Kolhapuri chappal

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

The Italian luxury fashion house Prada stirred up controversy when its models launched the men's spring-summer 2026 collection wearing leather slippers strikingly similar to Kolhapuri chappals.

- **The recent issue -** Kolhapuri chappals have a geographical indication (GI) tag that certifies how a product originates from a specific geographical area and possesses qualities or a reputation due to that origin.
- A GI tag helps preserve traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, and the livelihoods of its local practitioners.

  The Kolhapuri chappals received GI designation on December 11, 2018, granted to four districts each in **Maharashtra and Karnataka**.

- Although Prada doesn't call the footwear Kolhapuri or credit their origin as an inspiration for their line, it is reported to be selling them at many times the price for which one can typically buy a pair in India.
- The manufacturers of Kolhapuri chappals are reportedly planning to move court against Prada's allegedly unethical business practice.
- The chappal makers argue that the design of Prada's footwear amounts to cultural appropriation, and a violation of the GI tag because it is too close to the original Kolhapuri.

  Cultural appropriation refers to the practice of a designer or fashion house taking elements from another culture and incorporating them into their work, often claiming they were acting unknowingly.

- **GI Tag and its Protection**
- **Geographical Origin Link** - The product must originate from a specific place and its quality, reputation, or characteristics must be essentially

attributable to that geographical origin.

- **Defined Production Standards** - Detailed production methods, materials and quality benchmarks must be specified in the application.
- **Registered Proprietors & Authorized Users** - Only those entities (for example, producer groups, associations, or cooperative societies) that are registered as authorized users can legally use the GI.
- **Prohibition on Transferability** - GI tags are non-transferable and cannot be licensed like trademarks.
- **Enforcement and Monitoring** - Owners and governments are expected to monitor misuse and initiate legal action against counterfeiting or false usage.
- **No Generic Term Usage** - A GI should not be or become a generic name for a product.
- **Challenges to protect traditional crafts** - Protecting traditional crafts is difficult because the intellectual property (IP) systems that exist today were *designed for individual innovation, not collective heritage.*
- IP protections and systems require a known, identifiable creator or inventor.
- Traditional crafts are usually created collectively by a community over time.
- Traditional crafts are ancient, widely known, and already in the public domain, so they fail the novelty test.
- Many traditional crafts are passed down orally, without records, drawings, or technical details.
- IP systems rely heavily on documentation to verify and protect rights.
- Most IP protections, except trademarks, have a smaller life of protection, whereas traditional crafts need perpetual protection, which is incompatible with such limits.

Reference

The Indian Express | Kolhapuri chappal

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