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Geographical Indications as an Instrument for Empowering Local Communities: A Case Study of North-Eastern India

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ABSTRACT

A Geographical Indication (GI) tag is a form of intellectual property protection that safeguards the distinct qualities, reputation, and authenticity of products linked to a specific geographical region. It plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage and traditional knowledge associated with such products. Beyond legal protection, GI recognition can serve as a powerful tool by helping create a unique brand identity, enable producers to obtain premium prices, and support the empowerment of local communities. In this sense, GI protection contributes to reinforce the broader Indian economy. The North-eastern States of India are rich in traditional and cultural arts and craft, unique agricultural produce, and natural products. In spite of this enormous potential, the region has comparatively fewer GI registered products compared to the other parts of the country. Only few states, such as Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Meghalaya, received GI recognition. Despite the fact that India's GI registration system has been in place since 2005. This study examines the role of Geographical Indications as a tool for empowering local communities, with special reference to Northeastern India, a region rich in cultural diversity, indigenous skills, and unique agricultural and artisanal products. The paper also analyzes how GI protection contributes to community empowerment by enhancing market recognition, generating employment, and increasing income opportunities. The paper also emphasizes the current disparities between legal recognition and actual benefit delivered to the indigenous producers of Northeastern India. By means of some selected examples of GI-tagged products from Northeastern India, the study explores the practical impact of GI registration while identifying the key challenges face by the local producers such as lack of awareness of the Intellectual Property Rights, inadequate institutional support, limited access to the market, and enforcement issues. The study concludes that although Geographical Indication possess significant potential for community-based development, their accomplishment rely on efficient implementations, involvement of producers, and enabling legislative actions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The nation's diverse legacy and indigenous expertise yield distinctive commodities that hold substantial financial promise. Indigenous and local populations consider traditional, cultural, and natural products to be an integral component of their cultural heritage and distinctive identity, maintaining the unique systems for which this knowledge originates. This body of knowledge is often indispensable for their future prosperity, sustainable advancement, and cultural distinctiveness. Numerous communities constitute a fundamental aspect of comprehensive world view and is inextricably linked to their established customs, including their cultural principles, spiritual conviction, and customary governance structures.³ Now, even though people have different ideas about whether our current intellectual property laws are the right fit for protecting such products, the tool of geographical indication can, to a certain degree, be employed effectively for its legal protection. The concept of geographical indications was initially established within TRIPs Agreement. Under Trade-Related Aspect of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), Geographical Indication is defined as *a sign that indicates that goods originate from the territory of WTO member country, or from a specific region or locality within that country, where a particular quality, reputation, or other distinctive characteristic of the goods is mainly due to their geographical origin.*⁴ A GI registration is highly esteemed by both the manufacturers and the buyers, as it guarantees quality, certifies the distinctiveness of the product, and secures the entitlements of all involved parties. Moreover GIs support the advancement and conservation of traditional expertise and cultural distinctiveness, thereby providing advantages to the wider community. Geographical indication is a sign applied to the goods that came from a particular place and have qualities, reputation, or characteristics that are essentially attributed to the geographical environment, including natural and human factors. Geographical Indication labels are crucial for protecting India's traditional and region specific products, encouraging balanced economic growth, and supporting both makers and buyers. Under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, a

³ Dr. Kariyana K.S, A study on Geographical Indication as a tool of protection of traditional knowledge, 8 International Journal of Innovation Research in Technology (IJIRT), Oct. 10th 2021, available at <https://ilirt.org/article?manuscript=153039>

⁴ Suresh C Srivastava, Geographical Indications under TRIPs Agreement and Legal Framework in India: Part I, 9 Journal of Intellectual Property Rights, 9-23 (2004). Available at [https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/4725/1/JIPR%209\(1\)%209-23.pdf](https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/4725/1/JIPR%209(1)%209-23.pdf)

Geographical Indication is defined as *a distinctive mark applied to agricultural, natural, or manufactured items to show that they come from a particular place, region, or area, and that their special quality, reputation, or distinct features are mainly linked to that place of origin.*⁵

The distinguishing characteristic, renown, or special features of these products must be directly linked to their place of origin. For manufactured commodities, it is mandated that at least a single stage of their making, handling or finishing process occur within that specified territory. The Act further clarifies that the term “Goods” encompasses a broad range of items, including agricultural, natural, or manufactured articles, alongside artisan crafts, industrial items, and foodstuffs.⁶ Geographical Indication acts as a legal shield, preventing unauthorized sellers from unfairly profiting by misleading products claiming to originate from a specific region. By ensuring that only goods truly originating from a specific place can carry that region’s name, GI status preserves the integrity of indigenous people. North-East India is a vibrant example of this potential, a region with rich in culture and natural diversity. To support the goal of self-reliant India (Aatmanirbhar Bharat), the government aims to turn North-East India into a powerhouse for authentic local production and a vital gateway for economic growth.

II. INDIAN LEGAL REGIMES OF GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS

Geographical Indications (GIs) are fundamentally about establishing a connection between a product’s quality, reputation, or a specific attributes and the place it originated. This system encompasses a vast array of goods, such as farm produce, fabricated articles, naturally sourced materials, craftsmanship, food and drink. The main purpose of securing GI protection is to conserve inherited expertise, stimulate local and rural economic growth, and shield purchasers from fake or poor quality merchandise. Given the significant commercial prospect GIs offer, robust legal enforcement is imperative to minimize their unauthorized use. Consequently GIs have become an increasingly important form of intellectual property in India, with more than 500 successful registrations achieved by mid-2023.⁷ The enactment of the Geographical Indications (GI) Act and the subsequent notification of its implementing rules were driven by a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors. A primary objective of these GI statutes was to secure and maintain the cultural regions. By formally recognizing and shielding products such as Darjeeling Tea, Banarasi Silk, and Basmati rice, the law was intended to ensure

⁵ The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, Sec. 2(1) (e)

⁶ The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, sec, 2 (f)

⁷ Jayanta Gosh, Oishika Banerji, Navajyoti Samanta and Ashish Bhargva, Geographical Indication (GI) laws in India and its implementation: A critical Appraisal, Journal of Intellectual Property Rights, May 22nd 2024, Available at, <https://orniscpr.res.in/index.php/JIPR/article/view/9953/4319>

traditional expertise and artisan skill are both protected and advanced.⁸ Furthermore, the legal defense of GIs was also projected to deliver financial advantages to both manufacturers and the buyers. For those who produce the goods, GIs provide market edge, allowing them to command higher prices for their distinctive items. Conversely, consumers gain confidence from the guarantee of product excellence and genuineness. GI products in India are mostly made in rural and economically weaker regions. The main purpose behind introducing GI laws was to support the growth of these areas by promoting traditional industries, creating job opportunities, and improving local infrastructure. Moreover, India's GI framework is in harmony with international instruments like the TRIPs Agreement, which helps to ensure that Indian GI product received global recognition and protection.

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

Prior to the GI Act, there was no law in India that protected geographical Indications. It only in 1999 did India's parliament pass the Geographical Indications Act referred to as Geographical Indication of Goods (registration and Protection) Act, 1999.⁹ The Act was enacted to enable the official recording and improved and enhance graphics associated with various products. The purpose of this law is to forbid unapproved organizations from using GIs for profit thereby protecting manufacturer's and producer's rights while also guaranteeing fake goods do not deceive consumers.¹⁰ Crucially, the Act encourages the development of truly verified goods. Section 3 through 9 list the steps involved in registering GI describing the precise grounds for filing an application through procedure representative organization or associations. Although GI registration is not required, it is the first legal evidence of the GIs legitimacy in court, providing improved statutory protection against violation. The GI cannot be legally defended under the Act without this official registration prohibiting the authorized user from pursuing remedies such as damages or an injunction.

B. Need for legal protection of Geographical Indications

Because Geographical Indications possess significant market value, obtaining statutory safeguarding is crucial. Without a formal legal framework, unauthorized third parties could take advantage of the established prestige of a name without merit. Such dishonest commercial

⁸ Andrea Zappalaglio, *The Law of Geographical Indications at the centre of the European Green Deal*, *Journal of Intellectual Property Law and Practice* (2023), available at, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370532528_the_law_of_geographical_indication_at_the_centre_of_the_european_green_deal

⁹ Dr. M. K. Bhandari, *Law relating to Intellectual Property Rights*, pg.280, (Central Law Publication, Delhi, 6th edn., 2021)

¹⁰ Piyush Raj Geddam & Laxita Chandolia, "Geographical Indications- Balancing their Protection and preserving cultural heritage," vol.5, 2024, available at <https://cnlu.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/geographical-indications-balancing-their-protection-and-preserving-cultural-heritage-by-laxmi-chandolia.pdf>

conduct deprives genuine stakeholders of legitimate income, confuses the public, and run the risk permanently devaluing the reputation of the brand. In India, protection of Geographical Indications is governed by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 and the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Rules, 2002. The law relating to GIs offers several important advantages:

- a) It allows registration and grants stronger legal protection to goods whose reputation is linked to a particular geographical area.
- b) It restricts unauthorized persons from using or misappropriating the GI.
- c) It protects the rights of producers and manufacturers and prevents consumers from being misled by false claims regarding origin.
- d) It supports the economic interests and livelihood of genuine producers.
- e) It encourages the promotion and export of products carrying a registered GI.

In the end, the registration procedure gives authors sole proprietary rights, allowing them to increase their profit margins and establish a cohesive, respectable presence in the international market.

III. OVERVIEW OF GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS IN NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

During the period of independence, the North Eastern Region (NER) maintained a prominent position of significant economic power within the Indian union. Over the past six decades, the area has hit a rough patch. It's lagging behind the national average on almost every front, from jobs to healthcare. This region is distinguished by enormous demographic diversity, including 220 different ethnic groups and a corresponding range of dialects in language.¹¹ The human landscape here is incredibly dense, made up of 160 primary tribes and roughly 400 smaller sub-communities. What sets them apart is their resilience, they continue to operate through long standing traditions of collective management. They've spent centuries perfecting a system of communal living, where social ties and local finances are handled together, just as their ancestors did.

An examination of registered Geographical Indication (GI) certifications reveals a significant differences between other industrialized Indian province and states of the North-East. The North-Eastern region possesses a wide range of potential GI products. However, despite this richness, the number of formally registered GIs from the region has historically limited. This

¹¹ Distinct Destination, Unboxing Northeast India's Amazing Eco-Friendly Crafts, Dec. 30 2025, available at <https://www.distinctdestinations.in/blog/india/unboxing-northeast-india-s-amazing-eco-friendly-crafts>

gap is may be attributed to factors such as strong region's reliance on oral tradition, as well as a lack of legal infrastructure and administrative resources. In recent years, the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) has taken the leading role in efforts aimed at formalizing and protecting these intellectual property rights. This effort reached a significant milestone in December 2023 when the Patent Office granted 63 GI certifications within a span of 24 hours. A notable portion of these registrations came from North-Eastern region, with Assam

receiving 19 GI tags, Meghalaya 4, and Tripura 2. In addition, several certification were also granted to other states including Gujarat (5), Maharashtra (16), and Uttar Pradesh (16).¹²

The North Eastern States have long been known for their vibrant cultural traditions, many of which are reflected in the region's indigenous crafts, traditional textiles, and unique agricultural practices. The region is particularly recognized for bamboo and cane products, traditional silk weaving, and unique handloom textiles. Each state in the region contributes its own distinctive products, such as Muga Silk from Assam, Traditional pottery from Manipur, and Intricately woven tribal shawls from Nagaland. The region is also known for its diverse artisanal products, including bell metal and brass work from Assam, woodcraft from Arunachal Pradesh, and traditional crafts from Manipur, all of which showcase the technical skill and creativity of local artisans. Agricultural products such as Naga chilli, Tripura pineapple, Assam lemon varieties, and scented rice further highlights the region's potential. Because of their distinct regional identity and quality, these products often enjoy strong export prospects and higher market value.

A. Some of the registered GIs of North-East India

Monpa Handmade Paper of Arunachal Pradesh

Monpa Handmade Paper is a traditional paper-making craft practiced by the Monpa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. This paper is produced mainly in the Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The paper is traditionally manufactured using the bark of a locally available plant known as Shugu Sheng which is botanically identified as *Daphne papyracea*, and is commonly called the India Paper Plant.¹³ This plant is a shrub that grows naturally in the high-altitude regions of Arunachal Pradesh. The paper is known for its durability, strength, and resistance to moisture and harsh climatic conditions. It has a natural brown color, a fibrous and slightly translucent texture, and traditionally measures approximately 24 inches in length and

¹² Nupur Kalita, Geographical Indications Products in India: Recent Trends with Special References to North-Eastern States, 11 IJCRT 1387, 1388-1389 (2023), available at, <https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2312944.pdf>

¹³ Manali Bhanushali, Monpa Handmade paper of Arunachal Pradesh, Textile Articles, Sept. 29th 2025, available at, <https://textilevaluechain.in/monpa-homemade-paper-of-arunachal-pradesh>

16 inches in width. It is classified into four categories based on size and quality, namely *Gochema*, *Tsarsho*, *Kangyur Parsho*, and *Kyosho*. Historically, this paper was used for writing Buddhist scriptures and religious texts because of its long lasting quality.¹⁴ In modern times, after refinement, it is also used for making greeting cards, visiting cards, decorative sheets, and writing pads.

Arunachal Orange

Arunachal Orange, also known as Wakro Orange or sometimes referred to as Khasi Mandarin, has received GI recognition due to its distinct characteristics arising from the specific agro-climatic conditions of Arunachal Pradesh. It is cultivated in various parts of the State, particularly in areas mainly in *Wakro*, *Roing*, *Dambuk*, *Pangin*, *Mebo*, *Belong*, *Basar*, *Boha*, *Bargon* and *Bana* where the soil composition, rainfall, and temperature contribute to its unique quality. The fruit is round in shape and has a balanced sweet and sour taste. It develops a bright orange color when fully ripe. It has a medium-thick peel which can be easily removed by hand. The fruit can be separated into uniform segments without juice spillage, making it convenient for direct consumption. These qualities distinguish it from oranges grown in other regions.

Muga Silk of Assam

Muga Silk is a distinctive variety of silk that has been traditionally produced in Assam. The term “Muga” is an Assamese language and refers to its silk’s natural golden-yellow or amber color. Unlike many other silk varieties of silk, Muga silk is known for its natural golden shine that gradually becomes more vibrant with washing rather than diminishing. Muga Silk holds deep cultural and historical significance in Assamese society. Historical accounts suggest that the production of silk in Assam had attained high levels of excellence as early as the 7th century A.D. Today, muga silk is one of Assam’s most valuable traditional products and an important export after tea.¹⁵ Muga silk is widely used in the making of the traditional attire known as Mekhela Chador, which is commonly worn by Assamese women during important ceremonies and festivals. Historical references to Muga silk and the practice of silkworm rearing can be trace back to 1662, and early descriptions of its cultivation were recorded by the writer Shihabuddin Talish. Over time, the commercial value of Muga silk has grown considerably.

¹⁴ Testan Wangmu, Phurpa Lhamu & Dorjee Yangjom, Mon-Shugu: An Indigenous and Sustainable Papermaking Technique of the Monpa tribe of Tawang District, Arunachal Pradesh, 6 IJHSSM, 242, 242 (2026) , available at, https://ijhssm.org/issue_dcp/mon%20Shugu%20An%20Indigenous%20and%20Sustainable%20papermaking%20Technique%20of%20the%20monpa%20tribe%20of%20tawang%20district%20arunachal%20pradesh.pdf

¹⁵ Anushka Das, Muga Silk- Weaving Golden Dreams, University of Design, Innovation & Technology, May. 30 2022, available at, <https://www.iad.edu.in/the-circle/muga-silk-weaving-golden-dreams/>

The price of Muga yarn has increased considerably, largely due to the growing demand in both domestic and International markets. Sualkuchi, often referred to as the “Manchester of the East”, has emerged as the prominent centre for silk weaving. The town is well known for its skilled artisans and evolving weaving techniques, which have further contributed to enhancing the market value of Muga Silk Products. Muga silk received GI tagged in 2006 by the Patent Information Centre of the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTECC). It was the first GI from the North Eastern region of India. Although ASTECC is the registered proprietor, there are currently no registered authorized users. Field studies conducted among weavers and traders in Sualkuchi revealed limited awareness about GI protection. The rising price of muga silk is not directly linked to GI registration but rather to practical challenges such as reduction in cultivation areas due to rubber plantations, disease affecting cocoons, and losses from outdoor rearing conditions. Despite higher prices, farmers are not encouraged to continue muga cultivation.¹⁶ As a result, pure muga silk products are rarely produced today, except for government emporiums or special orders. Many products now mix muga with other silks, including imported varieties. The increasing use of power looms has further affected traditional handloom weavers. Although ASTECC has proposed a quality control system through the Seri Bio Lab in Guwahati, no formal inspection body has yet been established. Consequently, even several years after registration, the GI does not fully guarantee quality or authenticity in the market.

Gamosa of Assam

Gamosa is a traditional hand woven cloth that represents the cultural identity of Assamese society. It is widely used during religious ceremonies, cultural functions, and social events. It is presented as a mark of honor and respect to guests, dignitaries, and religious leaders.¹⁷ Traditionally, Gamosa is woven using cotton yarn, although silk varieties such as mulberry, muga, and tasar are used for ceremonial purposes. It is woven on traditional looms that are fixed on bamboo posts, supported by wooden beams known locally as “Tolotha.” The weaving process reflects a long traditional craftsmanship that has been carefully passed down from one generation to another generation. Beyond the cultural value, the Gamosa also carries strong religious significance.¹⁸ It is considered essential attire for members of Namghar and Satras

¹⁶Nitya Nanda, Indrani Barpujari & Nidhi Srivastava, *The Protection of Geographical Indications in India: Issues and Challenges*, The Energy and Research Institute (TERI), March 2013, available at, https://yucita.org/file_sub_301_Diger-The-Protection-of-Geographical-Indications-in-India:-Issues-and-challenges.pdf

¹⁷ AB Bureau, *Gamocha's GI tag to boost rural economy*, Asom Barta, Jan. 1st 2023, available at, <https://asombarta.com/gamochas-gi-tag-to-boost-rural-economy>

¹⁸ Arunima kalita, Trideep Borsaikia & Mridul Dutta, *Gamosa, the traditional handloom artefact of Assam: A case*

(Vaishnavite religious institutions).

Shaphee Lanphee of Manipur

Shaphee Lanphee is a traditional handwoven shawl of Manipur, primarily crafted by women of the Meitei community. In earlier times, it was often presented by the Meitei kings as a mark of honor and recognition to individuals who had rendered distinguished service or achieved notable recognition. As a result, the shawl has come to symbolizes dignity, respect, and social prestige. Its production is confined to particular geographical areas, namely Imphal West and Imphal East districts of Manipur. The weaving is done using traditional loin looms and frame looms. The unique feature of Shaphee Lanphee lies in its intricate motifs such as Iroichi, Nga, Numit, Phantup, Shagol, Shamu, Ta etc.¹⁹ these are created through detailed needlework without the use of a frame. Cotton yarn is commonly used, although silk yarn is also used in certain varieties. In modern times, the motifs of Shaphee Lanphee are incorporated into garments such as waistcoats and other apparel, including products meant for export. The GI registration ensures that this culturally significant textile is protected from imitation and remains linked to its specific place of origin and traditional craftsmanship.

Meghalaya Chubitchi (Rice Liquor)

Meghalaya Chubitchi is a traditional fermented rice-based alcoholic beverage prepared by the Garo community of Meghalaya. It holds cultural and religious significance and forms an important part of social customs and ceremonies. It is offered to the Sun God, Saljong, during the Wangala festival and is also used during marriages and funerals. The beverage is mainly prepared from a sticky red rice variety known as Menil (*Oryza sativa*), which contains high carbohydrate content and provides natural sweetness. In times of rice scarcity, millets are also used. In some cases, the rice is lightly roasted to produce a smoky flavour. The fermentation process begins with the preparation of a starter cake called “Wanti,” which is made from raw rice, chilli, certain medicinal plants, and a small amount of previously prepared starter culture. After preparation, the starter is mixed with boiled and cooled rice and stored in traditional earthen pots that are typically placed near fireplaces to keep them warm. The fermentation depends largely on the seasons, lasting about takes one week in summer and nearly one month in winter.²⁰ Although the beverage becomes ready after roughly a week of fermentation, it is

study, 24 *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge (IJTK)*, 73, 76 (2025), available at, <https://or.nispr.res.in/index.php/IJTK/article/view/1617>

¹⁹ Akshatha Karthik, World Intellectual Property Day Celebration, ipmetrix, May 12th, 2014, available at, <https://ipmetrix.com/world-intellectual-property-day-celebration/>

²⁰ B.K. Mishra, N. Balamurugan, S. Hati & B.Paul, ‘Chubitchi’- The native fermentation rice beverage of the Garos’ of west Garo hills, Meghalaya, *International Journal of Fermented Foods (IJFF)*, 68, 69-71 (2015), available

often allowed to remain in the earthen pot for some time to enhance its flavor and overall character.

Mizo Puanchei (Mizoram)

Mizo Puanchei is a traditional handwoven textile from Mizoram. It is a medium to heavy fabric woven on a traditional loin loom and is known for its bright colors and intricate motifs. These designs are incorporated during the weaving process using supplementary yarn techniques. The weaving requires considerable skill, as the colored yarns must be carefully arranged to maintain the precision of the patterns. Particular attention is also given to the woollen crosswise bands to ensure that the warp yarns do not appear against the darker stripes and that the fabric remains undistorted. Mizo Puanchei is commonly worn during festivals and important occasions and reflects the artistic skill and cultural identity of Mizo women. GI protection preserves its distinctive weaving style and traditional design patterns.

Naga Mircha of Nagaland

Naga Mircha, also known as Naga King Chilli or Raja Mircha, is recognised as one of the hottest chillies in the world. It is cultivated in the monsoon climatic conditions of Nagaland, with high humidity and annual rainfall ranging between 1200 mm and 4050 mm. The temperature varies from approximately 6°C in winter to 36°C in summer. The chilli changes colour from green to red upon ripening. It is known for its extreme pungency and distinct flavour. Traditionally, it is believed to have medicinal properties and is used in local remedies for common ailments. The unique soil composition and climatic conditions of Nagaland contribute significantly to the development of its intense heat and flavour. Replicating these conditions elsewhere may not produce the same characteristics. In 2008 Naga Mircha became the first product from Nagaland to receive a GI tag after a milestone that followed decades of traditional cultivation.²¹

Tripura Queen Pineapple (Tripura)

Tripura Queen Pineapple is known for its distinctive aroma, sweetness, bright golden yellow color, and comparatively low fiber content. It is cultivated mainly through natural and organic farming practices, resulting in minimal chemical residue. The fruit is harvested between mid-May and mid-July when the outer “eyes” of the pineapple turn yellow. The juice is bright yellow and highly aromatic. Its sweetness and fragrance distinguish it from pineapples grown in other

at, <https://ndpubliesher.in/admin/issues/IJFFV4N2g.pdf>

²¹ Setuolie Theunuo, A study on King Chilli (Naga Mircha) as a source of income from Seiyhama Village, *International Journal of Research GRANTHAALAYAH*, 8, 9 (2024), available at, <https://www.granthaalayahpublication.org/journals/granthaalayah/article/view/5893/5637>

parts of North East India. Tripura Queen Pineapple received GI tag on March 25th 2015.²²

Tripura Risa Textile

Risa is the traditional attire of Tripura and holds deep cultural importance for the people of the state. It is worn by both men and women. It forms a special part of women's clothing, which includes two main pieces i.e., the *Risa* and *Rikutu*. The Tripuri's Risa Textile is a beautifully hand-woven, embroidered fabric, generally about five feet long, worn around the upper body. It is crafted in bright and vibrant colours with intricate traditional designs such as *kwchak pali*, *kosom pali*, *takhumtwi*, and *Khamchang*.²³ Today, the Risa is more than just a traditional garment. It has become a strong symbol of the cultural identity of the Borok community. It is often presented to guests and dignitaries during ceremonies as a gesture of honor respect, and welcome. The motifs and patterns used in the "Tripura Risa Textile" are also unique identifies of different tribes within the state. Each tribe possesses its own distinctive patterns, weaving techniques, and colour combinations that reflect its cultural heritage and craftsmanship. Risa textiles are particularly recognized for their bold vertical and horizontal stripes, along with their rich multicoloured embroidery, which together highlight the artistic traditions and cultural identity of Tripura.²⁴

Sikkim Large Cardamom

Sikkim Large Cardamom is one of the most important commercial crops of the State. It is valued for its strong aroma and flavour and is widely used in cooking, spice preparation, and food flavouring. The finished product must retain its natural aroma without any smoky smell. It is commercially graded as Badadana (large capsules) and Chotadana (small capsules), and further classified based on whether the capsule tails are removed (Kainchi-cut) or not. The distinctive quality of Sikkim Large Cardamom is closely connected to the State's unique climatic conditions, soil characteristics, and the traditional methods of cultivation that have been practiced for generations. The Geographical Indication (GI) tag formally acknowledges these unique features and provides legal protection against the misuse of the product's name and identity.

²² Tanya Sharma, Geographical Indication (GI) Tags of Tripura, IP Press, Jan. 8, 2021, available at <https://www.theippress.com/2021/01/08/geographical-indication-gi-tags-of-tripura/>

²³ Dr. Ashish Mohan, Geographical Indications of Northeast States of India, Intellectual Property India, (2024).

²⁴ Vajiram, Risa Textile, Vajiram & Ravi institute for IAS examination, Mar. 5th, 2024, available at <https://vajiramdravi.com/current-affairs/risa-textile/>

IV. CASE STUDY

- **Tripura Jackfruit**

Jackfruit occupies an important place in the agricultural landscape of Tripura and is often referred to as the “poor man’s fruit” because of its widespread availability in household gardens and even in wastelands across the State. Despite its considerable commercial potential and regular exports to neighbouring regions such as Bangladesh and Assam, efforts to obtain a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for Tripura Jackfruit encountered several challenges. In December 2018, the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) submitted Application No. 638 with the aim of protecting the interests of local farmers and producers. However, during the examination process, the GI Registry pointed out a number of deficiencies, particularly relating to the lack of sufficient evidence establishing the fruit’s historical origin and its unique geographical association with the region. Subsequent check reports and consultative meetings held in 2019 led experts to conclude that the application did not adequately demonstrate the necessary grounds for granting GI status. A show-cause hearing was later conducted in February 2020, but the Registry remained unconvinced by the documents submitted, especially regarding the requirements under Section 9(f) of the GI Act. As a result, on 2 March 2020, the application for “Tripura Jackfruit” was formally refused. Nevertheless, the applicant was given a period of three months to file an appeal against the decision.²⁵

V. POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT THROUGH GI CERTIFICATION

One of the main advantages of obtaining a Geographical Indication (GI) tag is its potential to support economic development, particularly in rural areas. By recognizing products that are closely linked to a specific region, GI certification helps local producers gain greater control over their traditional resources and products. From a legal perspective, such recognition also enables these products to be positioned as premium goods in the market. This often allows them to command higher prices, which can create employment opportunities within local communities and help shift these products from small-scale local trade to more valuable national and international markets.

A. Statutory Safeguards for Regional Assets

A Geographical Indication (GI) registration serves as an important legal safeguard against the unauthorized use of traditional knowledge and regional products. By granting protection to a

²⁵ Prof. (Dr) V.K. Ahuja, Dr. Sankar Sundaram, Ms. Sharmistha Baruah & Ms. Nuzhat Nasreen Islam, Handbook on the Geographical Indications (with Special Focus on North-East Region), 230-235 DPIPT IPR Chair National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam, 2022.

particular name associated with a specific place, the law ensures that only genuine products originating from that region can be marketed under that name. In doing so, it helps prevent the circulation of counterfeit or imitation goods in the market and preserves the authenticity and reputation of products that are closely linked to their place of origin.

B. Conservation of Heritage and Identity

The Geographical Indication (GI) framework plays an important role in protecting and preserving cultural heritage through legal recognition. It acknowledges products whose reputation, quality, or unique characteristics are closely connected to the geographical region from which they originate. In a diverse country like India, this form of protection helps document and safeguard traditional knowledge and practices. By linking such products to their places of origin, the GI system ensures that these traditions are not lost in the process of modernization but continue to remain connected to the communities and regions where they first developed.

C. Strengthening the Agricultural Sector

Since agriculture continues to be the main source of livelihood in many regions, GI tags offer farmers an important legal mechanism to distinguish their products in the market. By recognizing the unique characteristics of crops often shaped by specific soil conditions, climate, or local cultivation practices the GI system allows farmers to present their produce as distinctive and region-specific. This recognition can help expand market opportunities and, through protected branding, may contribute to better prices and improved income for farming households.

D. Catalyzing Rural Business Initiatives

Protecting unique regional products through legal recognition can also encourage entrepreneurship at the local level. When a product receives legal protection, it gives producers and local entrepreneurs greater confidence to invest in activities such as value addition, processing, and specialized branding. This, in turn, can lead to the emergence of new small-scale enterprises and create a wider range of employment opportunities within rural communities.

E. Economic Security through Quality Guarantees

From the perspective of consumer protection, a Geographical Indication (GI) label functions as a form of legal assurance regarding the quality and authenticity of a product. It informs consumers that the product possesses certain characteristics and standards that are closely linked

to its place of origin. This assurance helps build trust between producers and consumers, as buyers tend to associate GI-tagged goods with authenticity and reliable quality. As a result, producers are often able to justify higher prices for such products, which can contribute to improved economic returns for the communities involved in their production.

VI. OBSTACLES AND IMPEDIMENT TO GI TAG REGISTRATION IN NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

Although the registration of Geographical Indications (GIs) offers important legal protection and economic opportunities for products from the North-Eastern region, a number of practical challenges continue to limit its full benefits for local communities. These challenges arise from several factors, including complex administrative procedures, financial and institutional constraints, difficulties in maintaining quality control standards, inadequate infrastructure, and limited awareness among producers about the advantages and processes involved in GI registration.

A. Administrative and Procedural Barriers

- **Procedural Complexity:**

Obtaining a Geographical Indication (GI) tag is often a lengthy and complex legal process. It usually requires the formation of a recognized producer association, the collection of detailed historical evidence about the product, and the completion of several stages of legal examination. For many small farmers and traditional producers, especially those working at the family level, dealing with such extensive legal documentation and procedures can be quite challenging and discouraging.

- **Fiscal Constraints:**

The cost involved in obtaining legal protection can often be quite high. Many small-scale producers and traditional artisans do not have sufficient financial resources to hire legal experts, conduct scientific or laboratory testing of their products, or cover the administrative expenses required for filing and maintaining GI registration. As a result, these financial constraints can make the process difficult for local creators to pursue.

- **Institutional Literacy:**

Another challenge lies in the lack of technical and legal expertise available to many local communities. In many cases, producers require guidance from experts who can help them navigate the legal procedures involved in GI registration. Such support is especially important when communities need to convert their traditionally preserved oral histories and knowledge

into the formal written documentation required by the Patent Office.

B. Bridging the Awareness Gap

- Intellectual Property Education:

Many traditional artisans are often unaware that their skills and production methods can be regarded as valuable forms of intellectual property. Because of this lack of awareness, they may not realize that legal mechanisms such as Geographical Indication (GI) protection can help safeguard their products from imitation or misuse by others. As a result, many producers do not feel encouraged to participate in or engage with the formal registration systems established by the government.

- The Tradition-Regulation Conflict:

In some cases, traditional farming practices do not always fit neatly within modern regulatory standards. Because of this, farmers may feel hesitant about formal registration, as they worry that becoming part of an official system could limit their independence or require them to modify the traditional methods that have long defined the uniqueness of their products.

- The Necessity of Collective Action:

Legal protection is granted to groups, not individuals. This requires different families or tribes to form cooperative legal entities. Building the necessary trust and shared governance to manage these associations can be difficult where communities are geographically or socially distant.

VII. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Geographical Indications (GIs) represent more than just a form of intellectual property protection; they serve as important tools for preserving cultural identity, safeguarding traditional knowledge, and promoting inclusive economic development. In North-East India, GI protection carries particular significance because of the region's rich cultural diversity, vibrant indigenous craftsmanship, and unique agro-climatic conditions that give rise to products with distinctive qualities.

The North Eastern States are home to an extraordinary variety of GI-eligible goods, including traditional textiles, handloom and handicrafts, spices, horticultural produce, fermented beverages, and different silk varieties. Products such as *Muga Silk*, *Gamosa*, *Monpa Handmade Paper*, *Naga Mircha*, *Tripura Queen Pineapple*, *Mizo Puanchei*, *Shaphee Lanphee*, and *Sikkim Large Cardamom* exemplify the deep link between geography, community knowledge, and product characteristics. These goods are not merely commercial items; they embody cultural heritage, community identity, and skills passed down through generations. At the same time,

the experience of GI registration in the North-East highlights several structural and administrative challenges. Complex legal procedures, financial limitations, limited institutional support, inadequate infrastructure, difficulties in standardization, and low awareness among producers continue to restrict the full potential of GI benefits. In many cases, securing registration has not automatically led to commercial success, indicating that legal recognition alone is insufficient. Effective enforcement, marketing support, capacity-building initiatives, and coordinated policy measures are essential to translate GI status into tangible economic gains.

For the North-East, GI protection should therefore be seen not only as a legal instrument but also as a strategy for regional development. A holistic approach that combines legal safeguards, infrastructure development, producer training, financial assistance, and market integration is necessary to ensure that GI registration contributes meaningfully to socio-economic progress. When effectively leveraged, Geographical Indications can act as a bridge between traditional knowledge and modern commerce, allowing the region's rich cultural heritage to generate sustainable prosperity for its rural communities.

Suggestion:

To safeguard the integrity of Geographical Indications and ensure that regional heritage and local producers are effectively supported, several legal and structural reforms are needed

- The current centralized GI registry, located in Chennai, presents a significant geographical barrier for applicants from distant regions. Establishing provincial branch offices would simplify the application process and make the legal benefits of GI registration more accessible to eligible communities across the country.
- A large part of the rural workforce remains unaware of the statutory protections and market advantages that GI status provides. Improving awareness and outreach programs is essential to ensure that producers can fully benefit from the opportunities offered by GI recognition. To bridge this gap state should take an initiative such as specialized seminar and vocational training to empower traditional craftsmen and small scale manufacturers with the necessary knowledge and technical skills.
- Small scale artisans and marginalized producers often lack the capital to defend their Intellectual Property. The government should implement fiscal measures, including export-related grants, to offset the high costs of international marketing and legal monitoring, thereby ensuring their economic validity in the global market place

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