



Potential of GIs is Waiting to be Tapped

(This editorial is based on the article “Potential of GIs is Waiting to be Tapped” which appears in BusinessLine on 6th December 2018.)

Recently, the Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry unveiled a **Tricolour logo that is common for all Geographical Indications (GI) with an impressive tagline “Invaluable Treasures of Incredible**

India”. //

Logos convey a specific message to the consumers about the product. An Agmark assures the consumer about the quality. **After 15 years of the GI Registry coming into being, now have a logo that is common for all registered GIs.**

GI indicates the ‘link’ between the place and the product, where the link could be the natural resources, climatic factor or human skills that render uniqueness to the product. **Apart from promoting tourism and rural development, some of the Sustainable Development Goals like empowering women, fostering sustainable communities and reducing poverty may be achieved through effective implementation of GI.**

What is GI tag?

- The **GI tag is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory.**
- It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods.
- For a product to get a GI tag, the goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. It is also essential that the product has a special quality or reputation.

- **The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 provides registration and also protection** of GI goods in India.
- This Act is administered by the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks, who is also the Registrar of Geographical Indications.
- **The Geographical Indications Registry for India is located in Chennai.**

How GI is protected in India?

- India, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999 which came into force with effect from 2003.
- A registered Geographical Indication prohibits a third party to use such Geographical indication by any means in the designations or presentations of goods indicating that such goods originate in a geographical area.

Difference between GI and other intellectual properties (IP)

- **GI is a collective intellectual property right and is thus owned by all the producers within the defined GI territory while the IPs like patent and trademark are owned by an individual or a business entity.**
- While the commercial use of patent could benefit an innovator or a particular firm, commercialization of GI would benefit all the producers in the GI territory.

Opportunities

- **India has rich diversity in a wide variety of handicrafts and agricultural products.**
Encouraging the producers to earn economic returns through authenticating the product with GI logo will help consumers to make an informed decision and help millions of livelihoods dependent on such products.
- **Promotion of common GI logo will create an edge for GI products over similar products.**
It will also bring more awareness among consumers in distant markets as well and result in increased demand for the GI products.
- **This will check distress migration, prevent artisans and farmers leaving their livelihoods and will arrest the erosion of traditional knowledge and practices.**
- It will also become a tool in the hand of exporters, which can be used to classify the produce and supplies at levels above foreign competitors.

Drawbacks

- **The potential of GI has not yet been realized in India** as the efforts have so far mainly focused only on the first step of filing the GI.
- **Filing a GI application is a huge task** that involves documenting historical evidence about the linkage of the product with the region and the application has to be filed by an association or group of persons.
- Hence, in comparison with the incidence of diversity in handicrafts or agricultural products from different parts of India only about [326 products](#) identified from different parts of the country have so far been registered with the GI registry.
- Post registration activities in terms of utilizing the GI certification as marketing/branding tool to benefit the producers have not been attempted in most of the registered products due to limited awareness about GI in the country among producers, consumers and policymakers.

Way Forward

- **A common logo for GI awareness, long advocated by researchers, is now in place. However, a mere unveiling of the logo will not serve any purpose for the producers of registered GIs in India. Enormous human efforts and financial resources are required to position the common GI logo so that it is used as a marketing tool.**

- The GI logo needs to be widely popularised so that consumers associate the GI logo with the uniqueness and authenticity of GI products. Increase in demand would encourage the producers to take efforts to sustain the uniqueness of the product and cater to the niche market that has demand for authentic products.
- **Along with these, measures should be taken to prevent the misuse of the logo.**
- The use of common GI logo has to be inclusive of all the stakeholders in the value chain and collective efforts in organizing them is the need of the hour.
- **India must learn from Thailand's experience, which has successfully showcased its GI logo.** Such efforts should start with all the State emporiums and handicraft hubs where products are on permanent display. There should be clear signboards with GI logos on the national highways or major bus/railway stations/airports about the GI Production centers in that region and

information about the sales points where the products may be procured.