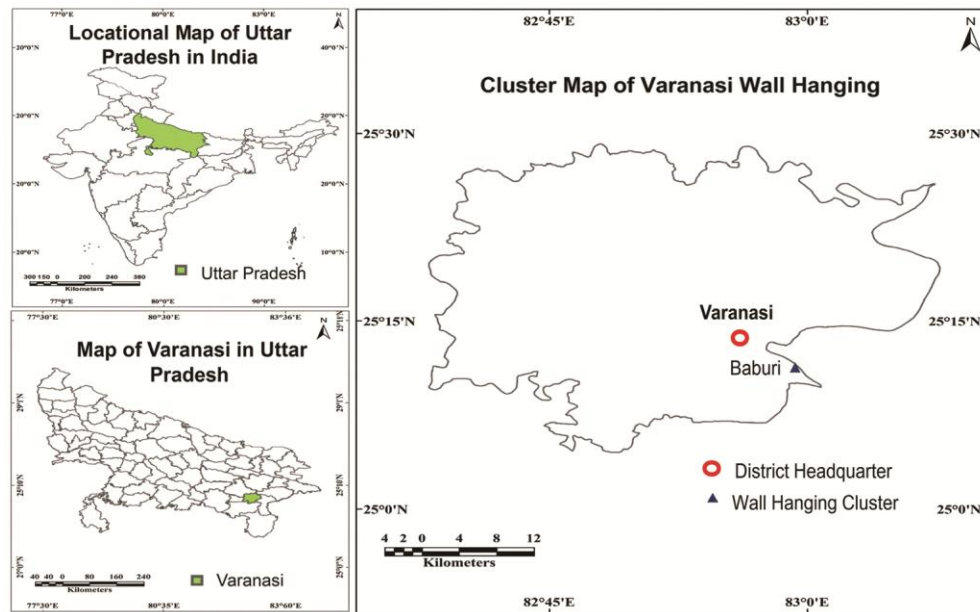


Fig. 1 — Geographical map of study area

- Restructure questionnaire
- Focused group discussions
- In-depth interview

Purposive household sampling of the wall-hanging weaving community was conducted during the field investigation to collect grassroots information regarding the cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, and legal rights of weavers living in the Varanasi wall hanging cluster. A total of 50 respondents were interviewed from the Baburi wall hanging cluster of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh between 2021 and 2025. Each respondent was given 30 minutes, sometimes more due to the sensitivity and accuracy of the information they were given. The purpose of the interview was clearly explained to all 50 respondents before starting the interview with them so as to make them more comfortable and relaxed to give the grass-roots information without favour or fear. Oral consent was humbly taken from all 50 respondents after showing the University of Delhi identity card, and the permission letter to conduct the interview was also taken from the Department of Geography, University of Delhi. Permission letter and the identity card were carried throughout the interview process.

Focused group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to comprehend the past glory, current challenges, and future prospects of the wall hanging products (Fig. 2). During an in-depth interview, many weavers expressed their experience that they were treated inappropriately by government officials at Weaving

Service Centre (WSC) while availing government schemes. These incidents disturbed the social fabrics, and disrupted the social harmony between the weaving community and government officials. As participant observation, it was observed that the condition of master weavers was better than that of other weavers. This study examined opportunities, challenges, revival strategies, and the contribution of Geographical Indications (GI) for unique wall hanging products in Varanasi. Suggested recommendations to bring back the past glory of the Varanasi wall hanging.

Regarding the secondary data, Ministry of Textiles, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Geographical Indications Registry, Geographical Indications Journal, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, District Census Handbook, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry were used for the analysis and description. In addition, eminent journals, research papers, books, government websites, reports, magazines, and newspapers were accessed to get the desired outcomes. Software like ArcGIS and MS Office were applied to represent the collected data through maps, trend lines, and flow charts. Analytical and descriptive methods were used to obtain insights into the study area. It was significant to understand why and under what circumstances the glory of wall hangings has been destroyed in the contemporary

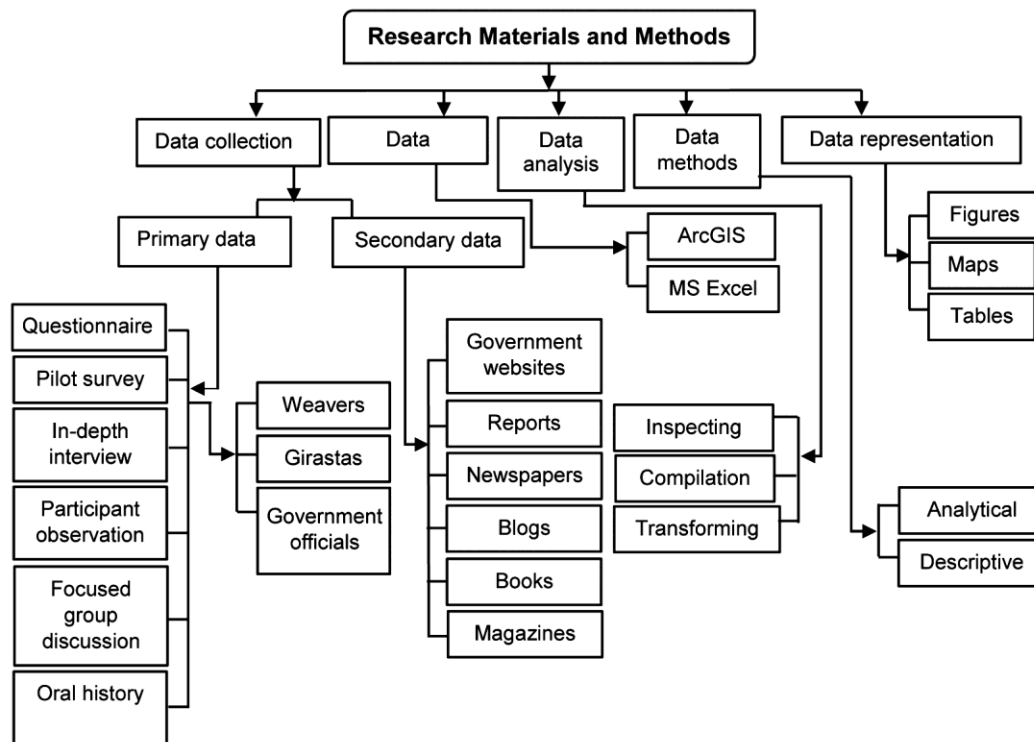


Fig. 2 — Diagrammatic representation of research materials and methods

scenarios despite multiple steps taken by government institutions for their revival.

Results and Discussions

Opportunities in Wall-hanging

Enriched Culture

Wall hangings are known for their unique and stylistic appearance and are prepared on jacquard handlooms with a blend of jute and wool yarns in different colours. Varanasi wall hanging is the best combination of golden fibres such as jute yarn, wool yarn, and other multiple colour fabrics. Whenever and wherever displayed, it provides aesthetic pleasure and enhances the decoration of drawing rooms, meeting halls, commercial halls, offices, hotel rooms, and showrooms. Wall hanging has been awarded the Geographical Indications tag since 2017. It was used for hanging on walls, and from there, the art gets its name; wall hanging. It is recognised as one of the most decorative products for people who love heritage and scenery. This is a hereditary work for weavers belonging to the Ansari or Momin community. The community has God's gifted hunar/skill in the wall hanging, and they are blessed with unparalleled growth in the handicraft sector.

Wall hangings depict rich, traditional, vibrant, and intangible cultural heritage in Varanasi. The exclusive



Fig. 3 — Wall hanging jacquard karghe/handloom

wall hanging products are prepared using an old technique called the Naka Jala Taka technique. Wall hanging weavers are experts in preparing low-to-high-end products for domestic and foreign markets for all consumers. They have no fixed working time because they have wall hanging handloom or karghe in their home (Fig. 3). Whenever they are free, they start weaving wall hangings regardless of day and night, whether it is hot or cold, and good or bad circumstances. However, not all weavers have their own handloom; in that case, they go to other houses for weaving, and their working time is 10 am to 5 pm (Fig. 4). They have a small lunch break of half an hour in the afternoon, and there can be variation in



Fig. 4 — Wall hanging dari

weaving time. During winter, working time is 10 am to 5 pm, while in summers, it is 9 am to 5 pm. In emergencies, they weave all day and night until they complete the given target.

There is a pleasant trend for original wall hangings that showcase craftsmanship throughout India and abroad. Buyers often prefer natural products prepared from organic fibres, including jute, wool, and cotton, for use in wall hangings. These wall hanging products are biodegradable and environment friendly. The wall hanging weavers in Varanasi started to adopt online platforms, such as social media, committed handicraft portals, and e-commerce websites to increase the number of customers and broaden their audience. There is an increasing trend for customised wall hanging products, such as motifs, décor, size, and colours to particular interior themes. The customers are not only interested in buying wall hanging product décor but also want to know the hidden story of the product. Weavers can avail the benefit by participating in training programmes, tourism-linked markets, fairs, and exhibitions. Traditional motifs, themes, and designs appeal to tourists and buyers seeking heritage souvenirs. These products command good interest and consumers' willingness to pay, which generates good opportunities for weavers willing to adapt. Varanasi wall hanging was given the Geographical Indications (GI) certificate, which ensures exclusivity and authenticity. GI status reassures consumers about the quality, indigenous value, and origin of the wall hanging; these factors that influence consumers' trust and market differentiation in domestic and global markets. Despite the advantages of weaving, wall hanging products facing stiff competition from synthetic wall décor and machine-made décor. This décor is inexpensive, attractive, vibrant, and easily available. Weavers are refocusing on premium quality, attractive storytelling, and appealing branding to remain competitive and assure their products.

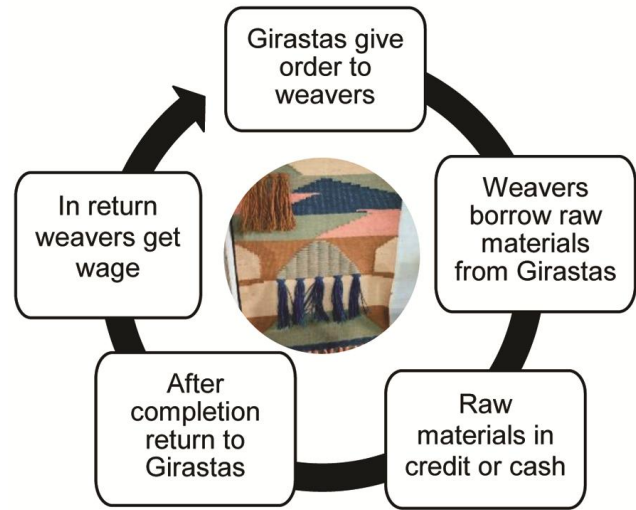


Fig. 5 — Supply chain management

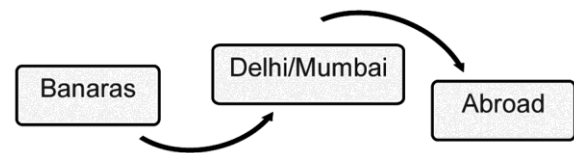


Fig. 6 — Supply chain management in wall hanging weavers and girastas in wall hanging

Supply Chain Management

Weavers purchase raw materials in cash or on credit from girastas/middlemen and from the open market in cash only. After preparing the complete wall hanging, they sell wall hanging products to girastas/middlemen at predetermined rates or, in some cases, in the open market. Generally, wall hangings are prepared on a contract pattern between weavers and girastas/middlemen. The chain goes as follows: whenever girastas/middlemen receive any wall hanging order, they forward that order to several weavers working under them. Afterwards, weavers borrow money and raw materials from girastas/middlemen to complete the order in time. After completing the order, weavers return that wall hangings to girastas/middlemen (Fig. 5). Later, these wall hangings are supplied to metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, and Pune, and from there, these are exported abroad (Fig. 6). Wall hangings are export-oriented products, as these are art products and not commercial products, and are more suitably placed in multi-complexes, malls, airports, hotels, government buildings, and luxury railways as souvenirs.

Morphology of Workplace

Weavers live in rectangular-shape houses where they fabricate wall hangings. Male members of their

family dominate the ground floor while female dominate in the first floor of their house. Weaving is performed on the ground floor only and there is a need to dig mud ground around 3–5 feet long and 2–4 feet wide. Weaving is practised on old pit looms, and most of the looms are of age-old design. The formation of a pit is necessary for the setting of a wooden wall hanging handloom or karghe. There are weavers with one karghe, while some have 2 or more handlooms. These handlooms are fitted close to one another due to limited space, while some handlooms are fitted side by side, and not in front of one another.

Females and elder family members dominate the first floor, where female members clean jut and wool from Karchi, which is a big bundle of jute and wool. Weavers' family resides on the first floor where female weavers unreel jute and wool from cones and wrap the same jute and wool in the form of kati. Afterwards, the male takes the same kati from the first floor and bring it to the ground floor. Male weavers set the kati in handloom/karghe and start wall hanging weaving. The process till the completion of the wall hanging requires horizontal rotation of the handloom handle every time. The production process is sometimes interrupted due to unavoidable circumstances in the family, such as when female weavers being outside for a few days. In that case, male weavers and elder members prepare wool and jute from cones.

Production Method

Wall hanging craft still follows traditional patterns, and the production process is carried out traditionally. The production process is comprehensive and includes the participation of all members of the family from colouring of the yarn to final packaging. Wall hangings weavers purchase/bring jute and wool from markets or middlemen/girastas. The weavers then check the quality of raw jute and wool and identify the best one among them. Jute is transported from Kolkata city of West Bengal to Varanasi.

Dyeing is a traditional method that is performed in two ways, such as hot-water dye and cold-water dye. Cold water dyeing is performed for domestic purposes, and hot water dyeing is performed for export purposes. Cold water is used to dye yarn in light colours while warm water is used to dye yarn in dark colours. Only natural colours are added to the yarn for dyeing. In this process, jute is collected from jute bags and cleaned with chemicals like silicate and hydrogen to shine the raw jute, and wool. Colour is



Fig. 7 — Cleaned jute



Fig. 8 — Cleaned wool

prepared in which the jute is dipped (Fig. 7 & 8). This process is called the dyeing process.

Tana-making Tana is prepared for weaving in Tana-making funni after dyeing the yarn. In the funni, the thread count is 1 inch = 8–10 thread counts; assume 40 inches = 320–400 threads for tana are put on the roller for the tana-making.

Design Pattern and Weaving Bana of different colours are blended as per the design pattern. The Bana of diverse colours and shades like blue, aqua, red, brown, pink, orange, green, and yellow are mixed with Tana, whose shapes and designs are clearly transparent. Funni and paddle are two important tools in weaving to adjust yarns and threads according to the up-and-down of the design.

Naksha Making Naksheband prepares the design, called naksha locally, for wall hanging on a piece of paper, varying from A1 to A3 size (Fig. 9 & 10). Multiple shades of black, blue, green, brown, green, and pink are drawn using different colours of pens and pencils. Different designs are prepared for wall hangings with themes, such as scenery, flowers, house structure, boating, vegetation, devotional, and carry.



Fig. 9 — Design/Naksha



Fig. 10 — Wall hanging

Cutting or Clipping is performed to remove or segregate extra yarns and threads to prepare the final yarn and threads for the next phase. Afterwards, finishing work starts on wall hangings wherein any hole, and fault is found, addressed, and later sorted out precisely (Fig. 11-13).

Weaving after drying coloured jute, it is fixed on the handloom, locally called khaddee or karghe, and the base of the wall hanging is prepared. The most important part: the weaving of wall hangings start on the handloom. Sometimes, it is kept on the nakshas background, and then the handwork starts. Later, different designs are engraved on the fixed wall hangings. Resham (silk) and wool are used to engrave different pictures on wall hangings like Lord Ganesh, Lord Shiva, human settlements, and scenery. Some materials are glued onto the raw wall hangings, and then irregular threads are cut off by special scissors. Thereafter, the wool is fixed at the top of the wall hanging so that it can hang on the walls.



Fig. 11 — Single colour jute



Fig. 12 — Multi-colour jute



Fig. 13 — Dual-colour wool

Embroidery is performed to develop new designs, and motifs. Both male and female participate in embroidery work where fine silk and jute are used. Tree branches, flowers, leaves, and motifs are created in embroidery work.

In *Beet Fixation* Beets are fixed at the top or lower portion for hanging of the wall hanging so that the products remain sturdy and gorgeous. The beet size depends on the length and breadth of the wall hanging. *Time Frame* a single jute wall hanging is prepared in less than one day, compared to the wool wall hanging, which is prepared between 1 and 2 days, and sometimes more. When the size of the wall hanging is large, it takes more time to weave compared to a smaller wall hanging with simple designs. However, such demarcation of time is not fixed, and sometimes depends on the quality, efficiency, design, and dedication of the weavers. It goes through 4–5 different processes, and around 4–5 people are involved in a single wall hanging preparation.

Rapping and Packaging exemplary designs, such as carts, boats, and bridges are used in rapping. However, images like windows making are important for patching. Now, the wall hangings are ready for packaging, and distributors, retailers, and wholesalers pick up their orders from the concerned karkhanas. After weaving, cutting, finishing, and packaging, the final task of the parcel starts. Finally, the wall hangings are ready for sale in the market. These activities are performed at different levels, such as the packaging wall hangings in a transparent plastic bag. Subsequently, parcels are prepared and placed in big cartons are called petee locally and composed of soft cardboard.

Unique Theme the scenery is widely prevalent, consisting of approximately 80% to 85% demand in the market. They avoid living elements-based wall hangings, such as animals, birds and fish, but these features are common in several scenes. However, there are wall hangings with a single living entity, but their number is minimal, as there are a few demands for featured products.

Types of Wool

Weavers call the wool used in wall hangings as kati. They purchase raw wool of white colour as it is convenient to dye them in different colours depending upon demand in the market, such as black, peacock, aqua, pink, brown, magenta, rani and orange. If they purchase other than white-coloured wool, they must

purchase different colours of wool, which is not feasible as it will increase the per-unit cost of the product. In the case of a certain wool colour, they must wait until the order of that colour wall hanging. Wall hangings prepared with single or multiple colours look gorgeous and vibrant and attract several customers. A multi-colour wall hanging looks more lively, vibrant, and bright as it describes several dimensions in a single portrait.

Several types of wool are used in wall hanging preparation, and the fineness and the softness determine their price in the market (Fig. 14). There is a direct relationship between the softness of wool and the price, means that higher the softness more will be price and vice versa. The price varies from ₹60 to ₹150/kg for hard wool and ₹160 to ₹400/kg for soft wool. The wool used in wall hangings is further classified into two categories: thick and thin, where thin wool costs ₹300 per kg, which is higher than thick wool. Wall hangings prepared from thin wool are in greater demand than thick ones as more dense and intense designs are possible with thin wool compared to thick wool. Although intense design is possible with thick wool, but the design does not give a good appearance.

Challenges

Several factors affect the wall hanging products of Varanasi, including mishandling, social dynamics, raw material volatility, and MGNREGA. All of these factors have different degrees of impact on weavers' participation, wall hanging production, market competitiveness, and market trends. MGNREGA has a direct influence on the availability of wall hanging labour. MGNREGA provides a short-term assured income that attracts weavers during the off-season,

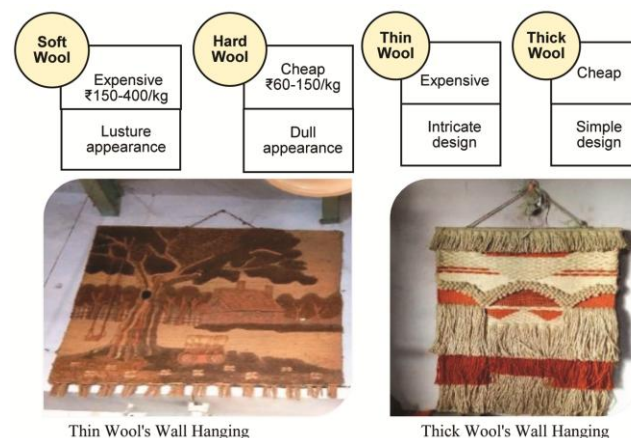


Fig. 14 — Types of wool

which requires an unskilled labour force, resulting in a seasonal shift of weavers from the wall hanging weaving. MGNREGA boosts income security, while wall hanging failed to provide security. Raw materials, such as yarn, wool, cotton, dyes, and others, indicate very high price fluctuations. This includes the rising cost of organic fibres, limited weavers' storage and purchasing potential, compromises in size and quality during price volatility, and excessive dependence on external suppliers. These factors push weavers towards cheaper and poor-quality substitutes, production stress, pricing ambiguity, and unreliable output. The volatility of raw material impacts the economic viability of wall hanging products (Table 2).

Social dynamics, such as caste, generational gap, and migration, shape skill enhancement and weavers' availability. Young weavers prefer alternatives because they want to continue their ancestral wall hanging due to low income, minimal social prestige, and limited employment associated with weaving. The shrinking active weaving base in traditional handicrafts and reduced intergenerational skill transfer are also responsible for its decline. As a result, many weavers have migrated to cities to secure better employment opportunities. Social dynamics are affecting the long-term livelihood of weavers in Varanasi. Poor implementation of the government policies, misleading, unfair institutional cooperation, and weak market linkages are responsible for the mishandling and loss of the wall hangings. Limited designs, logistic support, restricted access to formal markets, rational pricing, overdependence on middlemen, and limited participation in training programmes, fairs, and exhibitions are also responsible for the mishandling of the handicraft ecosystem in Varanasi. Mishandling leads to income instability, seasonal production, and discourage newly motivated weavers from continuing their ancestral weaving work (Table 2).

Mishandling and Loss

After packaging of the carton, an additional layer of a plastic bag is kept on the carton to protect the

wall hanging products from rain, moisture, and mishandling. Frequent cases of parcel mishandling are seen, despite several preventive measures. Sometimes, there are cases of exchange of parcels, and in that incidence, some useless things are found in their cartons instead of what was initially parcelled. In some cases, the cutting of wall hangings was found due to improper handling of cartons, while boarding and deboarding from the transport section. Labours involved in the boarding and deboarding of parcels use a sharp-pointed iron hook. When they dig a hook in the cardboard parcel, and there are chances of a hole creation in the parcel. Such kinds of practices are not in favour of the weaving community, as no customer will buy such a defaced wall hanging. In that case, weavers bear the loss because they are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and these faulty practices must be stopped with better alternatives.

Afraid of Investigation and Cultural Erosion

The condition of Muslim weavers engaged in the handicraft/handloom sector is not good in Varanasi. In the focused group discussion, it was elucidated that no Hindu weavers are involved in wall hangings. Muslim weavers suggested to include some Hindu weavers for the sake of belonging to Harijan. The concerned authority will investigate the wall hanging sector if they find out that Muslim weavers have monopolised it. Weavers are afraid of the reality of how an outsider will interpret their thoughts in the formal format. This shows that Muslim weavers employed in wall hangings are unable to express their thoughts without fear. They are not able to share their work's grassroots reality inherited from their forefathers.

Closure of workplace or Karkhana

Wall hanging karkhanas were once highly prosperous and employed more than a thousand weavers. Now, there is no demand for wall hanging products, and these karkhanas are getting closed (Fig. 15). Jute is mainly imported from Kolkata, the city of West Bengal to Varanasi, and the price of jute

Table 2 — Quantify the relative impact

Factor	Relative impact	Approximate contribution
MGNREGA	Low	15-20%
Raw material volatility	Medium	18-20%
Social dynamics	High	20-25%
Mishandling	Very High	30-35%
Total		100



Fig. 15 — Glimpses of closed wall hanging karkhana

is highly volatile as it is increasing at a regular interval of every 6 months or once in a year. 20 days ago, it was ₹150/kg, which has increased to ₹180/kg at an interval of 6 months (Field Investigation 2024). However, the weavers' wages are remained the same, which is causing serious concern for them. The raw jute is transported to Varanasi from Kolkata via middlemen. These middlemen are earning more profits by purchasing jute in bulk from the Kolkata market and selling it to the wall hanging markets in Varanasi at higher rates. In the interview, the weavers replied that the wages they are getting are very low for their weaving work, whereas the traders replied that the labour cost of the weaving had increased over the years. Traders claimed that they are not getting competent weavers due to increased labour costs, while weavers replied that their wages have not increased over the past decade.

The closing of handloom karkhanas has become a normal phenomenon in Varanasi because weavers are getting only 10% of the total cost of the wall hangings sold in the market (Table 3). Wall hanging artisans are losing their livelihood due to the closure of karkhanas because they and their families are directly and indirectly associated with these karkhanas. The whole investment of weavers becomes useless with the closure of karkhanas, and in return, they are getting nothing except frustration and problems.

Decline in Wall Hanging Weavers

The large-scale closure of the wall hanging karkhana generated unemployment among weavers. The decline in their number has registered over the past few years. The declining trend of wall hanging weavers is represented by a trend line graph (Fig. 16). The graph indicates a continuous decline in the number of weavers employed in wall hangings. The trend should not be confused with the number of weavers are declining. Although the number of wall-hanging weavers is increasing, the number of those engaged in wall hanging are decreasing. Nowadays, weaving has become a loss-incurring profession for Varanasi's economy, which is why weavers are leaving their heritage work and adopting alternative work.

Transtion in Dominated Clusters

Erstwhile, Chittanpura, Baburi, Sahabgunj, and Konia were engaged in producing wall hangings. The rich tradition of wall hanging in several clusters of Varanasi evolved from its extensive ritual, culture, religion, handloom, handicraft, patronage, and routine social lifestyle. Wall hanging production is developed

Table 3 — Per piece wall hanging price distribution

Market price	Artisan (Handloom)	Artisan (Cutter)	Artisans (Glued)	Artisan (Takai wale)
₹500	₹25	₹10	₹20	₹3

Source: Field Investigation, 2023

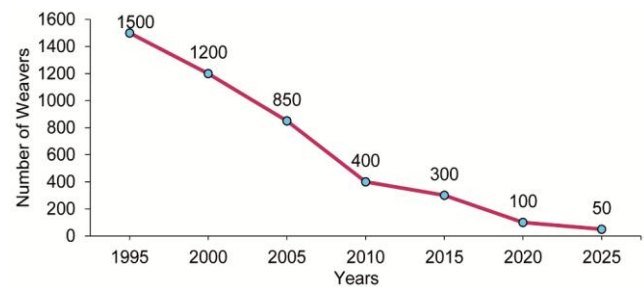


Fig. 16 — Decline in number of wall hanging weavers/karigars, 1995-2025 (Field Investigation 2021-2025)

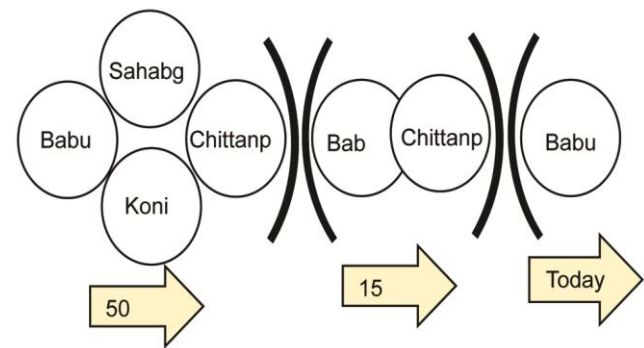


Fig. 17 — Decline in the number of wall hanging clusters, 1970-2020

as a community-based craft and began to transition from customs, ritual, and domestic use to commercial and global platforms. The Mughals' influence on wall hangings reflects a unique Islamic aesthetic, including floral motifs, stylised vegetal designs, geometric and carving patterns. After independence, wall hangings were redefined as heritage products, the most suitable for export, tourism, and home and office décor. The Geographical Indications (GI) status of wall hanging has revived its past glory and linked the product, region, weaving community, traditional skills, and knowledge. However, today, most karkhanas of these clusters have closed, and Baburi is the only cluster where weaving is continued. Around 50 years ago, Chittanpura, Sahabgunj, Konia, and Baburi were renowned as the hub of wall hangings (Fig. 17). The weavers of these clusters were highly skilled and paid well for their work on wall hangings. Young or entrant weavers were more inclined to adopt wall

hangings because their careers were bright during this golden period. The demand for wall hangings and weavers for in wall hanging has declined over the years.

Around 15 years ago, wall hanging was restricted to the Chittanpura and Baburi clusters because several wall hanging weavers leaving their heritage work due to underpayment and late payment. Several weavers started adopting other work, like driving, but the demand for wall hanging products remained high. Today, wall hanging is confined to Baburi only, and become a loss-making industry due to the non-availability of raw materials on time. The remaining weavers are leaving their ancestral work, apart from a decrease in demand, and the wall hangings' rate have reached to their lowest levels. However, Baburi cluster has hegemonised and become unparalleled in the wall hanging products due to the complete absence of competition from any cluster.

No Participation of Young Generation

The profit margin for weavers in wall hangings is minimal, and many times no profit occurs despite doing day and night hardships. Weavers do not have any other sources of income except weaving. Weaving works are often halted because weavers have no control over them. On average, weaving provides jobs for 4 months only in a year, and the rest 8 months, weavers are jobless. However, weaving is not a permanent but seasonal work. Those who have left weaving are not returning because they are getting good salaries in their new work, like e-rickshaw driving. These weavers have registered improvement in their living standards compared to their fellows and friends who are still engaged in the same weaving. The number of days and timings in their new work is fixed, which was not possible in the wall hanging. Such instances lead to a world of darkness for these intangible assets of the nation.

Absence of Suitable Market

Wall hanging weavers have failed to identify suitable markets where they get the raw materials at cheaper rates and markets to supply or sell their products at an appropriate price to customers. They cannot take their products directly to markets because of some limitations and middle-men have dominated the entire market where wall hangings are sold. The cost of a single wall hanging is around ₹400-₹500, but in the market, it is sold at ₹1200 to ₹1500, which is around three times more than artisans receive per

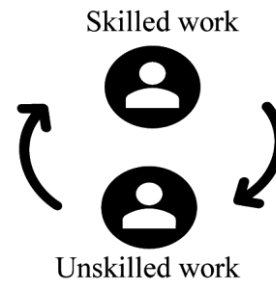


Fig. 18 — Weavers shifted from skilled work to unskilled work due to MGNREGA

piece of wall hanging (Field Investigation, 2022). However, artisans are involved in exploring new wall hanging markets, they have a ray of hope that they will find them soon. They believe that one day, a good time will come for their products.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Scheme

MGNREGA workers' daily wage was ₹201 in 2020-2021, which has increased to ₹204 in 2021-2022 in Uttar Pradesh, and respective state governments keep on revising it at certain intervals. Several wall hanging weavers have shifted from wall hanging works to employment in MGNREGA due to the higher daily wages. MGNREGA provides assured employment of 100 days without requiring any professional skills, and no discrimination based on sex, religion, race, caste, place of birth, or any of them. In MGNREGA, artisans carry bricks on their heads from one place to another, and are employed in the digging of canals or ponds, which is new for them. The number of working hours is fixed in MGNREGA, which starts at 9 am in the morning and ends at 5 pm in the evening, including an hour lunch break in between. These facilities are pulling several handicraft and handloom weavers from their native economic work to support their livelihoods. Several wall hanging weavers have shifted from skilled work to unskilled work, describing pathetic condition of wall hanging weavers (Fig. 18).

Revival

Geographical Indications (GI) and its Contribution

Geographical Indications (GI) is described as the vital interface between cultural rights, economic development, and intellectual property rights (IPR). GI has evolved from a means of commercial differentiation to hold huge responsibility and accountability towards social empowerment, economic enhancement, identity expression, and

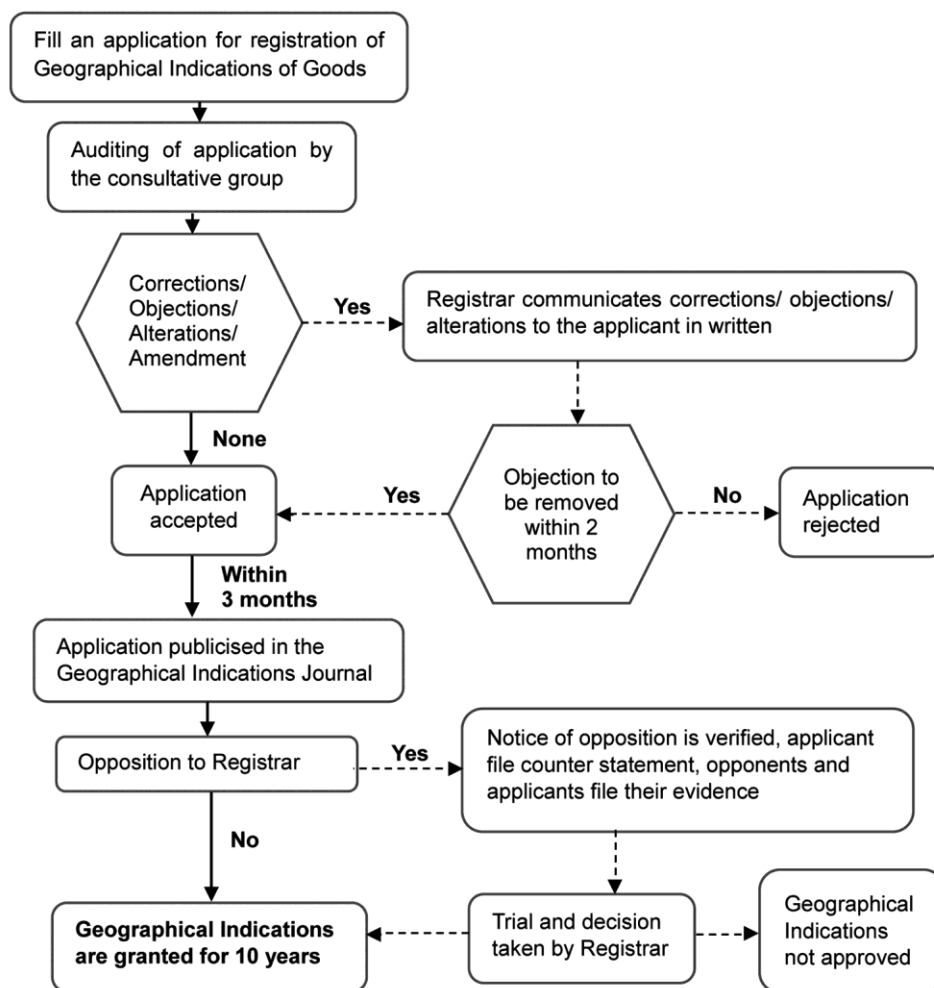


Fig. 19 — Procedure for the registration of geographical indications of goods

cultural preservation. GI protects indigenous communities to reclaim their unique articulation, since their origin and sustenance. The Geographical Indications of Goods: Registration and Protection Act, 1999, was the first step towards compliance with the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.²¹ This marked the commencement of Geographical Indications as a separate IPR category. The GI registry headquarter is situated in Chennai, administered by the Controller General of Patent, Design and Trademarks, who is a registrar of the GI, where the Department for the Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade works under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.²² The process of GI registration for any good is very comprehensive, and involving the applicant associations can be producer groups, artisans, weavers, or cooperatives. They all needed to represent the proof of a solid geographical integration,

historical background, distinct production techniques, and connection to that particular region. GI gives protection for around 10 years in one circle, and is renewable until further notice (Fig. 19).

The first product to get the GI status was Darjeeling Tea from West Bengal, followed by Aranmula Metal Mirror from Kerala and Pochampally Ikat from Telangana in 2003.²³ Recently, Amravati Pippal and Amravati Chana was the two products given GI status in 2024. Approximately 659 products are registered under the Geographical Indications of Goods until July 2024. The highest number of goods (120) was registered in 2022, while the lowest number of goods (2) was registered in 2024. On average, approximately 30 products are registered under the GI every year (Fig. 20).

Uttar Pradesh has the maximum number of GI-registered products (79), followed by Tamil Nadu (69) and Maharashtra (55), whereas Jharkhand has

only one GI-registered product from 2003 to 2024. Notably, the north-eastern states have a smaller number of GI registered goods compared to other parts of India, such as the south Indian states (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana), west Indian states and north Indian states (Fig. 21).

Geographical Indications (GI) certificate was given to the Varanasi wall hangings in 2017 due to their unique characteristics (Fig. 22 & 23). Wall hanging weavers know a little bit about GI. According to them, GI is a thing that will help them, but in what sense, it will help them, they have no idea. They rarely see the Ministry of Textiles officials taking any step under the GI, like making them aware and creating awareness of its wider benefits for the weaving community. Several weavers believe that, like other steps, GI is anonymous, and will remain poor and marginalised as they were before. Creating awareness about GI is the sole task of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT),

but it has failed on several fronts to make weavers aware about their GI tagged products. There is a need for a rigorous campaign to make weavers aware of their GI tagged products with some new and innovative ideas like conducting seminars, workshops, training programmes, and exhibitions. Although make in India is a good step, again, it did not build trust between the wall hanging weavers and the campaigning authorities. These innovative steps will bring positive change to wall hanging weavers' standard of living, but the campaign should not lose its intensity.

Handicraft artisans are contributing a lot to the constant growth and development of the handicraft and handloom economy in Varanasi. Wall hanging weavers do a wonderful job in this sector. In this direction, the government constructed a warehouse for jute storage so that artisans, could buy jute from the warehouse rather than depending on the jute market. This results in the cheap availability of jute for them. If the government arranges suitable markets for wall hangings, it will be a great help for the entire weaving community. Weavers won't worry for the sale of wall hanging products when markets are developed in the surroundings of important tourist destinations, such as Varanasi, Shimla, Nainital, Mussoorie, Lucknow, and Agra. They want at least one market should be allotted to them from the government side to take all their wall hanging products from their clusters and sell them in these tourist destinations. Wall hanging products are in high demand at airports, five-star hotels, multi-complexes, and restaurants as souvenirs. Wall hanging weavers want the direct interference of

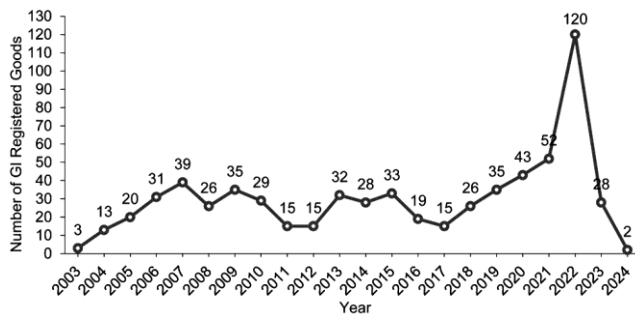


Fig. 20 — Number of GI-Registered products in India from 2003 to 2024

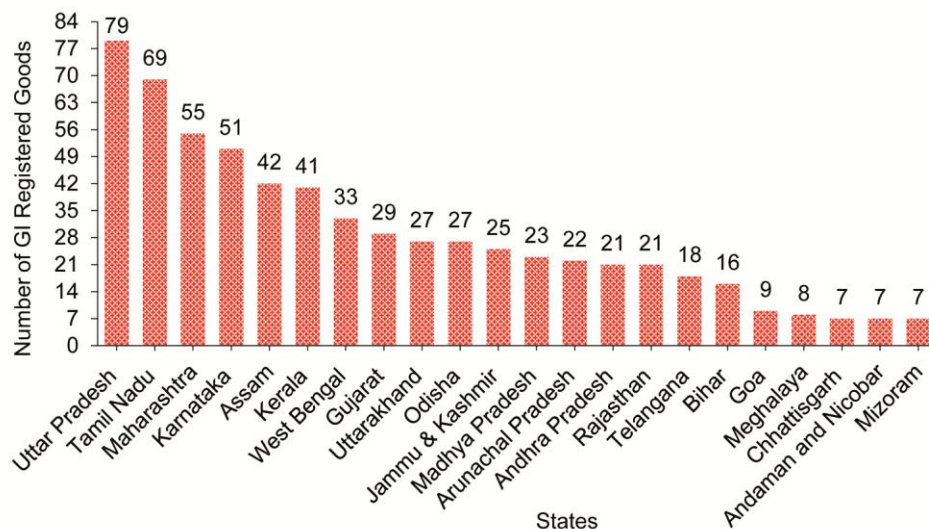


Fig. 21 — Number of GI-Registered products across different states and union territories from 2003 to 2024



Fig. 22 — Wall hanging logo



Invaluable Treasures of Incredible India

Fig. 23 — India's GI logo and tagline *Direct Interference*

the government to provide raw materials for the preparation of their wall hanging, including reshami dhaaga, jute, wool, and cotton availability within the prescribed period. The concerned department should hold a certain stock of wall hanging raw materials, which can be used in case of shortage, and release the raw materials during hoardings.

Provision of Required Loan

There is a need for DPIIT to add a few special ordinances in some selected banks near the wall hanging weavers' colony, like doorstep bank loan facility without interest rate, like farmers. The added facility should be easy, simple, hassle-free, and accessible to all weavers; then, it will only be productive for them. The banks in the weavers' locality demand several legal papers apart from mortgages to release loans in their name. Several weavers do not have papers they need, and in that case, they are debarred from loans that they need in emergencies. DPIIT should take weavers loan

responsibility as the same thing is happening, in the case of farmers, where the government is taking the guarantee. If in the case of farmers, it can happen, it is also possible in the weavers' case where the government facilitates them and takes legal guarantees. If the government takes their loan guarantee, they will not hesitate to invest in the growth of the wall hanging sector, and it will give a ray of hope to other handicraft artisans to invest in their respective sectors.

Awareness Campaign and Monitoring

Most wall hanging weavers belong to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families or lower middle-class families. They are illiterate and face several challenges in availing government benefits. There are several instances where they have missed the opportunity to avail benefits of government schemes exclusively for them. The reason is that they were not informed at the launch of the scheme, and the scheme was advertised in a very closed format so that maximum beneficiaries were not eligible to avail it. Awareness is the key for being informed about our rights and duties, as valuable information is an asset, and in its absence, the same asset will become a liability. Monitoring plays a significant role, and it should be set in the right direction; then the present government targets and the wider aims of the concerned department will be achieved in time. It stimulates the thought processes of weavers in many ways so that they will not be misguided by it about their exclusive rights in the handicraft sector. There must be a proper awareness mechanism to inform wall hanging weavers about the welfare schemes of the government.

Make in India and Make for the World

After achieving the success of Make in India by fostering innovation, enhancing skills, and facilitating investment in the cottage industries with the aim of creating a conducive environment. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) initiated Make in India 2.0 for the success of the programme with Production Linked Incentives (PLI). The department focused on zero defects and zero effects to make the handcraft products (wall hanging) more competitive with global standards.²⁴ Now, it is the right time to Make for the World to set up new and dedicated manufacturing units all over Varanasi. These products must be user-friendly, synergise traditional work with modernity, affordable, and

sustain for a longer duration to boost exports. The entire globe is looking for a trusted and reliable partner, in which India will play a significant role as it has quality, competitiveness, strength, and ability. Getting growth back is not very difficult, but it requires strong willpower. There is a requirement for self-regulation and self-certification, which means the entire focus and trust should be on weavers rather than outsiders. They are the champions of indigenous inspirations for the revival of the wall hanging industry.

Be Vocal for Local and Take Local to Global

The Coronavirus pandemic has taught us the importance of indigenous products, manufacturing, markets, and supply chain. The indigenous is not only the need but also the responsibility of each one. The handicraft sector is striving toward the self-reliant or Atmanirbhar Bharat, which aims to embrace the world with more strength, support, sustainability, and integration. When we buy handicraft products, we proudly tell people that these wall hanging products are prepared in our locality. Hence, weavers will avail their profit with increasing the sale of their handmade products. There is no compromise to slogan be vocal for local and take local to global, to showcase our products on the world level. This should be the mantra of every individual, family, community, district, state, and country to facilitate the cultural economy of the respective regions. It will bring positive changes to their daily lives because they and their products are being praised in every street. Be vocal for local and take local to global focus on all handicraft and handloom sectors, wherein Varanasi wall hanging is one of them. These artisans belong to the lower class, and lower-middle class of society. They prepare these products, and their promotion is essential to advance cluster, district, state, and country. This will play a turning role, and revolutionise the domestic cottage industry. We should give them an opportunity to contribute in nation building and making the cottage industry Atmanirbhar (self-reliant).

Conclusion

Wall hangings constitute an important component of Varanasi's cultural heritage and play a significant role in sustaining its composite cultural identity. Wall hanging weavers are not only producers of handicrafts but also, they function as cultural representatives who have historically transmitted its weaving traditions to

the national and global platforms. Despite these cultural and economic significance, the wall hanging industry is currently experiencing a continuous decline and urgent policy attention is required to ensure its sustainability. Therefore, a comprehensive and integrated policy framework is needed for the protection and revival of wall hanging weaving in Varanasi. This framework should enlarge the role of government and allied institutions beyond skill development to include infrastructure support, market creation, product diversification, and cluster revitalisation. The establishment of new domestic and foreign market linkages would not only improve the economic viability but also contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Varanasi and its long-lasting livelihood security.

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