



Geographical Indicators: A Strategic Catalyst for International Trade and Economic Development

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The concept of Geographical Indications (GIs) has existed for centuries. People have traditionally associated certain products with specific geographical regions because of their unique qualities, reputation and characteristics. Famous examples include Champagne from France, Parma Ham from Italy and Roquefort Cheese from France. These products gained recognition due to the special natural conditions and traditional knowledge of their regions of origin.

The growing importance of products linked to specific regions led to the development of legal frameworks for Geographical Indications (GIs) at both national and international levels. Key international agreements, including the Paris Convention (1883), Lisbon Agreement (1958) and the TRIPS Agreement (1994) under the WTO, established mechanisms for GI protection worldwide. In India, the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which came into force on 15 September 2003, provides legal protection to products whose quality, reputation, or characteristics are linked to their geographical origin. The registration process is administered by the GI Registry in Chennai.

The first GI-registered product in India was Darjeeling Tea in 2004–05, marking the beginning of the country's GI protection framework. Since then, numerous agricultural products, handicrafts, textiles and manufactured goods have received GI status, reflecting their unique qualities derived from specific geographical conditions and traditional practices. Notable agricultural GI products include Basmati Rice, Alphonso Mango, Kashmir Saffron, Shahi Litchi, Nagpur Orange, Coorg Orange and Wayanad Jeerakasala Rice, all of which benefit from enhanced market value and authenticity through GI protection.

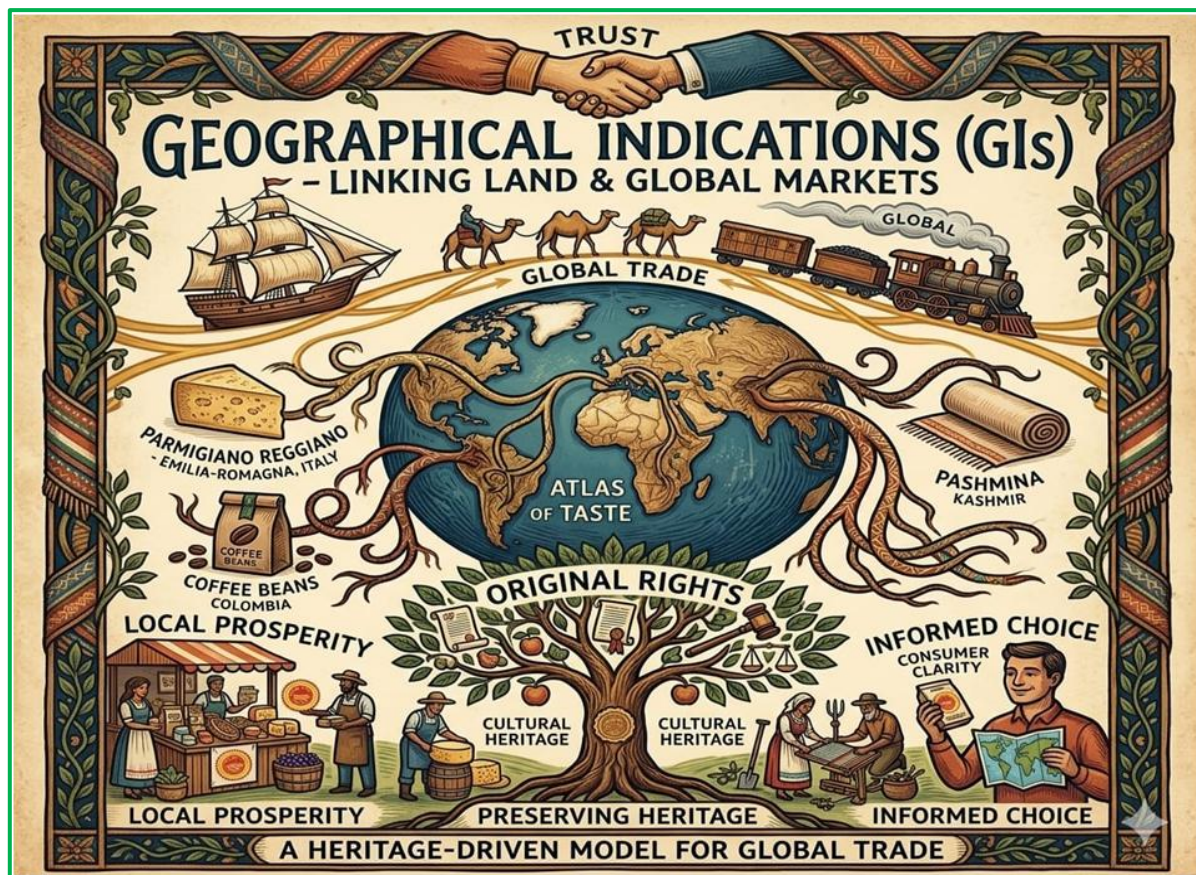
Geographical Indications (GIs) promote international trade by distinguishing products based on their geographical origin, unique qualities, and reputation. They enhance product differentiation, build consumer trust, reduce counterfeiting, and enable producers to obtain premium prices and greater export opportunities. Additionally, GIs support rural development by generating employment, increasing producer incomes, and preserving traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, thereby contributing to sustainable economic growth.

Significance of GIs in International Trade

The significance of GIs in international trade has grown substantially due to increasing consumer demand for authentic, high-quality and traceable products. By highlighting unique geographical characteristics and traditional production methods, GIs help producers differentiate their products, build consumer trust and command premium prices. They also enhance export competitiveness by increasing international recognition and market

acceptance of products such as Darjeeling Tea, Basmati Rice, Kashmir Saffron, Champagne and Scotch Whisky, thereby creating greater export opportunities and economic value (WIPO, 2023; European Commission, 2021).

GIs play a vital role in preventing unfair competition and counterfeiting by ensuring that only authorized producers from a designated geographical region can use the protected product name, thereby safe guarding its reputation and strengthening consumer trust (Rangnekar, 2004). Beyond trade benefits, GIs contribute to rural development by generating employment, increasing producer incomes, preserving traditional knowledge and promoting sustainable use of local resources. As a result, GIs are increasingly recognized as effective tools for economic growth, cultural preservation and sustainable development (Belletti and Marescotti, 2011).



The International Legal Framework

The effective promotion of GIs in international trade relies heavily on a complex web of international treaties and national laws:

- **The TRIPS Agreement (1995):** Administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights establishes minimum global standards for GI protection. It explicitly requires member nations to provide legal mechanisms that prevent the use of deceptive geographical indicators, particularly prioritizing goods like wines and spirits.
- **The Lisbon Agreement:** Overseen by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), this treaty facilitates the international registration of "Appellations of Origin"—a specific, stringent class of GIs. By allowing for a single registration procedure, it promotes cross-border protection and mutual recognition among member states.
- **National Laws and Regulations:** Because international agreements set minimum baselines, actual cross-border protection heavily depends on national legal systems. For example, before 1999, India relied on common law remedies like "passing off" and unfair competition to protect regional goods. To comply with TRIPS, India enacted the

Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, creating a structured sui generis system to safeguard products with specific geographical origins.

State-wise GI Tag and their key export markets

Below is the state-wise breakdown of GI tags in India, showing which states lead in registered geographical indications and their commercial importance for exports.

Table 1: State-wise GI Tag and their key export markets

Rank	State	No. of GI Tags	Top GI Products	Key Export Market
1	Uttar Pradesh	70+	Banarasi Saree, Lucknow Chikankari, Agra Petha	UK, USA, Middle East
2	Tamil Nadu	65+	Kanchipuram Silk, Thanjavur Painting, Madurai Sungudi	USA, Europe, Japan
3	Karnataka	50+	Coorg Arabica Coffee, Mysore Silk, Udupi Saree	Europe, Middle East
4	Maharashtra	50+	Alphonso Mango, Nagpur Orange, Kolhapuri Chappal	Middle East, Europe
5	Odisha	35+	Odisha Rasagola, Sambalpuri Fabric, Pattachitra	Europe, USA
6	West Bengal	25+	Darjeeling Tea, Muslin, Baluchari Saree	UK, Germany, Japan
7	Rajasthan	25+	Blue Pottery, Kota Doria, Sanganer Print	Europe, USA, Japan
8	Gujarat	22+	Gir Kesar Mango, Kutch Embroidery, Patola Saree	USA, UK, Middle East
9	Assam	15+	Muga Silk, Assam Tea, Joha Rice	Japan, Europe
10	Jammu and Kashmir	15+	Kashmir Pashmina, Saffron, Khatamband	Europe, USA, Middle East
11	Andhra Pradesh	19+	Araku Coffee, Kondapalli Toy, Etikoppaka Toy	Europe, USA
12	Kerala	12+	Alleppey Coir, Malabar Pepper, Navara Rice	Europe, Middle East
13	Madhya Pradesh	12+	Chanderi Fabric, Maheshwar Saree, Bastar Dhokra	USA, Europe
14	Haryana	6+	Bawal Handloom, Phulkari Embroidery, Rohtak Khurja	Middle East
15	Jharkhand	7+	Sohrai Khovar Painting, Dokra Craft, Tussar Silk	Europe, Japan

Economic Impact: Export Data and Case Studies

The economic vitality of GIs is best demonstrated through concrete export data and the global success of protected products. Globally, products like Italy's Parmesan cheese, French Champagne and Scotch Whisky have successfully utilized their GI status to dominate international markets, preventing counterfeits from diluting their premium value.

Developing nations are also leveraging GIs to expand their export footprint. India, which has awarded 643 GI tags, provides compelling evidence of this economic impact:

- **Agriculture and Wheat:** Following its GI certification, Gujarat's Bhalia wheat was exported to Kenya and Sri Lanka in 2021. This milestone coincided with a massive 808% surge in India's total wheat exports, reaching US\$ 542.54 million in FY21.
- **Bananas:** GI certification offers a distinct price premium. The regular banana is priced around Rs. 50 (US\$ 0.67) per kilogram, while the GI-tagged Chengalikodan Nendran banana from Kerala sells for Rs. 75 (US\$ 1.01). Furthermore, GI-driven agricultural

methods helped boost India's total banana exports to US\$ 88.60 million in FY20, with significant shipments reaching Dubai.

- **Mangoes:** High-value GI mangoes, such as the Banganapalli from Andhra Pradesh and the 'Jardalu' from Bihar, have successfully penetrated markets in South Korea and the United Kingdom, contributing to an export valuation of US\$ 57 million in FY20.
- **Floriculture and Employment:** The export of GI-tagged Madurai Jasmine to the US and UAE directly created employment opportunities for 130 women and 30 highly trained individuals, highlighting the social and economic empowerment facilitated by GIs.

Government Initiatives Supporting GI Tags

Recognizing the potential of GI products in enhancing rural livelihoods and export earnings, the Government of India has implemented several policies and initiatives to promote their export.

1. One District One Product (ODOP): This scheme encourages the identification, development and promotion of unique products from each district, many of which have GI tags. It aims to enhance domestic consumption and export capabilities by showcasing regional specialties, thereby providing livelihood opportunities and strengthening local economies.

2. GI Mahotsav and Trade Fairs: Events like the GI Mahotsav are organized to display GI-tagged goods from across India. These festivals generate awareness among consumers and buyers, boost sales and help producers network with traders and exporters, facilitating better market linkage for rural artisans and farmers.

3. E-commerce Integration: The government facilitates GI product promotion through online platforms such as Tribes India, GeM (Government e-Marketplace), Amazon Karigar and Flipkart Samarth. These platforms help artisans gain access to national and international markets, overcoming traditional barriers of distribution and enhancing visibility.

4. International Recognition: India actively pursues international agreements and trade deals like the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to secure mutual recognition and protection of GIs abroad. This move helps Indian GI products gain legal protection in foreign markets, expanding export potential and guarding against counterfeiting. Together, these government initiatives reinforce the protection, promotion and global competitiveness of Indian GI-tagged products, contributing to rural development, cultural preservation and economic growth.

Global Challenges and Future Trajectories

Despite their proven benefits, the international promotion of GIs faces several significant hurdles:

- **Counterfeiting and Trademark Conflicts:** The boom in e-commerce has amplified the risk of unauthorized use and counterfeiting. Malicious entities often exploit well-known GIs to sell fake goods, which dilutes brand integrity and consumer trust. Trademark conflicts also arise when businesses register marks identical to established GIs, complicating cross-border enforcement.
- **Variations in Legal Recognition:** Disparities in national laws hinder uniform enforcement. While the EU offers robust protections, other nations lack specific legal mechanisms, creating gaps that counterfeiters exploit and erecting hurdles for exporters seeking broad market access.

To address these challenges, future GI management will increasingly rely on technologies such as blockchain and digital traceability systems to ensure authenticity and combat counterfeiting. Additionally, GI regulations are expected to incorporate stronger sustainability standards to meet growing consumer demand for ethically and environmentally responsible products.

Conclusion

Geographical Indications (GIs) have emerged as a powerful tool for promoting international trade, protecting intellectual property and enhancing the economic value of region-specific products. By preserving authenticity, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, GIs create better market opportunities for farmers, artisans and local communities while contributing to rural development and employment generation. In India, supportive government initiatives and a growing number of GI-tagged products have strengthened export potential and global recognition. Although challenges such as counterfeiting and differences in legal protection remain, improved international cooperation and the adoption of digital traceability technologies can further enhance the effectiveness of GI protection. Overall, GIs play a vital role in fostering sustainable economic growth, strengthening global competitiveness and preserving the unique identity of regional products.

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