

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PROTECTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS OF GOODS IN INDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

Geographical Indications (GI) are a specific type of certification that may be given to goods that have traits and a reputation that are solely derived from their area of origin. India is a nation where the majority of individuals are deeply connected with culture and tradition. GIs serve an essential part in conserving traditional knowledge, protecting the rights of creators, providing legal protections, and combating violations of such rights. Local communities in India are the primary recipients and major participants in the production and distribution of GI-tagged items to consumers. Likewise, sustaining GI could stimulate exports, tourism, and demand for legit goods and services. In keeping with the TRIPS Agreement¹, India has already developed strong legislation for the registration, conservation, and advancement of GIs. In order to attain such goals, the Indian government additionally created an array of programs. The primary objectives are to foster national prosperity and safeguard the significance and necessity of upholding culture. The focus of this paper is to look at what extent India has advanced in recognizing the value of conserving geographical indications of goods as one critical form of intellectual property rights (IPR). The author has made an attempt to assess the successes and explore possible spots for improvement.

Keywords: Geographical indications, intellectual property right, export, culture, local community, tourism.

¹ Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, 1994.

Introduction

India is a treasure trove of rich and magnificent traditional and cultural heritage. India is home to a wide array of unique products. Of late, the Government of India has made steady attempts at obtaining Geographical Indication (GI) tags for products which have distinct geographical origin and bear special qualities which are solely unique. Demand for place based and authentic items has been on the rise worldwide. James Boyle offered a metaphor called “cultural environmentalism”. India has made significant move at tapping its own potential at leveraging its cultural heritage in the export market. Products that are manufactured even in lesser quantities and come within the umbrella of the small and micro industries prevalent in rural communities are rendered greater in worth by geographical designations.

Meaning of the term GI

The expression "Geographical Indication" (GI) relates to a mark or sign that is applied to products that are of a specific geographic origin and are renowned for the quality or fame only because of that provenance. For a product to receive a GI, it has to be firmly shown that the features of the goods and its location of origin are immediately connected. Articles 1(2) and 10 of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property², as well as Articles 22 to 24 of the TRIPS Agreement³, refer to GI as an important intellectual property right (IPR).

Necessity

GI acts as a vital tool for determining an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product that have a distinct or specific geographical origin and special features. Such products derive their reputation in the market due to the collective contributions of nature and human skill. The primary necessity of providing protection and recognition to place-based goods is two-fold. First, it ensures adequate returns and security to the actual artisans and manufacturers who produce the items. Second, it affords guarantee to the consumers with regard to the authenticity of the products. GIs aim to curb malpractices in the market where counterfeit items are attempted to be passed off by unscrupulous businessmen as the genuine ones.

² The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, 1883.

³ Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, 1994.

Advantages

- **Protection of Intellectual Property Rights:** A GI tag gives protection to the actual producers and manufacturers of the product. It is aimed at preventing other people from applying and benefitting from the GI tag without due permission. Thus GI helps to stop circulation of counterfeit items in the market which have the potential of damaging the reputation of the original product as well as the local economy. Protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) through GI makes sure that the original producers receive fair compensation for their skill and efforts in producing the special and authentic GI products.
- **Developing equity of the brands:** One primary objective of acquiring GI of goods is to let the local communities of indigenous producers to formulate a premium pricing for their GI protected goods so that they may fetch proper profits from the market. Once they build a brand equity on their GI products, they are expected to gain commercially.
- **Market value of the GI products will increase:** A GI tagged product attracts more market value than any ordinary item as the buyers are guaranteed of the quality and genuineness of the items concerned. A higher market value of the GI tagged items would result in higher prices and consequently in higher profitability for the producers and manufacturers.
- **Preserving cultural heritage and enabling rural development:** GI tagging encourages employing traditional modes of production, thereby enabling rural development and financial growth of local artisans and producers. This has the effect of facilitating employment opportunities for local youth and promotion of sustainable development.
- **Preserving biodiversity:** Protection of geographical indications of goods ensures protection of biodiversity by encouraging the use of traditional production methods and preservation of local ecosystem. This in turn can result in conservation of rare as well as endangered species and also the protection of landscapes and valuable natural resources.

Tourism

Experts across the globe have recognized the role of GI in strengthening tourism. One such instance is Kerala. Kerala is home to a host of unique products and has exotic experiences to offer to tourists. Tourists can obtain very high quality and authentic GI tagged items like handicrafts, fabrics and spices from Kerala.⁴ Such rich culture coupled with its natural beauty makes Kerala a high-end tourist destination in India. Many state governments are getting together with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for developing travel packages for tourist destinations that are famous for GI tagged unique and special products. Moreover, many state governments have built GI kiosks at their railway stations and airports for showcasing and marketing their exclusive GI items. This initiative is aimed at providing additional support and push to the industry of GI tagged products in line with the tourism industry. The Union Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman launched an initiative in this regard that aimed to create a ‘Unity Mall’⁵ in each state capital or its popular tourist destinations. This effort was initiated for creating the ‘One District, One Product’⁶ scheme for all GI tagged products in the state. These efforts have been formulated for bolstering economy and amplifying India’s position as a destination for premium place based original products in the ever-expanding global market.

Government Schemes

It is considerably easy to protect geographical indications in countries that have their own legislation on this particular category of intellectual property but it becomes difficult when a country has general laws like trademark or collective mark laws that include the subject of geographical indications, like in the United States.⁷ India being a member state of the World Trade Organization (WTO), promulgated the Geographical Indications of Goods

⁴ Kerala GI Products, available at: <https://industry.kerala.gov.in/index.php/kerala-gi-products> (visited on July 10, 2025).

⁵ Prime Minister Ekta Mall: Fostering Unity and Empowering ODOP Artisans, available at: <https://www.investindia.gov.in/blogs/prime-minister-ekta-mall-fostering-unity-and-empoweringodopartisans#:~:text=In%20a%20resounding%20stride%20towards,the%20ethos%20of%20the%20nation> (visited on July 8, 2025).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Fabio Parasecoli and Aya Tasaki, “Shared Meals and Food Fights: Geographical Indications, Rural Development, and the Environment” 2 *Environment and Society* 108.

(Registration and Protection) Act, 1999⁸ and it was put into effect on 15th of September'2003.

Darjeeling Tea

was the first agricultural product that received GI tag in India⁹. As of 6th of May'2025, India has 658 number of registered GI products¹⁰ which includes Basmati rice, Kanchipuram Silk Sarees, Mysore Silk, Bikaneri Bhujia among others. London Economics had noted in its 2008 edition that countries that are home to a diverse range of GI products are rich in their agricultural sector.¹¹ These GI tagged products have received recognition all across the globe and to benefit from the reputation of the products, the Government of India has introduced several schemes to expand the marketing and production of the products. Few important schemes are as follows:

- Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)¹²: The SFURTI was launched by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)¹³ in order to support traditional artisans to survive in the competitive business environment. This programme is targeted to create sustained employment for traditional artisans and rural businessmen for expanding the marketability of GI tagged products. Such efforts are designed by creating support for novel ideas, designs and better packaging. Such initiatives are generally planned for assisting traditional artisans with advanced technical knowledge and skills through expert trainings as well as exposure. One feature of the initiative is to provide the traditional

⁸ The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (Act. 48 of 1999).

⁹ Geographical Indications Registry, *available at*: <https://www.search.ipindia.gov.in/GIRPublic/Application/Details/2> (visited on July 8, 2025).

¹⁰ New Geographical Indications Registrations in India (April 2024–March 2025): 23 Additions Across States, *available at*: <https://www.bananaip.com/intellepedia/geographical-indications-registered-india-2024/#:~:text=Summary,heritage%20and%20boost%20local%20economies> (visited on July 8, 2025).

¹¹ Annmarie Elijah, Donald Kenyon, *et.al.* (eds.) *Australia, the European Union and the New Trade Agenda* 125 (ANU Press, Canberra,2017)

¹² Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries, *available at*: <https://msme.gov.in/scheme-fund-regeneration-traditional-industries> (visited on July 8, 2025).

¹³ Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, *available at*: <https://msme.gov.in/> (visited on July 10, 2025).

artisans with new skills and knowledge for updating their production process and products. The scheme also provides common facilities for registration and protection of Geographical Indications of the products. Adoption of modern technology in traditional artisanal market has bridged the gap between traditional industries and the current business market. Such initiative is going to benefit the local community of businessmen by developing new designs and products from their traditional idea which in turn will support the local community to profit more out of the GI tagged products.

- One District One Product (ODOP)¹⁴: It is a programme that has been launched for encouraging the business and demand of indigenous and traditional items having distinct features due to their place of origin. This programme has also been planned for supporting local artisans, businessmen, producers and entrepreneurs. Moreover, the ODOP aims to take the mission in acutely remote areas in each district of the Indian states for determining products that satisfy the requirements for receiving GI tags. The ODOP initiative has been quite successful for expanding the demand of high quality and unique place based Indian products in the domestic and international market. The ODOP along with the Atmanirbhar Bharat¹⁵ scheme, has opened export opportunities for the traders. This has resulted in building better export value chains, reduction of logistics expenditures and helping the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) for entering the export markets in clusters or in groups.
- Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)¹⁶: ONDC has been designed to enable the promotion and sale of unique products that have already received GI tags. Resultantly, this initiative has the effect of bridging the gap between the sellers and potential buyers from all across India and even abroad. Since it is a digital platform, it creates a helpful level playing field for small and medium sized enterprises so that they can access the business market in an advanced manner and enjoy the full potential of their unique products. The ONDC coupled with ODOP can ensure

¹⁴ ONE DISTRICT ONE PRODUCT, *available at*: <https://www.mofpi.gov.in/en/pmfme/one-district-one-product> (visited on July 8, 2025).

¹⁵ Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, *available at*: <https://tribal.nic.in/atmanirbhar-bharat.aspx> (visited on July 8, 2025).

¹⁶ Open Network for Digital Commerce, *available at*: <https://ondc.org> (visited on July 9, 2025).

economic growth in each district and thus contribute in boosting export of these products in profitable markets.

Unlocking export markets for GI products

India's export grew significantly in the Financial Year 2024-2025 in comparison with that in the previous Financial Year. India recorded a cumulative export amounting to approximately \$602.64 billion in the Financial Year 2024-2025. The figure represents a jump of 6.03% in comparison with the export value of \$568.36 billion in the Financial Year i.e. 2023.¹⁷ The Government of India has launched several initiatives over the years for multiplying the nation's export value. These initiatives were formulated for introducing new policies, providing incentives to the traditional artisans and manufacturers, relaxing the lengthy export procedures. A variety of measures were undertaken by the government for expanding the Indian export markets. For instance, the government has taken steps for certifying special and good quality agricultural products having definite geographical origin. Such steps are aimed at augmenting India's dividend from the export market. The Districts Export Action Plans¹⁸ are designed at the district levels for designating specific products and services including GI accredited products having high export potential in the international market. It forms part of the bigger Districts as Export Hubs Export scheme¹⁹. Export plans have been prepared for promoting unique place-based items in overseas market. Such plans include supporting local communities for enabling their adequate growth. Such plans are also framed for identifying and addressing the challenges that local artisans and businessmen face while entering the trade market.

¹⁷ India's Exports Reach Historic Heights, *available at*: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2098447> (visited on July 9, 2025).

¹⁸ District as Exports Hub, *available at*: <https://industry.kerala.gov.in/index.php/district-asexports-hub> (visited on July 9, 2025).

¹⁹ District as Exports Hub, *available at*: <https://industry.kerala.gov.in/index.php/district-asexports-hub> (visited on July 9, 2025).

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)²⁰ has set up offices for registration and protection of GIs. Such offices also impart guidance to the beneficiaries for registration of proposed GIs. These offices are dedicated for extending awareness and guidance about the benefits of GI registration and protection. These offices are also entrusted with strengthening the legal framework of geographical indications.

In addition to it, several export promotion bodies have been created and entrusted with exploring the business avenues for GI accredited items. These export promotion bodies are the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)²¹, Export Promotion Councils (EPCs)²², the Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO)²³, Commodities Boards²⁴, Export Development Authorities (or the Export Promotion Councils of India)²⁵ and Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)²⁶.

Other initiatives by the Government of India include organizing virtual buyer-seller meets for conducting business on agricultural and food products having GI tags.²⁷ Countries like the

²⁰ The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, *available at:* <https://dpiit.gov.in> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²¹ Directorate General of Foreign Trade, *available at:* <https://www.dgft.gov.in/CP/> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²² Indian Trade Portal, *available at:* <https://www.indiantradeportal.in/vs.jsp?lang=0&id=0,31,223,24369> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²³ Federation of Indian Export Organizations, *available at:* <https://fieo.org/> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²⁴ Commodity Boards, *available at:* <https://www.commerce.gov.in/useful-links/commodity-boards/> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²⁵ Export Promotion Councils of India, *available at:* <https://www.indiantradeportal.in/vs.jsp?lang=0&id=0,31,223,24369> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²⁶ Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority, *available at:* <https://apeda.gov.in/> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²⁷ APEDA's Virtual Buyer Seller Meet Expected to Further India's Exports, *available at:* <https://indbiz.gov.in/apedas-virtual-buyer-seller-meet-expected-to-further-indias-exports/> (visited on July 9, 2025).

USA, the UAE, Qatar would take part in such trade meets in collaboration with the Indian Missions.

The APEDA²⁸ has played significant roles in exporting GI tagged food and agricultural items in different countries. Various unique GI tagged items including Black Rice from Manipur and Naga Mircha (King Chilli) from Nagaland have been exported to the UK at the behest of the APEDA. The APEDA has also assisted in exporting Assam Lemon to the UK and Italy, GI varieties of mangoes originating in West Bengal (Fazli, Laxmanbhog and Khirsapati) and Bihar (Zardalu) to Bahrain and Qatar. The APEDA has also set up promotional activities through in-store facilities in the importing countries in collaboration with foreign retail companies.

“India Geographical Indications (GI) Fair”²⁹ is hosted every year by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)³⁰. This Fair is organized with the help of the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)³¹ for showcasing Indian GI products both in domestic markets and abroad. Moreover, the DPIIT promotes and organizes for sale of GI products in the India International Trade Fair (IITF)³², Delhi and arranges for programmes focused on boosting the market for GI tagged items through Exhibitions, Workshops, Buyer-Seller Meets, Conferences etc.

Conclusion

The initiatives undertaken by the Government of India for promoting and protecting Indian GI tagged goods have been noteworthy in yielding positive results. The number of GI registrations have shown significant progress over the years. As of 6th of May’2025, India has

²⁸ Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority, *available at:* <https://apeda.gov.in/> (visited on July 9, 2025).

²⁹ GI Fair India, *available at:* <https://www.gifairindia.in/home> (visited on July 9, 2025).

³⁰ The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, *available at:* <https://dpiit.gov.in> (visited on July 9, 2025).

³¹ Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, *available at:* <https://www.epch.in/> (visited on July 10, 2025).

³² India International Trade Fair, *available at:* <https://utsav.gov.in/view-event/india-international-trade-fair> (visited on July 10, 2025).

recorded a total of 658 GI registrations³³. GI registration is expected to grow further as the beneficiaries become more aware of its benefits. The government is expected to continue and even increase its outreach programmes for protection of Indian GIs. One primary requirement for adequate protection of GI tagged goods is conducting extensive sensitization among local communities with regard to the importance of GI registrations. India boasts an incredible source of rich cultures and natural resources. India's exquisite artisanal products and commodities are proof of its traditional treasures. Each state in India has its own unique kind of fruit and crop to offer. GI is one kind of Intellectual Property right that recognizes and protects the unique place-based products. Apart from that, a GI tag assures the legitimacy and authenticity of a given product coming from a designated region. India has been putting sufficient efforts for protecting the GI tags and designated products. Improved marketing strategies have been devised by institutions and agencies for promoting GI tagged products through missions like the 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat'³⁴ scheme and the 'Vocal for Local'³⁵ mission. It is possible to earn appreciable revenue from GI tagged products through continued focus and dedicated efforts. Protecting the rights of beneficiaries and encouraging the use of GI products hold the key for unlocking the potential of economic development and also preserving India's rich traditional heritage.

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³³ New Geographical Indications Registrations in India (April 2024–March 2025): 23 Additions Across States, *available at*: <https://www.bananaip.com/intellepedia/geographical-indications-registered-india-2024/#:~:text=Summary,heritage%20and%20boost%20local%20economies> (visited on July 8, 2025).

³⁴ Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, *available at*: <https://tribal.nic.in/atmanirbhar-bharat.aspx> (visited on July 8, 2025).

³⁵ Vocal for Local, *available at*: <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1697022> (visited on July 8, 2025).