



Socio-Economic Empowerment and Brand Building through Geographical Indication (GIs): Lessons from Gujarat's Agricultural and Handicraft Sector

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Geographical Indications (GIs) serve as vital intellectual property tools that link the exceptional quality, distinct characteristics, and long-standing reputation of specific products to their precise geographical roots. This review paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework, socio-economic dynamics, and branding potential of GIs within the state of Gujarat, India. Utilizing foundational principles from the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and India's Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, this study explores how regional specialties serve as engines of regional development. The paper evaluates key registered agricultural GIs—such as the celebrated Gir Kesar Mango, Bhalia Wheat, and Kachchhi Kharek—alongside illustrious handicraft GIs including Patan Patola, Sankheda Furniture, and various Kutch embroideries. The analysis demonstrates that formal GI protection facilitates market monopolization, allows producers to command premium prices (with consumers willing to pay 20-30% more), protects micro and smallscale enterprises (SMEs) from domestic counterfeiting, and rejuvenates rural tourism. Despite these explicit socioeconomic benefits, challenges such as complex post-registration enforcement, high maintenance costs, and a lack of awareness among primary producers persist. The study concludes with future strategic directions, advocating for stronger institutional marketing, legal vigilance against generic dilution, and integrated community supply chain management to maximize the brand value of Gujarat's unique agricultural and artisanal heritage.

Keywords: Brand Building, Geographical Indications, Gujarat Agriculture, Handicrafts, Socio-Economic Empowerment, TRIPS.

Introduction

Geographical Indications (GIs) represent a specialized domain of intellectual property rights (IPRs) explicitly designed to protect products that derive their unique quality, prestige, and characteristics from their specific territorial origin. Unlike traditional patents that safeguard novel technical inventions, or trademarks that establish brand ownership for specific commercial entities, GIs protect a collective geographical heritage. They certify that a product is inextricably linked to the environmental factors, climate, soil composition, and traditional human skills of a specific region. Consequently, GIs act as a powerful tool for rural asset creation, preserving cultural heritage and enhancing the export potential of traditional communities. India's diverse agro-climatic conditions and multi-layered cultural landscape have fostered an immense repository of unique products. To fulfill its international legal commitments under the World Trade Organization (WTO), India implemented a robust legislative mechanism to protect these regional treasures. Among the Indian states, Gujarat

holds a distinguished place, exhibiting a profound convergence of historic handicraft traditions and specific agricultural microclimates. From the arid tracts of Kutch yielding resilient agricultural varieties and precise handloom embroideries to the fertile plains of Saurashtra producing world-class horticultural crops, Gujarat's geographical specialties possess immense commercial potential. This review paper synthesizes the theoretical, legal, and operational frameworks governing GIs, using Gujarat's agricultural and handicraft sectors as case studies to assess their impact on socio-economic empowerment and brand equity.

Concept and Legal Framework of Geographical Indications

The global governance of Geographical Indications is rooted in international conventions. Under Articles 1(2) and 10 of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, GIs are recognized as foundational components of industrial property. The legal framework was systematically formalized under Articles 22 through 24 of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, which emerged from the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations. Article 22 provides a baseline protection for all goods, defining GIs as indications that identify a good as originating in the territory of a member, or a region or locality in that territory, where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographical origin.

In accordance with these mandates, India enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which came into effect in September 2003. This legislative framework is administered by the Geographical Indications Registry located in Chennai, functioning under the guidance of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks. Section 2(f) of the Indian Act provides a meticulous definition, categorizing registerable goods into agricultural, natural, manufactured, or handicraft goods. The registration process requires the filing of a comprehensive application (Forms GI-1A to 1D) that defines the precise geographical boundaries of production, provides scientific evidence of the product's unique attributes linked to the region, and establishes a clear historical lineage of its reputation.

Status of GI-Tagged Products in Gujarat

The state of Gujarat has strategically leveraged the GI Act to secure legal recognition for its diverse regional specialties. As of 2026, the state possesses a robust portfolio spanning multiple categories, reflecting its dynamic microclimates and artisanal clusters. Table 1 outlines the prominent registered GIs from Gujarat, detailing their classification and registration timelines as documented in the national registry.

Application No.	Registration Year	Geographical Indication (GI) Product Name	Category / Classification	Primary Production Cluster/ Region
100	2008-09	Sankheda Furniture	Handicraft	Chhota Udepur / Vadodara District
101	2008-09	Agates of Cambay	Handicraft	Anand (Khambhat) Region
103	2008-09	Kutch Embroidery	Handicraft	Kutch Desert Region
127	2009-10	Tangaliya Shawl	Handicraft	Surendranagar District
171	2010-11	Surat Zari Craft	Handicraft	Surat Urban Cluster
185	2011-12	Gir Kesar Mango	Agricultural	Junagadh, Gir Somnath, and Amreli
192	2011-12	Bhalia Wheat	Agricultural	Bhal Region (Ahmedabad, Anand, Bhavnagar)

174	2011-12	Kachchh Shawls	Handicraft	Kutch District Rural Clusters
232	2013-14	Patan Patola	Handicraft	Patan District
718	2023-24	Kutch Rogan Craft	Handicraft	Nirona Village, Kutch
756	2023-24	Kutch Bandhani	Handicraft	Kutch and Jamnagar Regions
761	2023-24	Kachchhi Kharek (Dates)	Agricultural	Arid zones of Kutch District
838	2023-24	Gharchola Craft of Gujarat	Handicraft	Saurashtra and Ahmedabad Clusters
997	2023-24	Gujarat Suf Embroidery	Handicraft	Kutch Border Artisans
1114	2023-24	Ambaji White Marble	Natural Goods	Banaskantha District

The data clearly underscores that while Gujarat initially prioritized its rich handicraft heritage during the early phases of GI adoption, recent registration trends indicate an aggressive push to certify its high-value agricultural commodities, such as Kachchhi Kharek, thereby broadening the safety net for primary agrarian producers.

Role of GI Tags in Brand Building and Premium Pricing

One of the primary economic mechanisms of GI protection is market differentiation through structured branding. In an unmonitored market, products face asymmetric information challenges where consumers cannot easily distinguish authentic regional goods from cheap imitations. A formal GI registration resolves this by transforming a geographical name into a collective trademark. This establishes an exclusive legal monopoly over the designation, allowing authorized users to bar external competitors from using the protected geographical label.

This exclusion capability directly contributes to a premium pricing structure. Empirical consumer psychology and market studies referenced in agricultural economics show that roughly 80% of consumers are prepared to spend 20% to 30% more for products whose quality, authenticity, and geographic lineage are verified by a credible certification standard. For example, the recognition of the Gir Kesar Mango prevents standard mango varieties from being sold under the "Kesar" name in export markets. This legal shield enhances international brand equity, stabilizes wholesale market channels, and allows the direct farming community to capture a larger percentage of the consumer rupee.

Impact on Socio-Economic Empowerment

The socio-economic implications of GI registration are particularly profound within the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector and rural artisan cooperatives. In Gujarat, crafts like Patan Patola double-ikat weaving and Tangaliya multi-node weaving are extremely labour intensive, requiring specialized generational skills. Prior to legal protection, mass-produced power loom imitations from other states routinely undercut authentic handloom weavers, causing widespread rural un-employment and a decline in traditional skills. By establishing statutory barriers against deceptive trade, the GI framework helps rebuild local craft economies. It gives smallholder artisans the collective bargaining power needed to bypass exploitative intermediaries and establish direct supply lines to premium retail spaces. For the rural population of Kutch, the consecutive registration of Kutch Embroidery, Rogan Craft, and Bandhani has transformed traditional, domestic art forms into financially viable, institutional livelihoods. This dynamic keeps young artisans within their native villages, reversing forced urban migration patterns and empowering marginalized rural women who form the backbone of these embroidery cooperatives.

Confluence of GIs, Tourism, and Traditional Knowledge

Beyond direct commerce, GIs establish a symbiotic relationship with regional agritourism and cultural ecosystems. Because a GI product is intrinsically tied to its land, the production process itself becomes a point of interest for domestic and international travelers. In Gujarat, this dynamic is clearly visible in the village of Nirona, where the exclusive preservation of Kutch Rogan Craft has made it a focal destination for travelers visiting the Rann of Kutch. Similarly, the harvest seasons of the Gir Kesar Mango attract substantial horticultural tourism to the foothills of Gir, providing supplementary income streams for local hospitality providers. Furthermore, GIs act as legal vessels for preserving Traditional Knowledge (TK). While standard patent laws require strict global novelty and individual ownership, GIs accommodate historical, community-owned practices that have been passed down orally for centuries. By linking legal protection to a designated geography rather than an individual inventor, GIs guarantee that the financial rewards of traditional knowledge flow back into the community that cultivated and sustained those practices over generations.

Challenges in GI Implementation

While the theoretical benefits of GIs are extensive, several significant challenges hinder their optimal execution on the ground in Gujarat:

1. Deficiencies in Post-Registration Enforcement: The Geographical Indications Registry in India functions primarily as a registration authority. The responsibility for monitoring and prosecuting counterfeiters falls entirely on the registered producer groups. Many artisan associations lack the financial capital and legal infrastructure needed to initiate litigation against large-scale domestic and international infringers.

2. Low Awareness and Exploitation by Middlemen: While the primary cooperative societies hold the overarching "Proprietor" status, the individual farmers and weavers must register as "Authorized Users" to fully utilize the legal shield. Due to low literacy and a lack of grassroots awareness, a vast majority of primary producers remain unregistered, allowing urban middlemen to buy authentic goods at rock-bottom prices and pocket the GI premium themselves.

3. Maintenance of Quality Control Standards: To maintain long-term brand equity, GI groups must enforce internal quality control and inspection mechanisms. For agricultural crops like Bhalia Wheat, variations in seasonal rainfall can impact product consistency. Without standardized, institutional quality testing mechanisms, the reputation of the GI brand remains vulnerable to dilution from inferior batches.

Emerging Trends and Future Prospects

The future of maximizing Gujarat's GI potential depends heavily on digital integration and targeted public private partnerships. Integrating GI supply chains with e-commerce portals provides a direct channel to conscious global consumers who value authentic products. Traceability technologies, such as QR codes and blockchain enabled labeling, can be affixed to premium items like Patan Patola or Gir Kesar packaging. This gives consumers immediate digital access to proof of geographic origin, the identity of the specific artisan, and quality certification records, effectively neutralizing counterfeit operations. Additionally, state agricultural and textile departments must shift focus from simple registration to aggressive post-registration marketing campaigns. Establishing dedicated "GI Pavilions" at international trade expos, creating standardized regional logos, and linking GI production hubs with official state tourism circuits will expand market reach. Providing low-interest institutional credit to registered authorized users will further encourage younger generations to preserve and scale these traditional trades.

Conclusion

Geographical Indications represent a powerful mechanism for combining intellectual property protection with sustainable rural development. In Gujarat, the successful registration of prominent agricultural assets like the Gir Kesar Mango and Bhalia Wheat, alongside

historic crafts like Surat Zari and Kutch Embroidery, demonstrates that GIs can effectively drive brand building and secure premium pricing. These legal tools provide robust protection for vulnerable micro-enterprises and traditional artisan communities. However, to fully unlock this socio-economic

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