

Ahead of PM Narendra Modi's Varanasi visit, move to get GI tag for shehnai

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VARANASI: Ahead of the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the city on July 7, an application was filed on Tuesday seeking Geographical Indication (GI) certification tag for shehnai, a musical instrument taken to its zenith by the great musician of Kashi, Ustad Bismillah Khan.

The GI application was filed by a Varanasi-based cultural organisation, Bharat Ratna Ustad Bismillah Khan Foundation, with the support of Padma Shri awardee Dr Rajani Kant of Human Welfare Association, who is also known as the 'GI Man' of India for his proactive role in filing over 125 GI applications across the country.

Bharat Ratna Ustad Bismillah Khan Foundation, which is a cultural society established in 2009, is looked after by its managing trustee, Syed Abbas

Murtaza Shamsi.

"Shehnai and Varanasi are closely interwoven, as the Shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan was synonymous with the city. It was the Ustad who lifted shehnai from the ignominy of being an obscure wind instrument played at marriages to an ideal medium of classical music," said Kant, adding that Varanasi has been associated with this instrument for years, and still continues to produce some of the finest players of the instrument.

According to Kant, the application was filed at GI Registry in Chennai.

"More than anyone else, Ustad Bismillah Khan was solely responsible for popularising shehnai as a concert instrument both nationally and internationally," he said.

The shehnai is made of wood, with a double reed at one end and a metal flared bell at the other end. Its sound creates and maintains a sense of auspiciousness and sanctity, and as a result, is widely used during marriages and in temples. "The making of shehnai comes in the category of handicraft, and there about 60-70 artisans engaged in this craft in Varanasi," said Kant, who is instrumental in getting GI-tags to most of the goods in Varanasi and adjoining districts.

According to records, the Varanasi region of eastern UP has 16 GI-tagged products, including Banaras Brocade and Sarees, handmade carpet of Bhadohi, Banaras Gulabi Meenakari Craft, Varanasi Wooden Lacquerware and Toys, Nizamabad Black Pottery, Banaras Metal Repousse Craft, Varanasi Glass Beads, Ghazipur Wall Hanging, Varanasi Soft Stone Jali Work, Chunar Balua Patthar, Chunar Glazed Pottery, Banaras Zardozi, Mirzapur Pital Bartan, Banaras Wood Carving, Banaras Hand Block Print and Mau Saree.

"The GI tag conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country," said Kant, adding that he has so far facilitated the GI filing of 126 goods in different states.