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Duplicating the Local:GI and the Politics of 'Place' in Kanchipuram*

Aarti Kawlra**

"As local subjects carry on the continuing task of re-producing their neighbourhood, the contingencies of history, environment and imagination contain the potential for new contexts (material, social and imaginative) to be produced"(Appadurai, 1995:214)

Abstract

The Geographical Indications of Goods or (GI) is a globally instituted label of origin that links a product's identity to a specified place and grants proprietary rights to its 'original' producers. Based on ethnographic field research conducted in Kanchipuram since 2011, this paper presents the ambiguities and tensions around the use of the GI tag among local producers. I suggest that the Tamil Nadu state's dispensation of the GI is predicated upon production compliance with the features of an "original" Kanchipuram sari entextualized (Raheja, 1996) in official colonial and postcolonial records through a place-based typology of traditional craft. I go on to show how the GI's conceptualization of quality and authenticating formula has become the basis for renewed branding for some producers while a majority of small private producers and cooperative societies subvert the GI's standard through the production of "duplicate" Kanchipuram saris.

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I Introduction

Since the 1980s, historiography of industrialization in India has sought to draw attention to the hitherto neglected experience of artisans and their response to wider techno-economic processes of change under colonialism.[1] The persistence, diversity and indeed growth of the "traditional textile industry" in the twentieth century prompted a number of studies underscoring the rise of artisan capital, dynamic role played by weaver-merchants and continued availability of labour, resulting in regionally distinct narratives on artisan cloth production in India.[2] The present paper locates itself within this growing scholarship and focuses on the active role of artisan producers in adapting to a socio-economic milieu dictated by global policy regimes and shifting markets for culturally valued products.

A more specific aim of this work is to examine the ambiguities and tensions among silk handloom producers pertaining to the "place" of production of the "Kanchipuram sari", against the backdrop of the product's official documentation in colonial and postcolonial records. I point to the colonial fixing of artisanal products to discrete localities within a place-based typology of "traditional craft" and discuss how this topography continues to underpin valuations of the local in India today. In his ethnography of an agricultural community in north India, Gupta stresses against essentializations of the local to account for the many "hybridities" or multiple knowledge constructions in the postcolonial situation (Gupta, 1998). By taking the case of silk handloom sari production, I examine the discursive strategies for the inscription of locality onto artisanal products, interrogate how spaces of production are transformed into "places of origin" and describe how the local is produced, reproduced and commoditized as a globally valued good.

[1] Haynes and Roy, 1999.

[2] See for instance the following works: Arivukkarasi and Nagaraj, 2009; Basile, 2013; Bharathan, 1983; 1985; Ciotti, 2007; De Neve, 2005; DeNicola, 2004; Haynes, 2001; 2012; Kawlra, 1998; Mamidipudi et al. 2012; Mukund and Syamasundari, 1998; Niranjana, 2004; Rai, 2008; 2012; Remesh, 2001; Roy, 1993; 1998; 2002; 2007.

I peg my argument on a particular practice that has gained purchase in the new millennium in countries of the South—the certification of local products, producers and production parameters, under the legal branding instrument referred to as the Geographical Indications of Goods or GI. Instituted by global economic and regulatory regimes[3] and implemented by individual nations seeking proprietary rights for artisanal products produced within their territories, the GI for the "Kanchipuram sari", and its contested use on the ground, provides an appropriate entry point for conversations on the politics of place.

It must be clarified that my goal is neither to evaluate the GI as a measure of protective branding, nor to assess whether it has been successfully implemented as a compliance mechanism in India. Rather, my intention is to unpack the formula of technical prescriptions and spatial demarcation of production in the text of the GI application[4] made by the government of Tamil Nadu in 2005, which has been a source of contestation and negotiation at the local level since then. I deconstruct the rhetoric of authenticity encoding the "original" within the GI for the Kanchipuram sari to demonstrate that its prescriptions of locality and quality are drawn from British colonial records and, moreover, seek legitimation from it.

The Indian GI Act of 1999 defines the GI as "an indication which identifies such goods as agricultural goods, natural goods or manufactured goods as originating, or manufactured in the territory of a country, or a region or locality where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of such goods is essentially attributable to its geographical origin…" (quoted in Marie-Vivien, 2010: 129). One among the many global standards of quality and intellectual property such as patents, copyrights and trademarks, the GI is distinct in that

[3] The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of India 1999 was enacted in 2003 following a global agreement of trade and intellectual property between nations, under the auspices of the World Trade Organization.

[4] The text of this application is available in the bi-monthly *Geographical Indications Journal of the Government of India*, No. 4, January 1, 2005, Application No. 15 and published by the Intellectual Property of India, Geographical Indications Registry Chennai. *http://ipindia.nic.in/girindia/*

it is associated with a specific bio-cultural region and is viewed as a collective mark when compared with copyrights, trademarks and patents. Since the GI seeks to protect the proprietary rights of producers from a specific geographical region, the GI is applicable to only those who can prove to be the "original" producers of the Kanchipuram sari. In what follows I hope to lay bare the contradictions inherent in such an entitlement.

Research on handloom weaving in Tamil Nadu during the early 1980s revealed that the silk weaving industry in Kanchipuram in northeastern Tamil Nadu had witnessed rapid growth in the post-independence period. "The number of silk looms in the district increased by 67 per cent from 1961 to 1983, from 7,200 looms to 12,006" (Bharathan, 1985:94). It is interesting that similar growth was recorded for the neighbouring Arani and north Arcot region since the 1970s and 80s. What is noteworthy is that the expansion of silk handloom weaving during this period is associated with the rising demand for a particular variety of silk sari—one that employs the three-shuttle or *korvai* technique for solid bordered weaving. Research findings by the Madras Institute of Development Studies in the early 1990s attested to a dramatic shift in Arani from simple varieties to more complex weaves along the lines of those woven at Kanchipuram (Nagaraj, et al. 1996).

Research conducted again in 2009 revealed that nearly three-quarters of the weaving households in the Arani area were producing a sari variety which was considered to be a "poor cousin" of the Kanchipuram sari (Arivukkarasi and Nagaraj, 2009:41). This aspect was confirmed once again in Basile's study where she found that "The quality of the *korvai* saris produced in Arni is not quite the same as that of the *korvai* saris produced in Kancheepuram, as the latter have more 'grand' designs, and more *zari* and raw silk are used. Yet, they are currently marketed as *Kancheepuram* saris and have occupied a segment of the market that is intermediate between 'low-quality' silk saris and the high quality genuine *Kancheepuram* saris…" (Basile, 2013:149). In both these accounts there is reference to and privileging of an "original" Kanchipuram sari indicating the pervasiveness of a rhetoric of authenticity even in expert accounts of artisanal production.

What is the genealogy of this discourse and how is it employed in the GI's formula of legitimating the "original" producer of the "genuine" Kanchipuram sari? In section II I establish that the production prescriptions of the GI and its demarcation of juridical boundaries of production, echoes the colonial and postcolonial enumeration of artisanal products within a fixed geography of "traditional craft" production. In the body of the paper I discuss some of the features that are under contestation in Kanchipuram—the geographical map showing the bounded territory of production, the percentage composition of gold/silver used and the stipulation to weave in the *korvai* technique. I argue that the GI is an authorized standard which is de-stabilized in a production scenario where multiple versions or "duplicates" of this sari are being produced by artisan producers exercising a choice between sustaining and reducing quality for a segmented market.

In the conclusion I suggest that the GI's invocation of the past as being rooted in the local is an act of patrimony whose salience stems from a Eurocentric ethic of place-based ownership and affective belonging. It circumscribes artisan production in India within a regime of value that has its roots in the French notion of *terroir* or "taste of place" attributed to agro-based products like wine, cheese and chocolate.[5] But, as we shall see in this paper, the GI's idiom of authenticity and valorization of the local has become an opportunity for artisan sari producers in Kanchipuram to either appropriate or disrupt its standard.

II A Cartography of Craft Production

The discourse and practice that indexed artisanal products and production within a cartographic paradigm of "craft" was part of the general process of "traditionalization" of the colony under the British. The "traditional" was constructed in contradistinction to the "modern" as a means of representing "different" civilizational foundations.

[5] See the work of Robert Ulin (1996, 2002) on wine, Heather Paxson (2010) on cheese and Susan Terrio (2000) on chocolate in the context of terroir.

Validating Britain's progressive modernization was a simultaneous proclamation and constitution of India as tradition bound and unchanging (Bayly, 1988; Ludden, 1993; Washbrook, 1997). Nostalgia for a pre-industrial mode of production that had perished in the West had already sought to promote the idea of "hand work" (along the lines of medieval European guilds) as a morally superior, aesthetic alternative to the industrial "factory hand". For the British therefore, "crafts stood in for India as a whole" (McGowan, 2009:3). They were the tangible markers of all that was "traditional", embodying notions of economic backwardness as well as beauty of a bygone era, which the imperial government actively sought to promote and claim as a potential resource.

Colonial administrators and art officials appropriated artisanal production in India by spatially marking and fixing products and producers in the very process of mapping and documenting them as "traditional crafts" of the colony.[6] Recalling how the "entextualization" of indigenous speech in colonial documents "radically stabilized and transformed their meanings and excluded or marginalized speech that was not congruent with colonial views of Indian society or colonial political interests" (Raheja, 1996:495), I suggest that artisanal production was refracted through the prism of the "traditional" and entextualized as place-based crafts in official records.

Knowledge production on crafts of India was part of a wider geo-physical and techno-economic enumeration of the commercial products of the colony that sought to order diversity by fixing its "place" of production. Writing in the preface of the *Arts and Crafts of India: A Descriptive Study*, Sir George Watt notes his "attempt to associate Indian art-wares in a systematic sequence, under certain classes, divisions, and sections…" to be a "sufficiently comprehensive account to admit of identification of each style of Indian work in association with the names of the centres of production and of the chief producers" (Watt and Brown, 1904, 1979: vii). Systemizing local realities in the

[6] Cartography was in fact integral to the colonial and crypto-colonial governmental endeavour more generally; see especially Thongchai Winichakul (1994) and Phillip B. Wagoner, (2003:789).

language of craft, featuring an "informed selection of exemplary 'types'" applicable throughout the length and breadth of the colonized territory, captured in a single sweep the geographical spread of the coverage (Driver and Ashmore, 2010:367). It also framed Indian artisanal products and producers within the episteme of craft, and spatially marked them according to their ascribed "place of origin".

Artisanal products and processes were recorded in colonial texts according to rationalized, scientific classificatory schema and focus upon the raw material used, techniques employed, nature of ornamentation and provenance or chronology of ownership and location. Among the early projects of documentation that re-contextualised artisanal products for colonial interests include the series of eighteen volumes produced by John Forbes Watson in 1866 and 1873, containing actual textile swatches with generalized labels such as fabrics "plain" and "ornamental", "coarse" and "fine", "lower class wear" and "upper class wear", "male" or "female" wear etc. much "like botanical specimens organized within a herbarium" (Driver and Ashmore, 2010:361). It is significant that Watson included an appendix for ease of reference and accessibility which spatially marked each example according to "the places of manufacture or markets from which they came carefully enumerated under name, district, Presidency, or country, right down to latitude and longitude" (Ibid.: 366). The re-contextualization of artisanal products within a place-based typology of craft in colonial documents, not only linked specific products and processes to specific places but also, fixed standards of quality to discrete localities within the emergent idiom of the "traditional".

The visual representation of the colony's products via museums, international expositions, fairs, department stores and catalogues also reflects this official ossification and validation of artisanal production within an imagined, authenticating past. Material samples of this project were actively collected, arranged and displayed according to criteria that constituted the "traditional" as defined and legitimated by colonial officials (Hoffenberg, 2004; Maskeill, 1999, 2002; McGowan, 2005, 2009; Metcalf, 1989; 1994; Sundar, 1995). Artisanal products became synonymous with all that was "traditional" in India for British art administrators such as Sir George Birdwood, Lockwood Kipling, Cecil

Burns and Ernst B. Havell who actively engaged in "the prevention of degradation" in the Indian arts in their search for authenticity (quoted in McGowan, 2005: 273). Disparaging innovations and imitations as deviant, hybrid or spurious, they attributed the decline in quality of craft products to the general tendency among native producers to digress from "traditional" principles and standards of practice set by their forefathers (Ibid.).

The sacralization of artisanal products as "traditional" was accompanied by the perception of its producers as equally inhabiting the timeless space of an authentic past. Artisans were accordingly emblematized in colonial records and exhibitions through rarefied conceptions of the "native Indian craftsman" visually represented, as Dewan (2004) notes, in the image of an anonymous ethnological "body at work", and whose presence in diverse exhibitionary complexes was itself evidentiary reference to and evocation of the traditional (Dewan, 2004; Mathur, 2007). The concrete location of artisans in the geo-scape of "traditional" India, however, was legitimized by other forms of colonial knowledge, particularly historical epigraphy. Part of the massive geo-historical project of field surveys since the nineteenth century involving the production of maps and collection of revenue information, donative inscriptions, coins, manuscripts and orally transmitted local legends (Cohn, 1996; Wagoner, 2003), artisans were systematically inserted within local histories thus produced as the "living" repositories of an unchanged, even if fuzzy, techno-cultural past.

The postcolonial appropriation of this cartographic paradigm of craft is evident in the numerous national projects that documented and mapped "traditional crafts" of India in census reports, exhibition and museum catalogues, craft documentations and maps as being uniquely associated with their geographical coordinates. Their depiction as distinctively *Indian* handicrafts and handlooms, draws upon the colonial spatialization of India's inherited past onto the nation-scape, indexing its place-based specificity as regional and local diversities.[7] The last

[7] The use of regional and local traditions to represent nation has been dealt with by Appadurai (1988) in his discussion on the construction of a national cuisine of India through the increasing specialisation of regional

quarter of the twentieth century witnessed India's self-representation as a "craft nation" at the diorama of "Festivals of India" abroad (Greenough, 1996) and the regionalisation of craft designs, legitimized by "policy communities" comprising nationalist social elites and designers (DeNicola, 2004). The encapsulation of artisanal production as "traditional craft" in the post-liberalisation era culminated into the capital's "Dilli Haat", a commercial centre in the heart of the city invoking the village market-place, underscoring the "ambiguous relationship between 'the village', 'the city' and 'the nation'" in the topography of craft in India (Sethi, 2013).

Without positing a seamless continuity between colonial and postcolonial spatialization of artisanal production localities, I suggest that the GI mark for the Kanchipuram sari presumes this fixing of materials, processes and producers to explicit places of production and, what is more, draws its legitimacy from it. In the following section I point to the contemporary persistence of "traditional craft" as an authenticating discourse in official colonial and postcolonial records.

III Author(iz)ing the Local

In its original context of implementation in Europe, especially in France where it was applicable to wines, the GI was associated with empowering producer groups with greater responsibilities through the devolution of state control to local certification bodies (Marie- Vivien, 2010). In India, particularly in the case of the Kanchipuram, the disparate nature of the organisation of production of silk weaving comprising cooperative societies, dependent weavers and private producers (see Arterburn, 1982:108–122; Remesh, 2001) has required that the task be aggregated under a single organization—the Dept. of Handlooms and Textiles already administering handloom subsidies and other protectionist policies of the state. In lay terms this means that the

and local recipes on the one hand and their simultaneous imbrication within a more generalized pan Indian gastronomic frame (Ibid: 21–22). Other studies include Maskeill (1999) on the embroideries or *phulkari* of Punjab and Kawlra (1998) on the Kanchipuram sari.

Department of Handlooms and Textiles is not only the owner[8] but also the authorizing agency and regulatory body functioning on behalf of the numerous producers of the Kanchipuram sari.

A product's inclusion into the national-level GI protection regime involves the fulfilment of norms that establish its local, place-based identity. In the case of the GI tag for the Kanchipuram sari, this requires the submission of an application to the GI Registry in which historical evidence, of the co-relation between silk weaving and the town of Kanchipuram is provided. It is only after these claims have been examined and accepted that the applicant, in this case the state of Tamil Nadu, becomes the "registered proprietor" under the GI instrument. An examination of the procedures of application by the state for the GI tag for the Kanchipuram sari reveals the persistence of the discourse, already available in twentieth century administrative records, establishing Kanchipuram as a "traditional" centre of silk weaving in Tamil Nadu.

The application in the *GI Journal* accordingly emphasizes the town's long standing reputation for producing heavy weight silk cloths of unquestionable durability whose "proof of origin" is to be found in colonial and postcolonial records acknowledged as follows in the text: "Proof: (1) Census of India 1961—Volume IX issued by Shri P.K. Nambiar of the Indian Administrative Service, Superintendent of Census Operations, Madras, (2) Gazetteers of India—Tamil Nadu State—Kancheepuram and Thiruvalur District (Erstwhile Chenaglpattu District)—Volume Editor Shri M. Gopalakrishnan—year 2000, (3) Information was also published in leading reputed daily, *The Hindu*, dated 5th November 2004 under heading 'The lure of the Kanchi Silk'" (*GI Journal* No. 4, January 1, 2005: 11).

The Kanchipuram sari's geo-specification is stated as being the distinctive sheen of the silk attributed to "the water used at

[8] Ownership of the GI is permanent and, unlike patents and copyrights, cannot eventually become available in the public domain, in the manner of IP rights of "traditional knowledge" practitioners (Raustiala and Munzer, 2007).

Kancheepuram (which) possesses this unique quality of impacting luster [sic] (and) may be one of the reasons for the silk weaving industry which has taken firm root in Kancheepuram" (Ibid.: 3).The text goes on to identify the spatial area of production of the Kanchipuram sari whose perimeter coincides with the current administrative boundary of the Kanchipuram and made available as the "Geographical Area of Production and Map" on page 12 of the GI application.

The historical presence of silk weavers in the town is ascribed to Kanchipuram being the seat of dynastic rule and patronage under the Pallavas and Cholas since the second to ninth centuries CE and to the Tamil literary epic, the *Silappadhikaram* composed at the beginning of the Common Era. The GI application cites the commentary of Tamil scholar Venkatasami Nattar in 1937 as evidence to testify that "the weavers mentioned in Silappadhikaram were really Pattu Saliyars …. When the maritime city of Kaveripoompattinam was submerged by the sea, it is quite probable that some of the Saliyars migrated to places like Kanchipuram for safety" (Ibid.: 3).

The technical prescriptions of the GI for the Kanchipuram sari are drawn almost verbatim from the Census of India, 1961 Vol. IX Madras, Part VII—A-i which includes an entire volume dedicated to "Silk Weaving of Kanchipuram" (see Nambiar, 1964a, b). Taken to be the "original"[9] weaving process practiced since "traditional" times, the detailed process descriptions in this document in turn draw from colonial accounts on silk weaving in Kanchipuram in the early part of the twentieth century and further attest to the authority and adequacy of the citation.[10]

In drawing attention to official writing on the Kanchipuram sari within colonial and postcolonial documents my aim has been to show

[9] Their authorial legitimacy is taken for granted to such an extent that under the section on colors the GI application prescribes that the dyestuffs employed in the Kanchipuram sari be from "the firms supplying colors … the Imperial Chemical Industries, CIBA and GEIGY" (Nambiar, 1964:8) who are no longer the suppliers in present-day Kanchipuram.

[10] Even a cursory glance at the categories delineated under the heading (J), "Method of Production" reveals that they have been lifted from chapter 2 (pages 3-19) of Nambiar's report on silk weaving in Kanchipuram.

that the very process of delineation and fixing of production specifics to historically defined "places" of production, privileges a singular version of local reality, itself stabilized within an administrative moment. The creation of an authorized standard, through this process of entextualization (Raheja, 1996), however, contradicts the dynamism of the local. Indeed, the appearance of an official or GI version of the Kanchipuram sari has become a fertile domain of contestation and arbitration between state functionaries implementing the GI and local producers who aspire for its benefits.

IV "Original" or "Duplicate"

The process involved in the dispensation of the GI to producers is predicated on compliance with certain features or production processes delineated in the entextualized or "original" version of the Kanchipuram sari and crucial to the state's rhetoric of authenticity and authorisation.[11] According to the Deputy Registrar of Trade Marks and Geographical Indications

> Inclusion in GI Registry would help put a check to the unhealthy practice of cheating customers by selling silk saris woven in other parts of the state as 'Kancheepuram silk sari', … silk saris which comply with the specifications and weaving method mentioned in the GI registry records would alone qualify for branding as 'Kancheepuram silk sari' … (and) bring some discipline among the silk sari manufacturers and weavers in Kancheepuram (Venkatasubramanian, 2011).

Since its drive for enrolment and issuance of authorized user certificates in 2009, however, the Department of Textiles and Handlooms has received a number of petitions stating difficulties in

[11] The mechanism to ascertain production compliance among producers is a questionnaire cum authorization certificate issued in Tamil by the Dept. of Handlooms and Textiles. It requires signatures of the following officials before an applicant can be certified as a GI sari producer—Joint Director (Handlooms) Chennai; Assistant Director of Weavers Service Centre, Kanchipuram; Assistant Director of Central Silk Board, Kanchipuram; Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Zari Ltd., Kanchipuram; Assistant Director, Kanchipuram Range.

adherence to quality parameters standardized under the GI. The representations pertain to the composition of gold in the *zari* used in the sari, the obligation to weave in the *korvai* or three-shuttle weave and the area of production defined in the GI. These are at variance with those considered feasible, and actually employed, by local producers and hence the subject of on-going controversy among various stakeholders at the local level.

But many other private producers of silk saris in Kanchipuram are sceptical about the GI mark and question the viability of adhering to design and technical aspects delineated under it. Apparently it took the president of IPR Attorneys Association and advocates responsible for the GI registrations for the Kanchipuram sari, nearly four years to convince producers to become registered users under the GI Act once the government of Tamil Nadu had registered as proprietor under the first phase of the Act's implementation.

As of now, that is in 2013, a majority of the producers in the town of Kanchipuram are still not authorised to produce the official version or "original" Kanchipuram sari.[12] And it is clear that the implementation of the GI has resulted in palpable tension among various stakeholders in Kanchipuram. Whereas officials of the department of handlooms and textiles, in its capacity as an inspection body for quality control and for the validation of claims and settlement of disputes related to GI infringements, exhort producers to adhere to the GI's mandate, producers themselves are concerned about the stringent standards set by it and many are doubtful of its advantages to their business.

The GI tag on the Kanchipuram sari is one among other national-level markers of quality currently being used to brand the Kanchipuram sari. Other certifications of standard include the "Handloom" mark, the "Silk" mark, the mark of the production organisation or

[12] Some fifty authorised user certificates have been issued for Kanchipuram saris of which twenty-three are cooperative societies in the town, twenty-seven are private producers and the rest are in various stages of inspection and awaiting certification (Interview with Kandaswamy, Deputy Director Handlooms, Kanchipuram and his Technical Assistant, Senthil Kumari, January 2012).

"Cooperative Society" mark, and the gold thread or "*Zari*" mark which is currently under consideration but also hotly debated. The cooperative society label stipulates the composition of *zari* in the sari to be 57% silver; 24.6% silk thread; 18.4% copper; and 0.6% gold.[13] The repeated demand by silk producers for a change in this composition had led the state to affect a reduction in the percentage requirement of precious metals used in the *zari*. The revised break-up as of April 2010 was silver: 40%; copper: 35.5%; silk: 24% and gold: 0.5%. This specification contradicts those set under the GI, which according to the public document under review is an implausible 78% silver, 21% silk and 1% gold in the *zari* thread and simply impossible to comply with.

The injunction to employ the *korvai* or three-shuttle weave for solid borders in the GI has further exacerbated compliance. The *korvai* technique requires an apprentice weaver to assist in throwing the third shuttle. Often this apprentice is a younger member of the weaver's own family contributing to the work in the process of acquiring the skill of silk weaving at an early age. The enforcement of the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act from the 2000s in Kanchipuram ensures that hiring young apprentices be forbidden by law. New entrants to silk weaving, usually those who have woven in cotton, are either not deft enough to assist in three-shuttle silk weaving or demand much higher wages (equivalent to those of a highly skilled weaver) for a supplementary task. Considered to be laborious, time consuming and not worth the effort, *korvai* weaving is therefore a difficult and costly proposition for many local producers in Kanchipuram. Indeed, according to a news report "the word sparks passionate arguments about heritage, history and handlooms …" (Padmanabhan, 2012). Many producers have made representations to the government to replace the *korvai* obligation in the GI with newer, more popular, weaving techniques like the *jangla,* or patterned weave.

[13] This break-up is available from the website of Tamilnadu Zari Limited, a private company set up in 1971 by the government of Tamil Nadu to provide cooperative societies with the "required quality of zari at reasonable rates to save them from stiff competitions of the monopoly of the zari merchants in and outside of the State". *http://www.tn.gov.in/hhtk/dht/zari/zari-home.htm*

Demarking the spatial boundary of production under the GI to the municipal limits of the town of Kanchipuram has meant that producers of silk saris in Kanchipuram, both private and cooperative societies, cannot recruit weavers residing outside the perimeter approved. Moreover, existing weavers/members who happen to reside outside this circumscription are excluded and their work deemed a potential violation of the GI. A number of weavers, belonging to two of the largest silk cooperative societies to have acquired user certificates, live in streets located outside this bounded zone. The possibility that their production output may be marked as illegitimate has prompted requests from the concerned societies to review the GI map and to include these disputed areas within its jurisdiction.

Local producers appear to have succeeded in contesting the processes that essentialize and fix the production of the Kanchipuram sari. Officials confirm that the various petitions[14] received by them are being consolidated and a revised GI addressing their demands is under preparation. But the adoption of the GI mark is fraught with reservations and obstacles stemming from an increasingly vulnerable production environment. As authorised users of the GI, producers must use raw materials like silk and gold which are governed by economic forces far beyond their control. Comparing GI marked saris to other valuable commodities in the wider market-place, the president of the silk manufacturers association of Kanchipuram and first to receive the authorised user certificate, notes: "Just as silk and gold and are linked to the market, so also our saris are linked to fluctuations of the sensex" (Interview, March 2011).

[14] My discussions with weavers and producers of silk saris in Kanchipuram revealed that these petitions had indeed been made. However, this fact was never unequivocally accepted by the officials from the Tamil Nadu State Department of Handloom and Textiles both in Chennai and Kanchipuram and nor by the state's IPR attorney formulating the Kanchipuram GI. Their authorial position with regard to the technical specifications of the GI application prevented them from overtly questioning its authority. It is perhaps for this reason that my repeated requests for the new map indicating the GI's revised geographical coverage was never declined but also never fulfilled.

Gaining legitimacy as a producer of the "original" Kanchipuram sari is therefore filled with ambiguity and dependent upon external factors. Speaking of the challenges faced in sustaining the GI mark by silk weaver's cooperative societies in Kanchipuram, General Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers Union, pointed to the infiltration of poor quality (80% less silver content) *zari* from Surat, Gujarat. He demanded an end to the corruption through the cancellation of business licenses of *zari* traders from Surat, jeopardizing the business and reputation of the societies using their product (Quoted in *Dinakaran*, 26 September 2013, 14).

Spokespersons of the earliest cooperative society to adopt the GI mark point out that the GI has brought attention to their saris as being genuine on account of the fact that they provide their customers the "break-up" of the cost of the sari. Since the cost of raw materials used, wages for weaving and the profit accrued by the society are all pre-fixed, cooperative societies claim to offer their customers the means to estimate the true market value of their investment. This means that their products, when recycled, would continue to be valued for the measure of gold and silver contained in them—a true marker of the original Kanchipuram sari. Yet, unlike other tags of quality that adorn the labels of each of their saris, the GI tag is conspicuously absent despite the fact that the society has been certified to use the same, indicating the ambiguity related to its use.

For the many small producers framed outside of the approved parameters, however, the GI's de-legitimation is an opportunity for fresh prospects of production in an expansive market. It is not surprising that the fixing of attributes of the "original" Kanchipuram sari has spawned a whole new genre of products popularly referred to as the "duplicate" sari. These saris are known as such because they possess all features of the Kanchipuram sari fixed by the GI—the use of silk together with *zari*, the solid/contrasting border in bright colours and its characteristic weight and sheen. The difference is that the raw materials and techniques imitate only superficially those employed in the "original" GI version. The duplicate sari is a look-alike of the Kanchipuram sari and is sold at a significantly lower price. What is interesting is that this vital point of variance with the GI sari has

engendered a parallel production (and demand) of Kanchipuram saris whose price point merely suggests the clever circumvention of the three cost-raising features—*zari,* silk and *korvai* without compromising its visual likeness to the original.

The fact that Kanchipuram is fast transforming from a silk weaving town into a retail hub[15] is testimony to the rising demand for the "duplicate" Kanchipuram sari that is indifferent to or eludes the GI's precise specifications. The phenomenon is an example of what Herzfeld (2005) calls "cultural intimacy" where rules are flouted with impunity. The office originally handling GI applications and enforcements in Kanchipuram is now non-existent and the fact that the *zari* testing machine is not accurate or has been re-calibrated to show only the desired and/or acceptable reading is common knowledge among both the producers as well as those in positions of authority.

That the duplicate sari is a reality in Kanchipuram is indisputable. Looms relentlessly clack outside the municipal limits of the town of Kanchipuram to produce the duplicate sari using "chemical" *zari* and silk mixed with polyester yarn. "There are 200 Kanchipuram 'silk' saree manufacturers in town who make 20,000 saris a year but of those, only 200 can be classified as genuine Kanchipuram silk sarees, says an official, on condition of anonymity" (Quoted in Sivaramakrishanan, 2010). Duplicate Kanchipuram saris are readily recognized as they are of "*china raham*" or "simple weaves" and are purchased for "gifting" purposes at prices significantly lower than those of the "wedding" or *mahuratham* sari in Kanchipuram.

And even as the spatialization of the Kanchipuram sari continues to be resisted through overt negotiations and covert evasions of the GI, its brand Kanchipuram (whether original or duplicate) is being embraced as the new touchstone of value in the emergent national and global salience for the local. In the next section I describe how private producers and fashion designers variously employ the rhetoric of "local" to augment their brand's legitimacy in a competitive marketplace.

[15] Numerous retail showrooms have opened in Kanchipuram since 2011 including those of big players like Nalli Silks from Chennai, Varamahalakshmi from Andhra Pradesh, Joyallukkas from Kerala.

V Brand Kanchipuram

Locality has become the source of inalienable value since the GI's endorsement of the Kanchipuram sari within a place-based typology of traditional craft. The "traditional" in the GI sari pertains not only to the price of gold and silver admixture used in it, but also to its price-less or non-monetary worth, deriving from its local production environment. The GI's valorisation of Kanchipuram town's geo-physical and cultural past, symbolically transferred into the sari via ethically executed production processes is now being adopted as a branding strategy for many producers and retailers. Fontefrancesco (2012), Paxson (2010) and Ulin (1996; 2002) have shown how the infusion of ethical valuations into their work processes through the invocation of place is critical for artisan producers of jewellery, cheese and wine in Europe respectively. Sustaining one's brand sovereignty is made possible through the creation of "an actively demarcated moral divide" between the "original" or "own" brand vs. pirated brands (Thomas, 2009: 5–6).

The website of the local silk manufacturers' association delineates the characteristic features of the GI marked Kanchipuram sari in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and English not only to create awareness of the brand Kanchipuram but also to morally differentiate their products from local competition. Their exhortations remind customers not to get deceived by imitations and instead to look for the distinguishing features of the GI sari likening the difference to one between a "horse and a donkey".[16]

> The main intention of our website is to describe the traits of Kanchipuram Handloom Silk and Jari Saree and distinguish it from fake silk sarees....**The queen of silk saree is Kanchipuram Silk Saree**. Kancheepuram silk and jari saree is being produced with the high quality twisted mulberry silk which dyed with palar river water, runs through Kancheepuram by the skilled and artistic weavers of Kancheepuram in handloom. The real gold and silver jari is used to produce the world famous kancheepuram silk and

[16] Interview with Y.M. Narayanasamy, President of the Handloom Silk and Zari Sari Manufacturers Association, Kanchipuram, January, 2012.

> jari saree. We can know the worthines (*sic*) of The kancheepuram silk saree since it is registered under the **Geographical Indications Act**.[17]

Emphasizing the inalienable worth of the sari, the rhetoric promotes its "divine look" achieved on account of its being produced in the holy abode of the Gods, the town of Kanchi. Its instrumental value is said to be resultant from the gold and silver content of the *zari* in the sari, an "investment" equivalent to its value in gold and likened to wearing precious jewellery:

> When we exchange or sell our gold and silver ornaments we will get some value after deducting 30-35 per cent of the value as wastage and making charge. In the same manner we will get such value of gold and silver according to the jari used in the pure Kancheepuram Silk and Jari saree after its maximum usage. Buying of pure Kancheepuram silk and jari saree is not an expense but it is also an investment. Wearing of pure kancheepuram silk saree produced with real gold and silver jari gives good things to our body and soul like wearing of gold and silver ornaments. It gives divine look like **Goddes** (*sic*) **Sri Mahalakshmi**.

This is in sharp contrast to the branding rhetoric employed by new entrants into the silk handloom sari retail industry like RMKV, Chennai Silks and Pothys in Chennai whose websites, while careful not to claim the Kanchipuram brand, nevertheless invoke their rural roots as a family-owned business in order to counter Kanchipuram's official past as a centre of craft production with the weight of their own biographical past.

For urban fashion designers catering to transnational consumption patterns however, the "local" refers to a cosmopolitan sensibility and taste for the hand-made. "Studio" or "designer" silk sari branding in Chennai therefore emphasizes the product's identity with Kanchipuram town through a rhetorical capturing of its historical, geographical and cultural heritage. Each sari is imbued with this spirit of the "local" and

[17] *http://kanchipattuzarisareeasso.com/English%20handloom/home2.html*

branded as such to emphasize the wearer's personal style and need for an archetypal aesthetic in a modern world. The website of an elite boutique selling silk saris under "The Kanjivaram" label in Chennai describes their saris as follows:

> The Kanjivaram – arguably the queen of silks – reigns supreme as the most versatile, breathable, durable, and exquisitely comfortable sari known to the world. It is a sophisticated masterpiece of technique and skill that has evolved over centuries. Blessed by the unique confluence of history, geography and culture of Kanchipuram, the city of a thousand temples, the master weavers of this land elevated the handwoven silk sari to high art. To own a Kanjivaram is to know that each sari is so different and so special that no two can ever be exactly alike. To wrap oneself in the *luxury* of a Kanjivaram is to know that somebody's complete attention was on that weaving for many days. To experience the magic of a Kanjivaram is to know that you are wearing a sari that is at once smart, stylish, sensual and classic.[18]

Both versions appropriate the "local" through the "construction of inalienability" so that "consumption may … be reformulated in value-related terms as an ideal" Miller (1988:354). The Kanchipuram sari's fresh legitimation elevates it further into an archetypal product whose salience is obtained through a demonstrable nexus with "place" produced anew, whether real or imagined, in response to changing contexts of value.

V Conclusion: Place as Value

The GI's transformation of spaces of production into "places of origin" through a fictional mapping of artisanal production of the present onto the national crafts-scape is part of a wider process of authenticating the local and its establishment as heritage of "place". Its justification of protecting the rights of "original" producers of the Kanchipuram sari is hinged on the narrativization of a local past but, in its claims of patrimony, is squarely rooted in the present. As a tool and strategy for

[18] *http://sarangithestore.com/the-kanjivaram*

the inscription of locality with the valence of heritage then, the GI is "'a contemporary product shaped from history'… a value-laden concept…" (D.C. Harvey, 2001:327).

The GI's rationale and ethical basis for the valorization of the local can be traced to the French notion of '*terroir*' imbuing the geo-physical contours of a given piece of land with the symbolic value of a cultural bequest for its long-term occupiers. The "interplay of human ingenuity and curiosity with the natural givens of a place", according to this conception of locality, becomes the *terroir* or "taste of place" of a product whose material conditions of production and associated techno-cultural practice and skill-base is inherited by its resident producers (Barham, 2003:131).

As a collective representation of the past *terroir* is "a theory of how people and place, cultural tradition and landscape ecology, are mutually constituted over time" (Paxson, 2010: 444). It is predicated upon a notion of "cultural diversity"[19] which is seen to be the defining characteristic of the human species and "at the core" of dominant (UNESCO's) conceptualizations of world cultural heritage preservation today (Stoczkowski, 2009). Artisans and their products are celebrated in this unifying edifice as the archetypal place-holders of an archaic mode of production and way of life to be preserved for posterity as part of the "good" rather than "bad" diversity of humankind's past (Ibid.: 11).

The use of GI by the Indian state to further reinforce a craft-scape of colonial invention promotes only an official ("good") version of culture leaving unveiled the "dirty laundry" of duplicates and fakes[20] that nation states comprising the UNESCO, either deny or do not want to share with one another (Herzfeld in Byrne 2010:155; Herzfeld, 2005). Moreover, it anticipates the univeralization of *terroir* or "taste

[19] According to Herzfeld (1987; 2002b), this is the "Eurocentric ideology" suggesting that the diversity of European cultures reflects their transcendent unity.

[20] See for further reading Yi-chieh Lin (2011) on the emergence of fakes and how counterfeiting has become a "cultural touchstone" in the global market for symbolic brand value.

of place" under globally sanctioned programs valorising locality. It heralds the commodification of "local" heritage now constituted as a globally valued good, eminently eligible for high status within "the global hierarchy of value" (Herzfeld, 2004).

The GI's forceful claim to Kanchipuram's "tradition" of artisanal weaving and the official transformation of the town as the provenance or "place of origin" of the Kanchipuram sari, protecting the interest of the state of Tamil Nadu and the Indian nation is in fact "effective complicity" to the dictates of what Herzfeld (2002a) has called a "crypto-hegemonic" culturalist politics. The persistence of colonial and nationalist discourse of traditional craft more than sixty years after imperial domination and the contemporary heritageisation of artisanal production via the GI within global modernity is a denial of the individual and collective politics of artisans in today's localities.

The GI Act certifies only those producer associations who apply with a copy of a geographical map related to the product or good in question. They must establish "proof or origin" and "historical record" to be based on the geographical environment, and other "inherent human factors", including the exclusive right to use the GI with the possibility of punitive action against those who claim the right without certification (Lukose 2007: 218). This logic of Intellectual Property (IP) is lost in the case of the Kanchipuram sari where the "original" jostles side-by-side with its "duplicate" because "collaborative or distributed forms of creativity do not sit easily alongside the appropriative and individualistic terms it [IP] enshrines" (Leach, 2005: 29).

Even as the GI forbids the labelling of light-weight, embroidered silk saris currently being woven in Kanchipuram as "Kanchipuram saris", such saris continue to be "marketed by both the Handloom Silk Cooperative Societies and private silk sari manufacturers in the town as the 'latest and new variety' of Kancheepuram silk saris" (Venkatasubramanian, 2011). Market responsive design and technological innovations are not new to Kanchipuram and paradoxically, have been abetted by the entextualization process itself. One of the informants for the 1961 Census on the silk sari weaving industry in Kanchipuram conducted by Nambiar, admitted to have

shared the sari designs documented in the Census report on silk weaving in Kanchipuram with local producers who, in turn, is said to have used it as a source of fresh innovation for the burgeoning market at the time.[21]

The rationale for the introduction of the GI vehicle, under the IP regime of the WTO has been not only to ensure India's successful participation in world markets but also the protection of its material and cultural resources from appropriation and mass reproduction. But it is well known that in nineteenth-century Britain, even though artisanal products were "protected" through legal instruments like patents and copyrights and design, the legislation did not significantly impede the growth of mass markets and instead were used as models for the production of series (Bowrey, 1997:1). Instituted by the state for maintaining difference on behalf of the capitalist or mass manufacturer, who also owned the means to reproduce the design and to make profits from the production of its series, these protective legislations paradoxically provided an impetus for the commoditization of artisanal production (Ibid.: 16).

We know that in the eighteenth century, trade with China yielded many new sources of profit for Britain whose industrial revolution actually gained impetus through the mass production of "fake" artisanal Chinese pots by Josiah Wedgwood (Washbrook, 1997:52). The present-day elevation of the Kanchipuram sari to the status of a model for the artisanal production of "duplicate" saris therefore is hardly surprising. Technical innovations and dilution of quality have been the hallmark of artisan producers' strategies for adaptation to changing mass-markets. Roy has emphasized that "…goods that were earlier produced for a more select clientele often led to a fall in the quality of goods. Artisans adapted by various means. They made different goods of different quality, reached new markets, cut costs, relocated themselves, and shared knowledge, information, and risks, …" (Roy, 2007: 964). Technological innovations resulting in partial or selective

[21] Interview with silk weaver Munnuswamy, *chinna* Kanchipuram, February 2012, who is retired now and claims to have contributed to the Census Report in which he has remained unacknowledged.

modernization of the handloom industry continue in Kanchipuram today as is evident from a recent news report: "The SPS korvai sleigh developed by an award-winning artisan allows the weaver to do the inter-locking himself …. A jacquard spindle with a catch-card makes weaving of patterns easy and the tie-and-dye method has replaced Petni. Colours are lab-made. Computer-aided textile designing is now part of the Art-degree curriculum. … RmKV … has developed the KV technique to get the korvai effect" (Padmanabhan, 2012).

Finally, the localization of silk sari production of the Kanchipuram sari against the backdrop of colonial and postcolonial spatialization of craft recalls the "spatial fix", or fixing of investments in land or other immovable assets under capitalism. Its logic is governed by the "dialectic between fixity and motion" and can give rise to "an entirely new landscape for capital accumulation" (D. Harvey, 2001:27-28). The GI fails to account for the dynamism of artisanal production and echoes the sedentarization of hitherto mobile populations, through census operations, settlement of land rights and creation of political and administrative boundaries and other forms of spatial domination in colonial modernity.

Ultimately, the political ecology of culture includes not only what is essentialized under legislations like the GI, but also those that are in the processes of dialogue and negotiation. Naturalizing and fixing the present in bounded localities based on an authorized version of the past serves only to undermine the on-going claims of culture along with all their contradictions and dilemmas with modernity.

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