

# The traditional calling card

India's cultural heritage is represented through its rich variety of indigenous products and handicrafts. As the country becomes 'Vocal for local', **Chinnaraja Naidu** takes us through the journey of GI (Geographical Indication) tags and how they help local producers to protect and promote their unique crafts and traditionally acquired knowledge in the country



A man showcasing Odisha's GI tagged Single *Ikat* weaving tradition that includes the *Bomkai* and the striped or chequered *Santhali* sarees

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**Left to right:** A farmer harvests saffron from flowers near Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. *Kashmiri* saffron, a GI tagged product, is valued all over the world for its fine quality; Prime Minister Narendra Modi with an indigenous *Meitei Lengyan* scarf of Manipuri

Several of Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's recent appearances have been with the *gamusa*, a traditionally woven scarf with distinctive red borders and floral motifs from the state of Assam. The rectangular piece of clothing has been an iconic symbol of Assamese culture since the 18th century. Keeping aside its cultural and historical significance, the *gamusa* is also unique because it represents a traditional style of weaving practised in India's eastern frontiers.

With a demography as culturally diverse as India, the *gamusa* is not the only unique product, in fact, it is one amongst over 370 products exclusively produced across different regions of the country. In a mammoth effort to protect, propagate and celebrate Indian culture, the Geographical Indications (GI) were launched in 2004-05 as an intellectual property right, belonging to the concerned community of the said goods. The first product to be recognised under this norm was Darjeeling Tea. Since then the list has grown to include over

## Scripting history

The Geographical Indications Registry with pan-India jurisdiction was set up in Chennai, Tamil Nadu and functions under the Registrar of Geographical Indications. The Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks is also the Registrar of Geographical Indications (GIR) in India.

“Many people are not aware that Clusters are now being developed for value addition and marketing of local products under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan. Under these clusters, all facilities will be provided to Agro Startups and other industries. Organic products from the Northeast will receive all possible help to make their way into domestic and international markets.

**Narendra Modi**

Prime Minister of India

(While displaying the Manipuri *Meitei Lengyan* scarf at a national address)



## Heritage



**Left to right:** A woman from Nagaland holds up a plate with tree tomatoes, garlic and *Naga* chilies (known as *Bhut Jolokia*, the chilies are thought to be the hottest in the world); Indian Bay Leaf (*Tejpatta*) a GI tagged agricultural produce from Uttarakhand; Freshly picked strawberries in Mahabaleshwar, one of the many GI tags awarded in the state of Maharashtra

India has the largest number of GI tags in food and agricultural products. Some of them are:

**Saffron** from Jammu and Kashmir

**Gobindabhog rice** from West Bengal

**Tea** from Darjeeling, West Bengal

**Black rice** from Manipur

**Bhujia** from Bikaner, Rajasthan

**Kadalai Mittai** (a type of peanut candy) from Tamil Nadu

(Source: [ipindia.nic.in](http://ipindia.nic.in); 2019-20)

## High Five

Top five Indian states with maximum GI registrations

- Karnataka – 48
- Tamil Nadu - 40
- Kerala - 36
- Maharashtra – 32
- Uttar Pradesh – 31

350 unique local products with new applications submitted each year.

Geographical Indications empower producers to prevent its use by an unauthorised party, whose product does not conform to the applicable

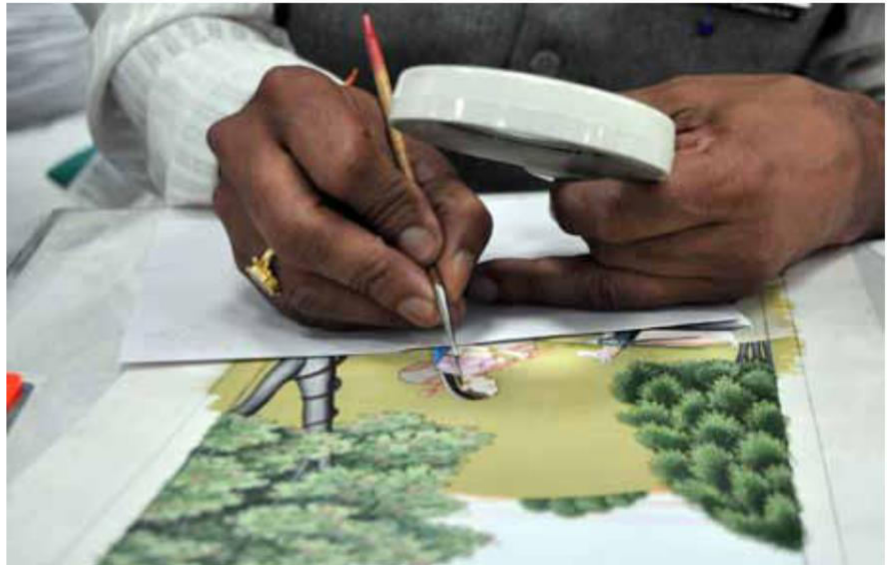
standards fixed by the registered proprietor within the demarcated geographical area. For example, in the case of *Bikaner Bhujia*, a savoury

snack from Bikaner, Rajasthan, in the jurisdictions in which the Bikaner geographical indication is protected, producers of the said *bhujia* are to exclude the use of the term “Bikaner” for the snack not produced in the demarcated area or not produced according to the standards set out in the case for the Geographical Indication.



A variety of premium teas laid out for tasting at a tea estate near Darjeeling, West Behgal. Darjeeling Tea, the first GI tagged product (2004), is now popular the world over for its crisp and fresh taste





**Clockwise from left:** *Thanjavur* dolls at a handicraft fair in Chennai, these dolls are a GI tagged handicraft product from Tamil Nadu; An artist gives final touches to his *Kangra* miniature painting, a craft practised exclusively in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh; *Chikmagalur* Arabica Coffee beans are laid bare beneath the sun at a plantation in Karnataka. There are seven different types of coffees that are GI tagged, including the iconic Monsooned Malabar from Kerala/Karnataka

In a country as culturally diverse as India over 370 products are exclusively produced across different regions of the country. These products and their producers are protected by Geographical Indications

### Protecting indigeneity

Geographical Indications, registered for an unlimited duration, confer legal protection to tagged products that help to identify and register the genuine and legitimate producer(s). Largely, the GI system promotes economic prosperity of producers in a geographical territory and helps a community to differentiate their products from competing products in the market. It helps build goodwill around unique local products, and as a result, the premium price received is also directly transferred to those involved with the product.

Another aspect is that GI tagging ensures the high-quality as the

distinctive local production process of these products is standardised. All GI tagged products are recognised only after qualifying the benchmark criteria of quality and authenticity. Similarly, for consumers, GIs act as a sign that helps them identify genuine products, adding to the economic prosperity of the producers. It has been noted that an overwhelming majority of consumers are prepared to pay premium prices for goods they believe to have originated in a particular geographical area using a traditional set of skills and knowledge, unique to the region (identifiable with a GI tag).

### Additional protection

Additional protection is a tool for the producers complementing the protection enjoyed by the registered Geographical Indications. Additional protection increases the value of the GI as a marketing tool and therefore, the Government of India is focusing on Indian traditional products which are useful for human consumption and promotion of knowledge, heritage and culture.



GI tags promote economic prosperity of producers in a geographical territory and help a community in legitimately differentiating their products from competing products in the market



### India's own

Geographical Indications are intellectual property, which means GI within our country is independent of any such rights existing in other countries.

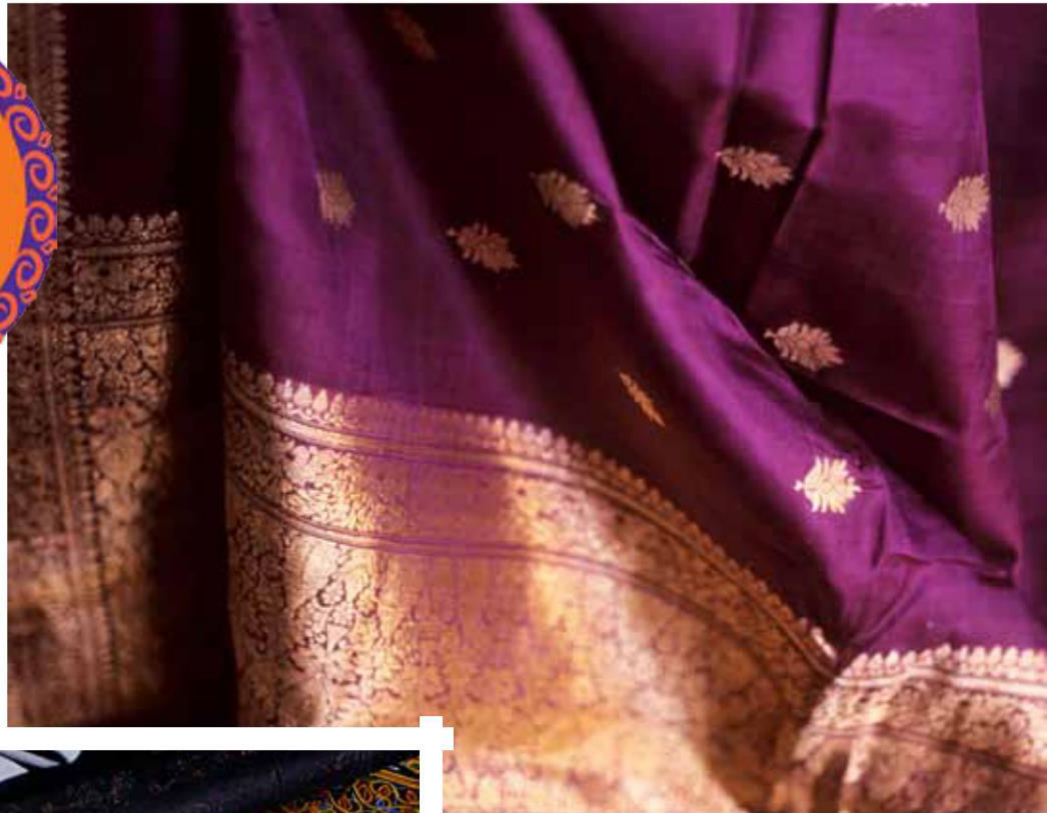
Because of their commercial potential, adequate legal protection of GIs becomes necessary to prevent their misappropriation. Notably, at the international level, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) sets out the minimum standards of GI protection that WTO members are required to comply within their respective national legislations.

Adhering to this obligation, India has enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. In this regard, applications are made to multi-national consortia in order to protect the identity of these Indian products not just within the country but also across the world. For example, Darjeeling Tea is the

PM Modi sporting an Assamese *gamusa* (scarf), traditional *kurta* (long shirt) and a *mundu* (a traditional garment from Kerala worn around the waist) as he lights a customary *nilavilakku* lamp on April 5 to thank coronawarriors from across the country



**Clockwise from top:** A Madhubani painting from Bihar; Traditional *Banarasi* silk sarees from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh; An artist working on beautiful *Kutch* embroidery patterns, a craft practiced exclusively practiced in the state of Gujarat



Geographical Indications are the identity of our rich cultural and national heritage. The tagged products and those involved with their production are an indispensable part of our diverse culture and society. The GIG act is symbolic of India's commitment to utilising a contemporary consciousness for protecting our traditional knowledge, while simultaneously promoting Indian heritage across the country. Documenting, protecting and promoting these products in its essence, is an effort towards sustainable intellectual development.

only GI tag registered under the EU Regulations. Similarly, to protect the identity of Basmati rice, agencies are faced with an uphill task with litigations outside India. Even for international GIs, to enforce their right in India, the producers should apply under GIG Act. India has registered 15 such GIs from outside the country, that conform to similar, high-quality standards.



*Chinnaraja G Naidu is the Deputy registrar for GI tags in India. Naidu, an active conversationalist, has published numerous seminars, white papers and official reports on India's cultural heritage and its preservation through the GI tagging mechanism in the country.*