



## *Report of One Day GI Camp*

*on*

# *Effective use of Geographical Indications - Muga Silk of Assam*

*30 March, 2016*

*Conducted by*

***Tezpur University Intellectual Property Rights (TUJPR) Cell***

*with*

***JPR Cell, Dibrugarh University and ASTEC***

***at***

*Dhakuakhana College, Lakhimpur*

*Assam*

Muga Silk of Assam was protected as a Geographical Indication (GI) from Assam in 2007. The Assam Science and Technology Environment Council (ASTEC) became the owner of this GI. In 2014, the logo of the Geographical Indication for *Muga Silk of Assam* was registered (Registered GI applications no 55 & 384).

A major lacuna surrounding all GIs in India has been the extraordinarily low number of “authorised users of the GIs”. In 2014, the total number of authorised users of the GI-Muga Silk of Assam was only two as compared to the total number of stakeholders of over 28000 as per the GI Application. The status of the authorised users for all GIs in India was equally alarming as the 234 registered GIs had only 881 authorised users in India. Clearly GI in India as a system has been ineffective as the emphasis was laid on registration of GIs and not on their lawful implementation for derivation of socio-economic benefits.



The Tezpur University Intellectual Property Rights (TUIPR) Cell initiated a project to identify the key reasons for such low number of authorised users of GI Muga Silk of Assam in the State and initiate immediate corrective measures at the grassroots level and across the MUGA Value Chain. Targeted field work in the Muga Hub in North Assam helped to identify the critical factors that needed to be addressed. Low awareness of the benefits of GI, uncontrolled quality of MUGA production, insignificant marketing infrastructure, non-existence of a regulatory framework for enforcement of GI, lack of technology infusion for enhancement of productivity and quality including insignificant organisational support were some of key weaknesses identified.

Starting with preliminary field work in December 2014, the TUIPR Cell organised a regional workshop on GI in Guwahati on January 14, 2015, in which participants were invited from various States in the North Eastern Region to share their experience with respect to GI filings and GI Grant activities in their respective States. Participants were also drawn from the Assam State Government Administration, Silk Board, Handloom Board, University Vice Chancellors, etc. The owners and stakeholders of various GIs in the North Eastern Region expressed their views based on which a set of recommendations were structured.

The follow-up activities of the TUIPR Cell in the MUGA Hub in North Assam finally culminated in a major GI Camp with the MUGA Stakeholders in the Lakhimpur Region. This Camp was conducted by TUIPR Cell in collaboration with the IPR Cell in Dibrugarh University at the North Lakhimpur College in April 2015. The camp was conducted in Assamese and this camp resulted in the preparation and filing of 92 applications for the stakeholders to become “Authorised users of the GI Muga Silk of Assam. These applications were sent to the GI Registry in Chennai and followed up by the TUIPR Cell. All the 92 applications were examined by the Chennai GI Registry and the 92 Authorised Users Certificates were issued by the GI Registry in April 2016.

Encouraged by this success, the TUIPR Cell carried on its field work and door-to-door campaign to promote GI Muga Silk of Assam in the Lakhimpur Region from March 2015 to April 2016. These efforts formed the basis of the second GI Camp on April 30, 2016 organised by the TUIPR Cell jointly with IPR Cell of Dibrugarh University and ASTEC (the owners of GI Muga Silk of Assam) at the Dhakuakhana College, Lakhimpur.

Professor Alak K Buragohain, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Dibrugarh University, Prof Prabuddha Ganguli, MHRD IPR Chair Professor at Tezpur University, Mr C.G. Naidu, Asstt. Registrar of GI, GI Registry, Chennai, Dr Pritam Deb, Coordinator, TUIPR Cell, Dr Pankaj Das, Coordinator, Dibrugarh University IPR Cell, Dr Tara Duwara, Dept of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Mr Bipul Saikia, Asst Professor, North Lakhimpur College, Dr Suchibrata Goswami, Research Officer, TUIPR Cell, Dr Juri Borbora Saikia, Research Officer, TUIPR Cell, Ms Dipali Dutta, Junior Research Fellow, TUIPR Cell, and Mr Mohindra Das, TUIPR Cell took part in this Camp.



More than 200 MUGA Stake Holders from 12 villages of Lakhimpur District across the MUGA Value Chain, including students and faculty of Dhakuakhana College and prominent local personalities actively participated in this GI Camp.

This overwhelming organic response of the stakeholders was a clear indication of the growing awareness among Muga producers on GI related matters. In this camp too, as in the earlier one, the



entire proceedings was conducted in Assamese to ensure total and free communication between the participants and the organisers of the Camp.

After a brief inaugural session, the Camp swiftly moved into an intense interactive session that was initiated by Dr Suchibrata Goswami and Dr Juri Borbora Saikia who made basic presentations on GI and how these be used to enhance individual and group earnings and how this could lead to an all-inclusive socio-economic development in the region. Mr Bipul Saikia also showed a documentary prepared on the entire sequence of Muga processing, from cultivation to the end product and explained in details the major issue related to Muga.



These presentations were followed by an elaborate session of questions from the grassroots participants, which were responded to by presenters Suchibrata and Juri and wherever necessary with intervention from Professor Ganguli (MHRD IPR Chair Professor, Tezpur University), Mr Naidu, the Asst Registrar of Trademarks, GI Registry, Dr Pritam Deb (Coordinator TUIPR Cell) and Mr Bipul Saikia (Asst Professor, North Lakhimpur College).



The main queries were centered around how registration as “authorised users” of the GI *Muga Silk of Assam* would help them in their business, what support system has the government put in place to check adulteration of Muga, what actions could be taken against persons adulterating Muga and selling in the market, are there any promotion schemes or platforms to market Muga with the GI Logo, how could one promote business of the Muga clusters, how should the Muga logo be put on the products, for example can the logo be embedded in the product, should the logo be put as a sticker and in that case what is the value, which body would regulate the use of these GI logo stickers, would there be a product pricing policy for GI marked products, what would be the government incentives to produce GI products, etc.



A special session was organised to display a couple of exquisite Muga Saris that were woven by Renu Bora who had attended the GI Camp in March 2015 and had now become an “authorised user of the GI -Muga Silk of Assam” and therefore was entitled not only to call her products Muga, but also affix the Muga GI logo on the products made by her. Mr Naidu demonstrated how the logo was to be placed on these Muga Saris. Mr Pulin Bora, husband of Mrs Renu Bora was present in this GI Camp and he delivered the saris to Professor Prabuddha Ganguli who had placed the order with them after the previous GI Camp.

This session was followed by an intense period of very systematic facilitation of the process of filling of the application forms to become authorised users of *GI-Muga Silk of Assam*. The TUIPR Cell personnel helped the stakeholders not only to physically fill their individual application forms, but also got the relevant documentation organised, systematised and varified. Affidavits were prepared on the spot by the TUIPR Cell members and a local attorney who was specifically contracted for this purpose.



It is indeed commendable that Mr C.G. Naidu, Asst. Registrar of Trademarks, GI Registry, Chennai himself inspected each and every application with their associated documentation and advised on the necessary corrective measures on the spot so that error free documents may be sent at the earliest to the GI Registry. This process helped to complete 147 applications and systematise the associated documentation during the Camp. One hundred six (106) stakeholders submitted their bank drafts for registration fee (Rs 600/- per head). The remaining applicants paid their application fees to the TUIPR Cell. The TUIPR Cell undertook the responsibility to get the bank drafts prepared on behalf of the applicants.

This Camp therefore established a new trend of how “train the trainers” sessions at the grassroots level can lead to a chain reaction for facilitation of such processes in the village clusters. The new applicants were appreciative of this gesture by their village peers and are now motivated play their role in the promotion of the GI movement in their villages. The next GI camp has been scheduled to be held in November 2016 and therefore the turnout is expected to increase exponentially.

In the Valedictory session Prof Buragohain expressed his personal satisfaction on the outcome of the collaboration between Tezpur University and Dibrugarh University. Prof Ganguli assured continued support on behalf of the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University.

Professor Prabuddha Ganguli, MHRD IPR Chair Professor assured his support and the support of the TUIPR Cell on behalf of the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University. He said that Tezpur University is not only committed to the cause of promoting GI MUGA Silk of Assam



but is also initiating projects related to MUKHA of Majuli in which a collaboration with Dibrugarh University is already underway.

The last session was of immense significance. Based on the applications made in April 2015, post the first GI Camp, Ninety Two (92) "Authorised User Certificates" were issued by the GI Registry in Chennai. Mr C. G Naidu, Prof Buragohain, Prof Ganguli, Dr. Deb, Dr Das, Dr Duwara, Mr Saikia, Dr Goswami, and Dr

Juri Borbora Saikia distributed the Ninety two ( 92) "Authorised User Certificates" issued by the GI Registry in Chennai to participants of the April 2015 GI Camp who attended the Dhakuakhana Camp as volunteers.



The GI Camp concluded with a set of focused recommendations from the stakeholders. The essential features were the urgent need for setting up a statutory body for enforcement of GI Muga Silk of Assam, development of reliable test methods for testing of purity of Muga Products, Setting up a State Level framework to promote MUGA products in national and international fora, exhibitions, markets, help the stakeholders to earn profitable returns from their products and also infuse technology in some of these traditional practices to enhance their productivity, quality and profitability. The TUIPR Cell took note of these recommendations and mentioned that TUIPR Cell with Dibrugarh University IPR Cell will jointly work towards these end goals.

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