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Megha Middha, is working as an Assistant Professor of Law in Mody University of Science and Technology, Lakshmangarh, Sikar (Rajasthan). She has an experience in the teaching of almost 3 years. She has completed her graduation in BBA LL.B (H) from Amity University, Rajasthan (Gold Medalist) and did her post-graduation (LL.M in Business Laws) from NLSIU, Bengaluru. Currently, she is enrolled in a Ph.D. course in the Department of Law at Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur (Rajasthan). She wishes to excel in academics and research and contribute as much as she can to society. Through her interactions with the students, she tries to inculcate a sense of deep thinking power in her students and enlighten and guide them to the fact how they can bring a change to the society

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Assistant professor of Law

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Avinash Kumar



Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC - NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR - Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and

learning.

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TRADEMARK LAWS OF INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA- AN ANALYSIS OF PARALLELS AND DISTINCTIONS

AUTHORED BY - EESHA PARANDE

Abstract

Trademarks are of paramount importance in today's business landscape, serving as invaluable assets that safeguard a company's brand identity and reputation. By securing exclusive rights to a trademark, a company can protect its distinctiveness and prevent others from capitalizing on its goodwill or diluting its brand. Trademarks are an essential component in modern corporate strategy and intellectual property protection since they are invaluable in attracting investors, licensing agreements, and expansion prospects. Due to their adherence to international treaties and accords, trademark rules in the US and India have certain similarities, but they also differ greatly in practical application. The author aims at shedding light on the multifaceted similarities and differences in the Trademark laws between the United States of America and India.

I. Evolution of trademarks

a. India

India's trademark system has developed in a dynamic manner, reflecting the nation's trade expansion, economic growth, and adherence to international intellectual property standards.

1. Pre-Independence- The Merchandise Marks Act of 1889 primarily regulated trademark protection before India's independence in 1947. The purpose of this Act was to regulate trademarks and stop deceptive trade practices.
2. Post- Independence- The Trade and Merchandise Marks Act, 1958, was established by India upon its independence, marking the start of a comprehensive legal framework for trademark protection. This Act provided for the registration and protection of trademarks.
3. Adoption of International Treaties- India became a party to international agreements such as the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in 1995 and the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property in

1998. This demonstrated India's commitment to bring its trademark rules into compliance with international norms.

4. The Trademarks Act, 1999- The 1958 Act was superseded by the Trade Marks Act, 1999 in India. With the introduction of measures for trademark registration and protection, this new Act brought trademark rules up to date with international norms.
5. The Establishment of the TTAB- The Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB) was founded in order to resolve appeals and conflicts pertaining to trademark registrations. It plays an essential role in preserving the federal trademark system's integrity.
6. Expedited Trademark Registration- To make the trademark registration procedure easier for firms to use, the United States launched programs including the Madrid Protocol and the Trademark Electronic Application System (TEAS).
7. Amendments- To address new issues and expedite the registration and enforcement processes for trademarks, the Trade Marks Act, 1999 has undergone multiple modifications. Significant modifications were made with the most recent amendment in 2017, which adopted international classification, simplified procedures, and strengthened penalties for trademark infringement.

b. United States

- 1) Early legislation- From its inception, the United States has acknowledged the value of trademarks. The Trademark Act of 1870 was the first federal law pertaining to trademarks, enabling their registration with the U.S. Patent Office.
- 2) The 1946 Lanham Act- The Trademark Act of 1946, also referred to as the Lanham Act, is a significant piece of law that created the current framework for trademark protection in the United States. It established the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) as the regulating body for trademark registration, introduced the concept of federal registration, and laid the groundwork for trademark rights.
- 3) Amendments to the Lanham Act- The Lanham Act has undergone modifications over time to reflect the evolving business environment. Domain names, counterfeit goods, and trademark dilution have all been addressed by these modifications.
- 4) International Treaties- The United States has ratified a number of international agreements, including the World Trade Organization's TRIPS Agreement and the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property Law. U.S. trademark laws have been

impacted by these agreements and have been brought in consonance with the global standards.

- 5) Amendments- The United States has amended its trademark laws in order to handle new issues and streamline processes. A number of improvements were made to the use-based system, improved protections for well-known marks, and the removal of the requirement for a specimen of use in the most recent amendment, which was implemented in 2019.

II. Registration

a. India

India has a first-to-file system, meaning that priority rights are awarded to the first individual or organization to file a trademark application for a certain mark.

In India, the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks is in charge of trademark registration. Examination, publishing, and registration are steps in the process.

An organized framework for the protection of trademarks and service marks is provided by the trademark registration system in India, which is managed by the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks. It functions on a first-to-file basis, giving priority to the first party for a trademark. Examining, publishing, and registering are the steps in the procedure. The protection is originally provided for ten years, renewable indefinitely. Although non-use for a continuous period of five years can result in cancellation, India does not have specific use requirements for maintaining registered trademarks, unlike the United States.

b. United States

The US operates under a first-to-use system, meaning that the entity that can demonstrate prior use of a trademark in commerce often has superior rights, even without formal registration.

Trademarks and service marks can be legally protected through an organized process provided by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), which is in charge of the country's trademark registration system. Both domestic and international applicants have the option to file electronically with the help of a trademark attorney or through the Trademark Electronic Application System (TEAS). The procedure comprises a publication period to allow for

opposition from third parties, a rigorous examination to guarantee trademark compliance with statutory requirements, and the potential of opposition proceedings before the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB). Trademarks must be renewed every 10 years after they are registered in order to be protected.

III. Requirements for Use

a. India

India does not have specific use requirements for maintaining a registered trademark. However, non-use for a continuous period of five years can lead to cancellation of the trademark.

b. United States

There are use requirements for maintaining a registered trademark in the US. The owner must demonstrate continuous use of the mark in commerce to keep it active.

IV. Grounds for Opposition of Trademark

a. India

1) Absolute Grounds for Refusal

The following are some examples of absolute grounds for refusal upon which the registration of a trademark may be opposed:

- Lack of distinctiveness.
- Descriptiveness of the mark.
- Marks that are customary in the current language or established practices of trade.
- Marks that are likely to deceive or cause confusion.
- Marks that are contrary to law or morality.

2) Relative Grounds for Refusal

- Similarity to an earlier trademark or a well-known trademark.
- Likelihood of confusion with an earlier trademark.
- Unauthorized use of a famous trademark.
- Bad faith in filing the trademark application.
- Marks that may tarnish or dilute the reputation of a well-known trademark.

- 3) **Generic or Common Use:** If the trademark is a generic term or commonly used in the relevant trade, it can be opposed.
- 4) **Non-Use:** If the opponent can demonstrate that the trademark applicant has not used the trademark for a continuous period of five years before the date of the application, it can be opposed.
- 5) **Prior Rights to Trademark:** The opponent may assert prior rights to the trademark in question, claiming that they have used the mark or a similar mark earlier in the same class of goods or services.
- 6) **Well-Known Mark:** Opposition can be based on the claim that the trademark in question is similar to, or likely to cause confusion with, a well-known trademark.
- 7) **Geographical Indications:** If the trademark contains a geographical indication or falsely suggests a connection with a particular place, it may be opposed.
- 8) **Deceptive Marks:** If the mark is likely to deceive or cause confusion, opposition can be filed on this ground.

The Trademark Office or Trademark Registry determines the decision after taking into account the evidence and legal arguments from both parties. Opposition proceedings in India give both the applicant and the opponent an opportunity to present their cases.

b. United States

The Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB) is in charge of managing trademark opposition procedures in the US. In the USA, there are specific grounds for opposing a trademark. The Lanham Act (15 U.S.C. § 1063)¹ and the rules and procedures set forth by the TTAB both specify these grounds. The following are the key grounds for opposing a trademark registration in the United States:

1) Likelihood of Confusion

This is one of the most common grounds for opposition. If a party believes that a proposed

¹ 15 U.S. Code § 1063, The Lanham Act, 1946

trademark may confuse consumers with their existing -registered mark, they may oppose it. This covers the similarities of the products in the appearance, sound, and meaning

- 2) Probability of Confusion: This is one of the most common grounds for opposition. If a party believes that a proposed trademark may confuse consumers with their existing -registered mark, they may oppose it. This covers the similarities of the products in the appearance, sound, and meaning
- 3) Descriptiveness: If a trademark merely describes the goods or services for which registration request is being sought for, it may be opposed. Unless they acquire a secondary meaning, descriptive marks usually lack distinctiveness and are not eligible for trademark protection.
- 4) Genericness: A mark that is generic, meaning it is the common name for the goods or services, cannot be registered as a trademark.
- 5) Deceptiveness: Marks that are deceptive or misleading in describing the goods or services they represent can be opposed.
- 6) Geographically Descriptive: If the trademark consists of a geographic term that primarily describes the origin of the goods or services, it may be opposed.
- 7) Scandalous or Immoral Matter: A mark that includes scandalous or immoral matter can be opposed on these grounds.
- 8) False Association: Opposition can be based on the claim that the use of the mark is likely to cause consumers to falsely believe there is a connection or association between the mark and a person, institution, or belief.
- 9) Abandonment: If the opponent can demonstrate that the mark has been abandoned, meaning it has not been used for a certain period, they can oppose the registration.

- 10) **Fraudulent Misrepresentation:** If the applicant committed fraud during the application process, such as submitting false information, the registration can be opposed on this ground.
- 11) **Priority and Ownership:** Opposition can be based on the opponent's prior use of the mark in commerce, establishing their priority and ownership rights.

V. Remedies for Trademark Infringement

a. India

In India, trademark owners have various remedies available to them to address trademark infringement. Legal proceedings may be employed to seek these remedies, which are stipulated in the Trade Marks Act, 1999². The following are India's primary remedies for trademark infringement:

- 1) **Injunction:** A trademark owner can seek an injunction to prevent the infringing party from using the trademark. An injunction can be temporary (interim) or permanent, and it restrains the infringer from further use of the mark.
- 2) **Damages:** The trademark owner may seek monetary compensation for the losses and damages incurred due to the infringement. This includes both actual damages, which are the quantifiable financial losses suffered, and special damages, which may be specific to the particular case.
- 3) **Account of Profits:** The trademark owner can claim the profits earned by the infringing party as a result of the infringement. The infringing party may be required to account for and hand over these profits to the trademark owner.
- 4) **Delivery-Up or Destruction:** The court can order the infringing party to deliver or destroy infringing goods, labels, packaging, or other materials. This remedy helps prevent the continued use and circulation of counterfeit or infringing products.
- 5) **Costs and Legal Fees:** If the trademark owner succeeds in the infringement case, they may be entitled to recover the costs incurred in bringing the action, as well as reasonable legal fees.

² Section 29, 30, The Trademarks Act, 1999

- 6) Anton Pillar Order: In exceptional cases, an Anton Pillar order may be sought, allowing the plaintiff to enter the premises of the infringing party to search, seize, and preserve evidence. This is used to prevent the destruction of evidence.
- 7) Criminal Proceedings: In cases of severe trademark infringement, the trademark owner may initiate criminal proceedings. The police or law enforcement agencies can arrest the infringing party, and if found guilty, they can face imprisonment and fines.³
- 8) Customs Recordal: Trademark owners can record their trademarks with the Indian Customs Department to prevent the importation of counterfeit goods.
- 9) Ex parte Interim Injunction: In urgent situations, trademark owners can seek an ex parte interim injunction to immediately halt the infringing activities before a full hearing.

The choice of remedy depends on the specific circumstances of the trademark infringement case, the extent of damages, and the relief sought by the trademark owner.

b. United States

In the United States, trademark owners have several remedies available to them when their trademarks are infringed. These remedies are designed to protect the trademark owner's rights and provide recourse against those who violate those rights. Following are the main remedies for trademark infringement in the United States:

- i. Injunction: A preliminary or permanent injunction may be requested by the owner of a trademark in order to stop the infringing party from utilizing the trademark. This prevents unauthorized use of the mark and helps safeguard the owner's reputation for their brand.
- ii. Damages: In order to make compensate for the damage that the infringement caused, trademark owners may be entitled to monetary damages. There are primarily two categories of damages:
 - Actual Damages: These are the actual financial losses suffered by the trademark owner due to the infringement.
 - Statutory Damages: The owner of a trademark may, under certain circumstances, opt for statutory damages, which are significant and do not need to be supported by evidence of

³ Section 103, the Trademarks Act, 1999

actual harm. A violation may be subject to statutory damages of \$1,000 to \$200,000, depending on the circumstances.⁴

- iii. Accounting of Profits: The owner of the trademark may demand that the party causing infringement give an accounting of the profits they made from utilizing the trademark.
- iv. Attorney fees and costs: If the trademark owner prevails in an infringement case, the court may order the infringing party to pay the trademark owner's attorneys' fees and legal costs.
- v. Destruction or removal of infringing materials: The court can order the infringing party to destroy or remove all infringing goods, labels, packaging, or materials from the marketplace.
- vi. Seizure and impoundment: In certain cases, the trademark owner can request the court to order the seizure and impoundment of counterfeit or infringing goods.
- vii. Ex parte temporary restraining orders: In urgent cases, a trademark owner can request an ex parte temporary restraining order to halt the infringing activity immediately. This is a temporary measure, followed by a hearing on a preliminary injunction.
- viii. Criminal proceedings: In severe cases of trademark counterfeiting, the Department of Justice can bring criminal charges against the infringer, potentially leading to fines and imprisonment.
- ix. Customs recordation: Trademark owners can record their trademarks with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to prevent the importation of counterfeit goods into the United States.

These remedies are available under the Lanham Act, which governs trademark law in the United States.

⁴ 15 U.S.C. § 1117(a), Lanham Act, 1999

VI. Similarities between the trademark provisions between India and USA

- There are a number of notable parallels between the trademark laws of the US and India, which show their shared commitment to promoting strong intellectual property protection. The adoption of the "first-to-use" principle, which is the cornerstone of trademark law in both states, is one essential similarity. This idea fosters a fair and competitive economy by stating that the person or organization that uses a trademark in commerce first usually has greater rights over others.
- In addition, the Nice Classification system—a widely accepted framework for the methodical classification of goods and services—has been adopted by both India and the USA. This common classification system offers a consistent and unambiguous method for identifying and categorizing different goods and services, which expedites the trademark registration procedure. The application of the Nice Classification system promotes worldwide trademark efficiency and fosters international cooperation.
- Another common feature of both nations' trademark laws is distinctiveness. In general, generic or merely descriptive marks are not eligible for registration in the USA or India. Both legal systems acknowledge the vital role distinctive trademarks play in safeguarding consumer interests and encouraging healthy competition amongst companies.
- Another common feature of both nations' trademark laws is distinctiveness. In general, generic or merely descriptive marks are not eligible for registration in the USA or India. Both legal systems acknowledge the vital role distinctive trademarks play in safeguarding consumer interests and encouraging healthy competition amongst companies.
- Both India and the USA acknowledge the evolving nature of brand identification and offer procedures for the registration of non-traditional marks in addition to traditional trademarks. This covers scent marks, sound marks, and other unconventional branding techniques. Both nations show their dedication to adapting their legal systems to correspond with the various ways that companies express and safeguard their brand identities by permitting the registration of these non-traditional marks.

These similarities between the trademark laws of the USA and India not only show a shared commitment to promoting innovation and safeguarding intellectual property, but they also help create an environment that is conducive for companies doing business internationally. These

regulations are aligned to provide a consistent and equitable framework for trademark protection in the worldwide economy, thereby facilitating international trade and collaboration.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the trademark laws in India and the USA represent the convergence of legal frameworks based on a common dedication to promoting innovation, safeguarding intellectual property, and enabling fair competition. As both countries adapt to the ever-changing global economy and rapid technological development, the collaborative spirit shown in their trademark laws creates the groundwork for an environment that is favorable to cross-border company operations. By aligning their legal frameworks and upholding international standards through treaties and conventions, India and the USA contribute to the development of a unified and equitable global trademark landscape.

