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Geographical Indication as Catalyst of Heritage Preservation and Expand Rural Economy in Chhattisgarh

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ABSTRACT

Chhattisgarh, often called the “Land of Diversity,” is home to an extraordinary range of tribal traditions, food items, crafts, and agricultural products, many of which possess unique qualities suitable for Geographical Indication (GI) recognition. Despite this cultural richness, the state has secured very few GI registrations compared to other regions of India. This paper explores the reasons behind such limited recognition and identifies products with strong GI potential. It highlights food items such as Chaprah chutney, Bastar Salfi drink, Mahuwa-based preparations, and traditional sweets, alongside heritage crafts like Bastar Dhokra and Kosa silk, emphasizing their cultural, ecological, and economic significance. The analysis identifies key challenges, including a lack of awareness among producers, weak institutional frameworks, poor market exposure, bureaucratic hurdles, and neglect of oral tribal knowledge systems. These factors collectively hinder systematic documentation and protection of Chhattisgarh’s indigenous products. The paper argues that policy prioritization, cooperative models, and structured awareness campaigns can transform these cultural assets into economic empowerment and global recognition sources. By bridging the gap between tradition and intellectual property rights, Chhattisgarh can significantly contribute to India’s GI portfolio while safeguarding its diverse heritage for future generations.

Keywords: *Chhattisgarh, Geographical Indication, tribal heritage, traditional food, handicrafts, cultural economy, intellectual property, Bastar.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A Geographical Indication (GI) is a form of intellectual property that links products to their place of origin and the unique qualities, reputation, or traditional know-how associated with that region (Rangnekar, 2004). The distinctiveness of these products stems not from mass production but from heritage, culture, natural resources, and traditional skills passed down through generations. GIs highlight the unique link between a product and its territory, signaling

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authenticity, quality, and distinctiveness while protecting producers and consumers (Bowen, 2010). The *Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999*, governs them in India. A GI Tag is a certificate of authenticity, ensuring an item is genuinely produced in its designated area and adheres to required standards. For consumers, this fosters trust and quality assurance; for producers, it enhances market value, brand recognition, and legal protection from imitation. Well-known examples include Darjeeling Tea and Banarasi Sarees, both carrying centuries-old traditions and now legally safeguarded under the GI framework (Marie-Vivien, 2016).

The fundamental aim of a GI is to differentiate goods by their geographical origin. Their reputation and quality depend on natural factors, such as climate and soil, and human skills specific to a region (Belletti, 1999). Unlike trademarks, which belong to individuals or firms, GIs are collective rights for all producers meeting prescribed criteria (Moran, 1993). Scholars interpret GIs as collective goods (Bryła, 2017; Moran, 1993; Belletti, 1999) or “club goods,” usable only by those adhering to standards (Gerz & Dupont, 2006). However, collective use can create governance challenges; if some producers ignore standards, it risks free-riding and reputational harm for the entire group (Rangnekar, 2004).

Economists also explain GI value through the “economics of information.” Nelson (1970) classified goods into search, experience, and credence categories. While search goods rely on inspection and experience goods on use, credence goods depend mainly on reputation. GIs thus play a vital role in reducing information asymmetry, where consumers rely on certified reputation, such as in the case of the Darjeeling Tea case (Marie-Vivien, 2016). Consequently, GIs preserve cultural heritage while providing producers recognition, protection, and enhanced competitiveness in global markets.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS ACT OF INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The system of GI Tag functions at both the international and national levels, ensuring that products linked to a particular region are given legal protection and recognition. This process safeguards the authenticity of goods and helps preserve cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and regional identity. At the global stage, the GI framework is primarily governed by the World Trade Organization’s (WTO’s) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), adopted in 1994. Article 22 mandates that member countries provide legal means to prevent public deception and unfair competition regarding geographical indications, while Article 23 provides enhanced protection for wines and spirits (Cottier, 2005). This ensures internationally recognized protection for unique products like Champagne, Scotch Whisky and

Darjeeling Tea.

India lacked a dedicated law for GIs until the *Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999*, which came into force on 15 September 2003, supported by the *Geographical Indications Rules, 2002* (Govt of India, 1999/2003; Jose & Manchikanti, 2022). This legislation strengthened India's ability to protect traditional products and promote fair trade. The Act established the GI Registry in Chennai with jurisdiction across India, administered by the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, who also serves as the Registrar of GIs (Bently et al., 2022). Producers from different regions can apply here for GI registration, providing legal recognition and protection.

Section 2(1)(e) of the GI Act defines a GI as an indication identifying agricultural, natural, or manufactured goods whose qualities, reputation, or characteristics are essentially attributable to their geographical origin. This includes not only place names but also non-geographic names like “*Basmati*” or “*Alphonso*” if their origin is verifiable (Gangjee, 2012). The Act emphasizes the role of human skill in safeguarding traditional products such as handicrafts and handwoven textiles, linking them to heritage and livelihood (Bowen, 2010).

Although the TRIPS Agreement provides enhanced protection under Article 23 mainly for wines and spirits, India's GI Act allows such protection to be extended to other goods through official notifications (Musiza, 2021). In 2010, the government granted additional protection to wines and spirits, aligning with international practices and supporting foreign convention applications, predominantly for these categories (Das, 2007). Importantly, the Act broadly defines “goods” that cover agricultural products, natural goods, manufactured items, handicrafts, and foodstuffs. At the same time, Schedule IV of the GI Rules incorporates the International Classification of Goods for registration (Bently et al., 2022). Thus, India's GI framework complies with global trade obligations and provides a legal mechanism for safeguarding traditional knowledge, artisanal heritage, and rural economies.

A GI Tag is valid for ten years from the date of registration and can be renewed indefinitely for subsequent ten-year periods upon timely payment of renewal fees (Legitimate India, 2025). Unlike trademarks granted to individual traders, a GI Tag is conferred to a community, region, or group of producers associated with the product's origin. This ensures all eligible stakeholders can use the GI symbol, enhancing product authenticity and consumer trust (Datta, Manchikanti & Bhattacharya, 2024). The governance of GI Tags, from international recognition under TRIPS to local oversight through India's GI Act and Registry, provides a robust framework that preserves traditional knowledge, protects producers' rights, and enhances

cultural heritage in domestic and global markets.

III. GI REGISTRATION PROCESS IN INDIA

Under the GI Act, registration happens in two parts:

- Part A records the details of the Geographical Indication itself.
- Part B records the details of the authorized users or proprietors, including their names, addresses, and descriptions (Lexology, 2021).

The application for GI registration can be filed by any association of persons, producers, or an organization/authority established under law that represents the interests of the producers of the concerned goods. The application must be submitted in the prescribed form (in triplicate) along with a fee of ₹5,000 for each class of goods (Vinayan, 2017).

However, the process of GI registration is often lengthy and requires legal support. If there are no objections or oppositions, the normal time taken for registration is around 9 months, divided into:

- 3 months for acceptance by the expert committee,
- 3 months for advertisement after the examination report, and
- 3 months for opposition after advertisement (Vinayan, 2017).

Still, the Act does not specify a minimum time for setting up the expert committee after receiving the application. Similarly, while the applicant's response timeline is clearly defined, there is no clear timeline for informing applicants about objections raised during examination. If an application faces opposition, the process can become complicated, often stretching beyond 24 months (Vinayan, 2017).

A GI registration needs to be renewed every ten years. The renewal application should be submitted six months before the current registration expires. Either the registered proprietor or an authorized user can file for the renewal. If the renewal fee is not paid, the Registrar can remove the GI or the authorized user from the register. This removal will be published in the GI Journal (Nupur & Youkta, 2020).

IV. POST-GI REGISTRATION ACTIVITIES

Brand building is the most important step after a product gets a GI tag. In many countries, such as Europe and Southeast Asia, a common logo helps consumers identify products registered under GI laws. However, no national GI logo exists almost a decade after the GI Act came into force in India. Instead, only a few individual products, such as Darjeeling Tea, Assam Tea,

Nilgiri Tea, Mysore Agarbathi, and Kota Doria, have logos. This is a major gap in India's post-GI strategy (Jena & Grote, 2010).

Another important area is registering authorized users under Part B of the GI Registry. According to the Act, only authorized users who are genuine producers and members of the registered proprietors can use the GI tag, subject to the proprietor's consent. As of March 2016, there were 1,184 authorized user applications registered out of 2,349 applications. (Government of India, 2016). Still, these registrations covered only around 50% of all GI products in India. This highlights two key issues: first, that becoming an authorized user depends heavily on the registered proprietor; second, proprietors must represent the interests of all producers instead of turning the GI tag into a monopoly (Vinayan, 2017).

The challenge of costs in brand building, monitoring, and supervision is another big issue. For example, the Tea Board of India reportedly spent approximately \$200,000 (around ₹1.6 crore) during 1998–2002 on hiring an international watch agency to protect Darjeeling Tea (Jena & Grote, 2010). Similarly, APEEDA incurred over ₹7.62 crore between 1995 and 2012 to protect Basmati rice internationally (SpicyIP, 2012). However, most GI products lack effective systems for quality control or prevention of misuse. In such cases, the role of the state government becomes very important. Since most producers belong to the unorganized sector, they need initial support through funds, awareness programs, brand building, and stakeholder participation. Such efforts would help create stronger networks and protect GI products in the long run.

V. BENEFITS OF GI TAG: ELEVATING COMMERCE AND CULTURE

The GI Tag shields regional names from misuse and creates transformative opportunities for trade, cultural preservation, and local development. Its benefits extend across several dimensions:

- **International Trade:** GI protection strengthens access to foreign markets by safeguarding reputation and exclusivity. By preventing unfair competition, GIs enhance export potential and foreign exchange earnings. Globally recognized examples such as Darjeeling Tea, Basmati Rice, and Banarasi Sarees illustrate how GIs boost India's trade performance (Das, 2010; Rangnekar, 2004).
- **Reputation and Consumer Trust:** A GI tag conveys authenticity and tradition. Consumers associate GI-certified goods with heritage and quality, fostering trust and long-term brand loyalty. This credibility enables producers to command fair value and position products as premium commodities (Jose & Manchikanti, 2022).

- **Market Differentiation:** In a globalized economy dominated by mass production, GIs highlight unique qualities and cultural heritage linked to origin. This differentiation enhances competitiveness and allows producers to secure higher prices than generic substitutes (Gangjee, 2012).
- **Tourism and Destination Branding:** GIs contribute to cultural and culinary tourism. Products like Banarasi Sarees and Darjeeling Tea sustain exports and attract visitors, integrating heritage into destination marketing (Singhal, 2008).
- **Legal Protection:** The central advantage of GIs is legal protection against counterfeiting and misappropriation. Only registered producers from the designated region may use the GI, preserving cultural identity and economic benefits (Das, 2007).

In sum, GIs are more than legal tools: they empower communities, expand trade, preserve traditions, and foster pride in cultural heritage.

VI. REGISTERED GI PRODUCTS FROM CHHATTISGARH

- **Jeeraphool Rice:** Jeeraphool rice, an indigenous variety from Chhattisgarh, received its GI tag in March 2019, following an application by Jaivik Krishi Utpadak Sahkari Samiti Maryadit, Ambikapur. Cultivated mainly in the Sarguja district, this heritage rice is scientifically known as *Oryza sativa*. It is cherished for its short, slender, cumin-seed-like grains, delicate aroma, and soft texture. Its unique qualities are deeply tied to the region's fertile soil, distinct rainfall, and traditional farming methods that farmers have followed for generations. Jeeraphool's resilience and natural resistance to pests make it a sustainable crop, while its fragrance and flavor make it highly prized in local delicacies such as kheer and pulao. The GI recognition safeguards this ancient grain from extinction and exploitation. It ensures economic benefits to farmers, highlighting Chhattisgarh's cultural and agricultural legacy while preserving biodiversity and traditional knowledge for future generations (Singh et al., 2021).
- **Bastar Dhokra:** Bastar Dhokra is one of Chhattisgarh's most iconic handicrafts, representing a tradition over 4,000 years old. Officially registered as a GI in 2008 under the Handicrafts category, it safeguards the rights of Bastar's Ghadwa community, the traditional artisans of this craft. Created through the ancient lost-wax method (*Dhokra*), it involves modeling, molding, casting, and finishing using wax, soil, clay, and rice husk, with a bronze, brass, and zinc alloy offering durability and a golden sheen. Each handmade piece, from small figurines to 14-foot sculptures, features motifs of tribal life, rituals, and nature, serving

decorative and ritual needs. GI recognition protects Bastar Dhokra as cultural heritage and sustains artisan livelihoods, preserving the tribal identity of Chhattisgarh (Deshmukh et al., 2024).

- **Bastar Wooden Craft:** Bastar Wooden Craft, a celebrated handicraft of Chhattisgarh, received its GI Tag on 22 April 2008. Rooted in the Bastar region's rich forests, this craft uses woods like Sal, Teak, Bija, Saja, Mahua, Tendu, Amla, and Bamboo. Skilled artisans carve idols, wall panels, and functional furniture like the Deewan, embodying cultural expression with an earthy, raw finish and tribal motifs. Tools are often handmade, enhancing originality. Beyond artistry, it embodies storytelling and heritage, making Bastar Wooden Craft a symbol of Chhattisgarh's legacy, now safeguarded through GI protection (Banerjee & Rani, 2024).
- **Bastar Iron Craft:** Bastar Iron Craft is one of Chhattisgarh's most distinctive handicrafts, rooted in tribal traditions. Registered under GI in 2008, the craft uses traditional forging methods to transform raw iron into artistic forms without modern tools. Each piece reflects tribal life, rituals, and harmony with nature, with motifs including deities, animals, and farming scenes. Its earthy and organic charm remains intact, and GI recognition has enhanced its protection, market reach, and cultural value (Deshmukh et al., 2024).
- **Champa Silk Saree and Fabrics (Kosa):** Kosa Silk Sarees of Champa, Chhattisgarh, are acclaimed for their brownish sheen and tribal motifs. Registered under GI in 2010, they remain protected until 2029. Crafted using traditional wooden looms and handmade tools, they present cultural and economic significance, portraying temples, flora, fauna, and festive scenes. GI status safeguards authenticity, empowers weavers, and preserves sustainable heritage (Patel & Srivastava, 2015).
- **Bastar Dhokra (Logo):** Bastar Dhokra (Logo) earned its GI certification in 2014. It highlights the traditional non-ferrous lost-wax technique practiced by tribal artisans using clay, beeswax, and resin. Each piece is hand-crafted, expressing folklore and nature motifs. The GI tag preserves artisan rights and boosts visibility while symbolizing Chhattisgarh's tribal heritage (Deshmukh et al., 2024).
- **Nagri Dubraj Rice:** Nagri Dubraj Rice, a premium aromatic variety from Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh, earned GI recognition in 2023. It is known for its delicate fragrance, long, slender grains, and natural cultivation. Grown using eco-friendly methods, its certification secures regional identity and prevents misuse, reflecting the agrarian heritage of Chhattisgarh (Bhagat & Banafar, 2017).

VII. PRODUCTS FROM CHHATTISGARH HAVING GI POTENTIAL

A. Agricultural Products

- **Tikhur Powder (*Curcuma angustifolia*):** Tikhur, derived from *Curcuma angustifolia*, is a traditional starch from wild turmeric roots widely used in Bastar. Known for its cooling and medicinal properties, it is used in drinks, sweets, and Ayurveda. Tribal groups have preserved eco-friendly processing techniques for generations. With rising demand in pharmaceuticals and organic markets, Tikhur Powder holds strong GI potential, safeguarding indigenous knowledge while enhancing tribal livelihoods (Patel et al., 2015).
- **Bastar Tamarind:** Wild-harvested Bastar Tamarind is valued for its tangy flavor, aroma, and purity. Distinct from commercial types, it has long been used in food, preservation, and indigenous medicine. Its uniqueness and global demand for natural condiments strengthen its GI potential. Certification could ensure fair trade and economic stability for forest collectors (Sharma & Sharma, 2025).
- **Mahua Products (Flowers & Seeds):** Mahua is central to tribal life in Chhattisgarh. Flowers are fermented into liquor and used in sweets, while seeds yield oil for cooking and Ayurveda. Revered as sacred, Mahua also symbolizes sustainability in local rituals. With growing demand for organic beverages and nutraceuticals, GI recognition would preserve heritage, prevent misuse, and expand markets for forest communities (Prakash & Khalkho, 2025).
- **Chironji (Charoli Seeds):** Chironji (*Buchanania lanzan*) seeds are collected from Bastar forests and valued for their nutty flavor, culinary use, and medicinal benefits. Traditionally harvested by tribal groups, they remain distinct as organic, wild produce. Increasing demand for plant-based proteins gives Bastar Chironji strong GI potential, ensuring authenticity and regional branding (Sharma, 2021).
- **Kodo-Kutki Millet:** Kodo and Kutki millet are ancient crops that have sustained tribal diets for centuries. Highly nutritious, drought-resistant, and eco-friendly, they secure food supply in harsh climates. Rising recognition of millets as “superfoods” for diabetes and malnutrition highlights their GI potential. Registration would empower farmers, preserve heritage, and align with India’s millet mission (Warkad, Pawar & Bidwe, 2023).
- **Bastar Mango Varieties:** Traditional Bastar mangoes, grown without chemicals, are known for their sweetness and fiberless pulp. Unlike hybrids, they hold cultural value and are naturally ripened. Their uniqueness and growing demand for organic fruits position them

as strong GI candidates, ensuring premium branding and farmer benefits (Rana, Sharma & Sahu, 2025).

- **Bastar Honey:** Collected from wild forest hives, Bastar Honey is prized for purity, aroma, and medicinal value. Honey gathering is both a livelihood and a cultural practice among tribals. With global preference for raw forest honey, GI recognition would safeguard authenticity, improve branding, and secure sustainable incomes (Ghode, 2022).

B. Handicrafts & Artistic Products

- **Godna Art of Chhattisgarh:** Godna art originates from tribal tattoo traditions of Chhattisgarh, featuring geometric and symbolic motifs once etched on the skin. Now adapted to textiles and paper, it conveys cultural identity and oral storytelling. Rustic aesthetics and heritage value highlight strong GI potential for preserving tribal knowledge and ensuring livelihood opportunities (Tamrakar & Banerjee, 2019).
- **Bhilai Steel Craft Miniatures:** Bhilai artisans creatively repurpose industrial steel waste into decorative miniatures of deities, animals, and vehicles. This blend of industrial material with folk artistry represents Chhattisgarh's modern cultural identity. Its innovation and regional distinctiveness make it a strong GI candidate (Jain & Chandravanshi, 2022).
- **Terracotta of Kondagaon:** Kondagaon terracotta reflects tribal spirituality and daily life through finely detailed idols and sculptures. With its distinctive texture, firing techniques, and generational artistry, this craft symbolizes Bastar's heritage and is a promising product for GI registration (Wasnik et al., 2025).
- **Bamboo Craft of Bastar:** Bamboo weaving is integral to Bastar's tribal life, producing eco-friendly baskets, toys, and décor from locally sourced bamboo. It embodies sustainable practices and cultural expression, reinforcing its GI potential (Jain & Chandravanshi, 2022).
- **Tribal Textiles of Bastar:** Weavers, especially Panikas, produce textiles dyed with natural colors like aal (*Morinda citrifolia*), decorated with motifs inspired by myths and nature. These unique designs rooted in cultural identity make Bastar textiles valuable for GI protection (Guha, 2022).
- **Rajim Stone Carving:** Rajim's heritage stone carvings in temples and sculptures depict deities and symbolic motifs using centuries-old techniques. This historic craft reflects regional distinctiveness and cultural continuity, strengthening its case for GI recognition (Dubey-Pathak & Clottes, 2020).

C. Food Products

- **Red Ant Chutney (*Chaprah Chutney*):** Chaprah chutney, prepared from red ants and their eggs with spices, is a Bastar tribal delicacy. Rich in protein and medicinal value, it is prized for its tangy flavor and health benefits. Consumed as food and medicine, it represents indigenous ecological knowledge (Sen, 2005). Its exclusivity and cultural roots give it strong GI potential, protecting traditional recipes while promoting tribal culinary heritage.
- **Bastar Salfi Drink:** Salfi, tapped from the fishtail palm, is a refreshing beverage central to Bastar's tribal life. When fermented, it becomes mildly alcoholic and is consumed in rituals, festivals, and social gatherings, symbolizing community ties (Tiwari et al., 2020). Beyond its role as a drink, Salfi reflects sustainable forest-based living and ecological wisdom. Growing demand for organic beverages enhances their GI potential, ensuring cultural recognition and livelihood support.
- **Chhattisgarhi Thethri / Khurmi / Farsa Sweets:** Farsa, Thethri, and Khurmi are festive sweets of Chhattisgarh, crafted from rice flour, jaggery, and local ingredients. Associated with Diwali and marriages, they symbolize community bonding and culinary creativity. Their preparation techniques differ from mainstream sweets, showcasing regional identity and generational knowledge (Shukla, 2021). With demand for authentic snacks, these sweets have strong GI potential, aiding heritage preservation and women-led enterprises.
- **Mahuwa Ladoo and Tribal Herbal Preparations:** Mahuwa flowers, sacred in tribal rituals, are made into ladoos and medicinal foods. Tribes also create herbal mixtures from forest produce for nutrition and healing. These practices blend food with health traditions, reflecting sustainable forest use (Prasad & Sahu, 2023). With growing global interest in herbal and organic products, Mahuwa-based items show strong GI potential by preserving culture and strengthening livelihoods.

VIII. REASONS FOR LIMITED GI TAGS IN CHHATTISGARH DESPITE RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE

Chhattisgarh, often called the “Land of Diversity,” is rich in tribal culture, crafts, indigenous foods, and rare crops. However, only a few products hold GI tags, reflecting cultural wealth and recognition gaps.

- **Lack of Awareness among Local Communities:** Most artisans, tribal farmers, and forest producers are unaware of GI as a tool for protecting heritage or improving livelihoods. Their

focus on survival and cultural continuity limits engagement with intellectual property systems (Bowen, 2010).

- **Weak Institutional Initiatives:** Unlike Tamil Nadu or Kerala, Chhattisgarh lacks strong state-level frameworks for GI registration. Efforts remain fragmented and inconsistent without a dedicated task force or facilitation center (Tripathi & Vedula, 2022).
- **Dependence on Informal and Forest-Based Economy:** Tribal livelihoods rely heavily on forest products like mahua, tamarind, and honey, often traded in local haats. The absence of organized trade or branding reduces motivation to pursue GI registration (Pandey, Tripathi & Kumar, 2016).
- **Limited Market Exposure and Branding:** Unique products often remain confined to local markets with poor packaging and branding. This lack of visibility reduces consumer demand, a key driver for GI recognition (Sharma & Kulhari, 2015).
- **Bureaucratic and Legal Challenges:** GI applications demand historical and geographical evidence. Producers often lack resources to handle documentation, while bureaucratic delays and post-registration enforcement add further obstacles (Das, 2010; Gangjee, 2012).
- **Absence of Producer Associations:** Unlike Darjeeling Tea or Mysore Silk, Chhattisgarh lacks strong cooperatives. Without collective organization, standardization, and negotiation, pursuing or defending GI rights becomes difficult (Poddar & Saikia, 2025).
- **Neglect of Tribal Knowledge Systems:** Much of Chhattisgarh's cultural wealth is oral and undocumented, challenging GI validation. Without systematic ethnographic documentation, many tribal products remain excluded (Ansari, 2019).
- **Low Policy Priority:** The state emphasizes mining and industry over heritage-based strategies. Unlike Odisha or Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh lacks a dedicated GI policy or financial support, limiting registrations (Ghosh, 2024).

Chhattisgarh has immense cultural wealth but limited GI recognition. Strengthened policy support, producer cooperatives, and awareness campaigns could position it as a leading contributor to India's GI portfolio (Gangjee, 2012).

IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING GI TAGS IN CHHATTISGARH

The products are produced mainly by the unorganized sector in the state. The following measures can be taken to strengthen the GI Tag status in Chhattisgarh.

- **Establish a Dedicated GI Cell:** Empirical studies show that specialized agencies at the state level significantly improve the delivery of IP-related benefits and governance (Balganesh, 2003). By acting as a nodal agency, a GI Facilitation Cell under Chhattisgarh’s industries or handicraft department could coordinate GI registrations, offer end-to-end support, and effectively ensure smooth monitoring, bridging producers and legal institutions.
- **Awareness and Capacity Building Programs:** Awareness programs and structured training sessions significantly enhance IP awareness in rural communities and encourage registration. Capacity-building focusing on documentation, branding, and cooperative formation empowers marginalized artisans and prevents external exploitation (Bowen, 2010).
- **Financial and Legal Assistance:** Financial constraints are among the most cited barriers to GI filing. Subsidies, legal aid, and dedicated funding for post-registration enforcement can drastically raise participation levels, especially among small producers (Balganesh, 2003).
- **Formation of Producer Cooperatives/Associations:** Research shows that producer organizations like FPOs and producer companies enable collective action, quality control, and better market access. Encouraging cooperatives like “Nagri Dubraj Rice Growers Association” can bolster GI claims and facilitate branding.
- **Documentation of Cultural and Historical Knowledge:** Ethnographic studies are essential for establishing historical legitimacy in GI dossiers. Funding documentation projects that record oral narratives and folklore can strengthen GI claims and preserve intangible cultural heritage (Ansari, 2019).
- **University and Research Institute Involvement:** Collaborations with academic institutions, through soil studies, genetic profiling, and historical research, can enhance the credibility of GI applications and provide professional legitimacy.
- **Integration with Tourism and Branding:** Linking GI products with tourism circuits, e.g., “GI Villages” or craft clusters, has enhanced visibility, created revenue streams, and strengthened brand identity (Malladagudda & Manjusha, 2025).
- **Promotion through E-commerce and Export:** Digital platforms like e-commerce and export fairs extend market reach for GI-labelled goods, particularly for remote producers, enabling them to tap into premium markets.

- **Policy Inclusion and Incentives:** Institutionalizing GI recognition through policy integration, offering tax benefits, marketing grants, and procurement preferences, encourages more producers to engage and builds structural sustainability (Malladagudda & Manjusha, 2025).
- **Learning from Other States:** Tamil Nadu's state-led promotion and Odisha's heritage-based branding highlight how proactive strategies and government involvement can vastly enhance a state's GI ecosystem.

X. CONCLUSION

Chhattisgarh's cultural and ecological diversity offers a strong foundation for GI recognition, yet this potential remains untapped. The state is home to numerous traditional crafts, agricultural products, forest-based foods, and tribal art forms that embody centuries of indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices. From the intricate Terracotta of Kondagaon and Godna art to aromatic Nagri Dubraj rice and unique tribal delicacies like Chaprah chutney, each product tells the story of community identity, resilience, and craftsmanship. Protecting these products under GI safeguards cultural heritage and opens pathways for economic empowerment and global visibility.

However, Chhattisgarh lags behind states such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Odisha, where GI-based strategies are integrated into cultural and economic policy frameworks. Challenges such as a lack of awareness among producers, weak institutional mechanisms, the absence of strong cooperatives, and bureaucratic hurdles continue to hinder progress. The over-dependence on informal markets, along with neglect of tribal knowledge systems that are mostly oral and undocumented, further restricts many products from entering the formal GI framework.

To bridge these gaps, a multi-pronged approach is essential. Capacity-building programs should be initiated at the grassroots level to educate artisans, farmers, and tribal communities about the significance of GI protection and its long-term benefits. Secondly, universities, research institutions, and cultural organizations should collaborate to document local products' historical, cultural, and geographical uniqueness in formats suitable for GI applications. Thirdly, the state government must create a dedicated GI task force to identify potential products, streamline the application process, and provide financial and legal assistance. Strengthening producer associations or cooperatives, similar to successful models in Darjeeling Tea or Pochampally Ikat, will also ensure collective bargaining power and better brand positioning.

Furthermore, linking GI products with eco-tourism, craft tourism, and digital platforms such as

e-commerce can significantly expand their market outreach. Effective branding, packaging, and storytelling around these products can transform them from local traditions into global commodities while retaining cultural authenticity. By aligning GI initiatives with livelihood programs, women's self-help groups, and tribal cooperatives, the benefits can be more equitably distributed among marginalized communities.

Chhattisgarh stands at a critical juncture where its unique products can be harnessed for cultural preservation and sustainable economic growth. A well-structured GI ecosystem, supported by awareness, documentation, institutional mechanisms, and policy prioritization, can turn these heritage assets into instruments of identity, pride, and prosperity. If pursued systematically, Chhattisgarh can significantly contribute to India's GI landscape, showcasing how traditional wisdom and modern legal frameworks can drive inclusive development together.

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