

## Analysis of Recent Trends in Geographical Indication Registrations in India

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The handicraft industry plays a crucial and significant role in the country's economy. It provides substantial employment opportunities for artisans in rural and semi-urban areas and contributes significantly to the nation's foreign exchange earnings. Additionally, it plays a vital role in preserving our diverse cultural heritage. In India, Geographical Indication (GI) has emerged as an important aspect of intellectual property rights. GI acts as a powerful tool for preserving and recognizing the commercial value of unique products and their associated traditional knowledge. While GI certification has the potential to rejuvenate the handicraft sector, it is essential to recognize that viewing it solely as an intellectual property element could pose risks to the industry's interests. This study provides an overview of the current status of registered GIs in India and highlights the total registration of GIs in the handicraft industry.

**Keywords:** Geographical Indication, Handicraft Industry, TRIPS Agreement, WTO, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection), GI Certification

India is a country with a rich cultural heritage, history, and traditions and is one of the world's largest producers and suppliers of handicrafts. Indian traditional art is renowned for its distinctive features, grandeur, elegance, and diverse styles. Its charm lies in its rarity and the mythical value it embodies. As per the Part II of the TRIPS Agreement, Geographical Indication is defined as "*An indication which identifies a good as originating in the territory of a member, or a regional locality in that territory, where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographical origin*". Geographical Indications (GIs) have become a crucial tool for protecting the quality, reputation, and other characteristics of goods tied to their geographical origin. They effectively rationalize economic control, empower traditional knowledge holders, and promote indigenous social development.<sup>1</sup> A GI refers to a specific place or region, indicating that a product possesses unique qualities, reputation, or other distinctive attributes associated with that location. A GI informs customers that a product possesses unique qualities due to its geographic origin, signifying quality rather than merely indicating the source, unlike a "Made in" tag.<sup>2</sup> The protection of GIs has been one of the most contentious intellectual property rights (IPRs) issues within the framework of

the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).<sup>3</sup> This type of intellectual property can serve as a legal instrument to institutionalize the link between a product's origin and its reputation, thereby generating value for all involved parties.<sup>4</sup> GIs help consumers distinguish products from specific regions and protect them from being misled by imitations. The primary objective is to safeguard GIs, granting businesses in the designated areas the right to prevent others from using the indication. Specific logos are used to differentiate GI products from non-GI products.<sup>5</sup>

While TRIPS is recognized as the first multilateral agreement to explicitly define "Geographical Indication," it is not the initial agreement addressing this type of intellectual property right. Other significant agreements include the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property of 1883, the Madrid Agreement Concerning the International Registration of Marks of 1891, and the Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin and their International Registration of 1958. Although these agreements discuss "Indication of Source" or "Appellation of Origin" (APO), the term "Geographical Indication" is not explicitly specified in them.

Figure 1 below illustrates the distinctions among these three concepts. "Indication of the source" is the broadest term, simply requiring that the product originates from a specific region without implying any

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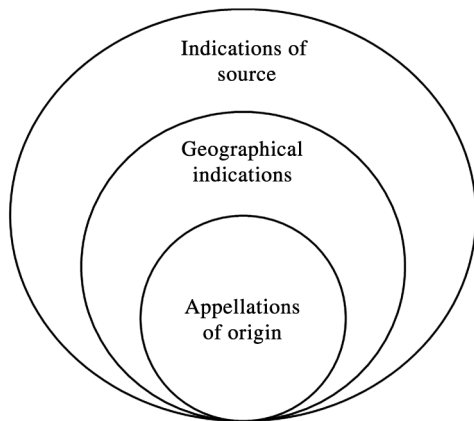


Fig. 1 — Relationship between indication of source, geographical indication, and appellation of origin<sup>6</sup>

connection to reputation or quality. This distinguishes it from the other two concepts. For a product with a "geographical indication" (GI) or an "appellation of origin," its quality characteristics must primarily arise from that specific location. Thus, it can be inferred that all appellations of origin are geographical indications, and all geographical indications are indications of the source. However, the concept of an appellation of origin is more restrictive than the GI concept. Therefore, while all appellations of origin and geographical indications are indications of the source, they are not identical.

### Significance of Geographical Indication

A GI is a collective property rather than a private one, allowing an association representing a group of individuals to register it in nearly any country. The benefits of GI registration are public and shared among the product producers, not confined to a private monopoly. Legal protection and effective administration of GIs significantly aid legitimate right holders in preventing free-riding and counterfeiting. By attributing a product or service with a distinctive market image based on its geographic origin, GIs enhance the value and trustworthiness of the product.<sup>7,8</sup> Producers aim to improve the quality of regional specialty products, ensure regional competitiveness, reinforce this competitiveness through producer protection, and provide buyers with reliable product information by registering and protecting GIs for exceptional domestically produced products.<sup>9,10</sup> For artisanal products, GI protection and marketing create a significant market distinction, enabling them to compete effectively with industrial products. Additionally, GIs help preserve traditional knowledge

(know-how) of items produced in rural regions and promote biodiversity by encouraging the sustainable use of natural raw resources.<sup>11</sup>

When consumers recognize the Geographical Indications (GIs) of products, they can identify and purchase high-quality goods from local markets.<sup>12,13</sup> GI protection offers quality assurance, helping consumers overcome the problem of asymmetric information. Products granted GI protection display the GI logo when promoted. Without this logo, consumers might incur significant transaction costs seeking quality assurance. GI symbols serve as indicators of quality and origin for consumers.<sup>14,15</sup> Producers, as collective and cultural asset owners, benefit from a strong reputation, a long-established brand name, and control over a specific market.<sup>16</sup> To preserve the historical significance and prevent misuse of the product, it is essential to maintain rich resources through Geographical Indications.<sup>17</sup> Geographical Indications (GIs) are increasingly recognized as valuable tools for establishing product identity and enhancing economic efficiency, enabling authorized producers to supply the market with appropriate goods. GIs facilitate the differentiation of products based on their unique characteristics, thereby aiding marketing efforts.<sup>18,19</sup> They serve as a means of product distinctiveness, quality assurance, source verification, geographical advertising, rural development, and the preservation of traditional knowledge. By distinguishing products through GIs, producers of high-quality goods are incentivized to remain in the market, as all goods typically command the same price.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, GI regulation ensures consistency in the qualities of the relevant commodities by implementing systems that guarantee the product consistently exhibits the characteristics derived from its local origin and processing. A regional GI strategy can unite large and small producers into an organization that leverages collective resources to agree on parameters, standards, and sometimes even marketing strategies.<sup>21,22</sup>

GI labeling ensures a product's authenticity by providing visible identification markers, such as a trademark, making it easier to recognize genuine products. This serves as an extrinsic cue that encourages customer purchases.<sup>23,24</sup> The GI certification mark assures buyers that a product meets their expectations by guaranteeing its cultural and traditional significance, thereby boosting customer confidence in their purchase. Additionally, the GI tag ensures that goods are produced according to

government regulations, allowing local firms to profit from authentic products.<sup>25</sup> The successful implementation of the Geographical Indications (GI) tag has enabled consumers to recognize GI-tagged products as premium, protected the producer's commercial and legal rights, and ensured economic prosperity for all stakeholders.<sup>26</sup> Similar to other types of IP protection, GIs address market inefficiencies, including information asymmetry. GIs provide potential consumers with information about a product's source and quality, reduce consumer search costs, and enhance market functionality.<sup>27</sup> GIs not only increase customer trust but also foster trust among producers by establishing a system that includes all participants in the value chain and acknowledges their cooperative efforts in the transfer of knowledge from generation to generation.<sup>28,29</sup>

The recent years have witnessed a notable increase in the registration of GIs in India, driven by a combination of factors such as heightened awareness, government initiatives, and the growing appreciation for indigenous products in both domestic and international markets. This surge is indicative of a broader trend where stakeholders are increasingly recognizing the value of GIs in fostering economic growth, especially in rural areas, and protecting the intellectual property associated with traditional knowledge and practices. This research paper seeks to analyze the recent trends in GI registrations in India, examining the patterns of this growth. It will explore the regional distribution of GI registrations; the types of products being registered. By doing so, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how GIs are evolving in the Indian context and their implications for the stakeholders involved. Understanding these trends is crucial for policymakers, industry participants, and researchers, as it can inform strategies to further harness the potential of GIs. Moreover, this analysis will contribute to the broader discourse on intellectual property rights and their role in sustainable development. Through a detailed examination of recent GI registrations, this study will shed light on the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage, economic development, and legal frameworks in India.

### Total Geographical Indications in India

In 1999, India introduced the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, which came into effect on September 15, 2003,

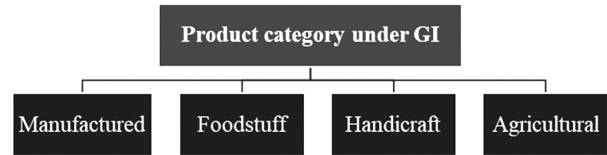


Fig. 2 — Classification of Products under GI  
Source: GI registry

alongside the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Rules of 2002. These legislative measures were adopted to meet India's obligations under TRIPS. Registrations under this act are valid for ten years and can be renewed. The administration and enforcement of the GI Act fall under the purview of the Registrar of Geographical Indications, operating under the jurisdiction of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks. Act No. 48 of 1999 aims to streamline the registration process and strengthen the protection of geographical indications associated with goods. India boasts a rich cultural heritage with numerous arts, crafts, and traditions developed over centuries. Despite recognizing the potential for many Indian products to receive legal protection as Geographical Indications, concerted efforts to leverage this potential did not commence until the enactment of the GI Act. Geographical Indications, being integral to India's cultural and intellectual heritage, must be preserved and promoted. These invaluable treasures, steeped in Indian traditions, deserve to be shared worldwide.

Geographical Indications are classified into four categories: manufactured, foodstuff/natural, handicraft, and agricultural (as shown in Fig. 2).

The registration process for Geographical Indication (GI) products in India began in 2003, with the initial registration featuring three goods. The first agricultural product to be registered was Darjeeling Tea, followed by Aranmula Kannadi, a Kerala handicraft, and Ikat from Pochampalli, Andhra Pradesh. As of March 2024, a total of 643 registrations have been recorded. Among these, 343 products (53%) belong to the handicraft category, followed by 200 products (31%) in agriculture, 50 products (8%) in manufactured goods, and 50 products (8%) in foodstuffs, as depicted in Table 1 and Fig. 3. According to the GI registry, in India, the handicraft category accounts for more than 50% of all registrations made to date. The increasing number of registrations related to handicraft products indicates a growing awareness among artisans.

The surge in the number of Geographical Indication (GI) registrations in India can be attributed to several

factors. Firstly, heightened awareness among producers, government initiatives, and increased access to information have played a crucial role in encouraging stakeholders to seek GI protection for

their products. This awareness has been further fueled by the growing appreciation for indigenous products in both domestic and international markets, leading producers to recognize the value of GI registrations as a means to distinguish their goods and capitalize on their unique characteristics. Additionally, the implementation of legislative measures such as the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999 and its accompanying rules has provided a structured framework for the registration and protection of GIs, thereby facilitating the registration process for producers. Furthermore, the economic benefits associated with GI registrations, such as enhanced marketability, premium pricing, and protection against counterfeiting, have incentivized producers to pursue GI protection for their products. Overall, a combination of awareness-building efforts, supportive government policies, and economic incentives has contributed to the significant rise in GI registrations in India.

Table 1 — Number of GIs Registered in India

Category	No. of Tags	Percentage
Handicraft	343	53%
Agricultural	200	31%
Manufactured	50	8%
Foodstuff & Natural	50	8%
Total	643	

Source: GI registry

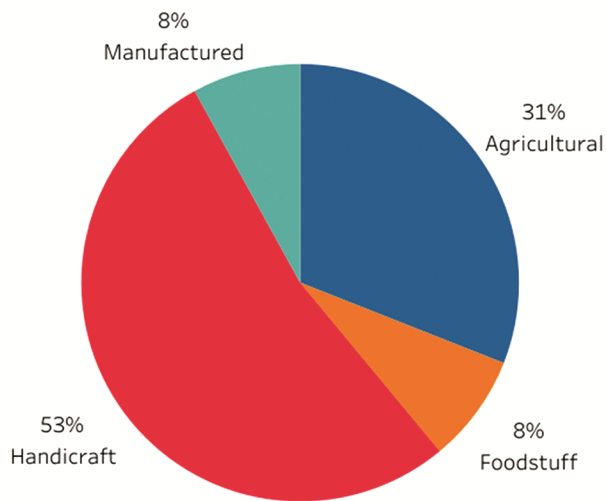


Fig. 3 — GI Registration Product Share in %

Source: GI Registry

As illustrated in Fig. 4, the inaugural year from April 2004 to March 2005 witnessed only three goods being registered. However, registrations gradually increased in subsequent years. The apex of GI registrations was reached from April 2023 to March 2024, with a remarkable total of 168 products registered. This included 91 handicraft products, 48 agricultural products, 21 foodstuff products, and 8 products in the manufactured category. The second-highest registration, totaling 55 items, occurred from April 2022 to March 2023. Additionally, foreign

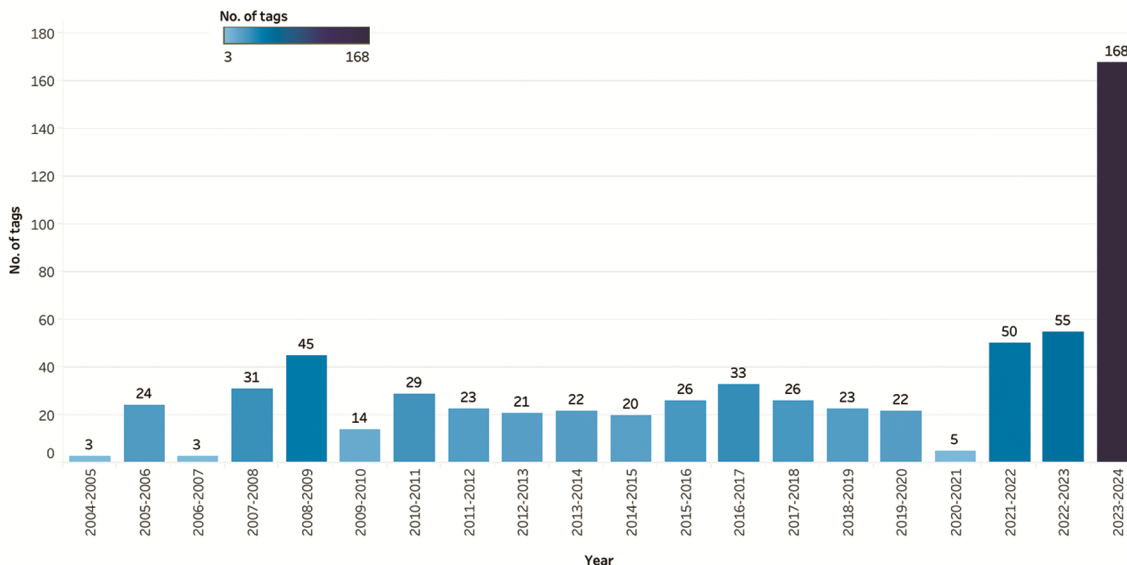


Fig. 4 — Year-wise Distribution of GI Registration in India

Source: GI Registry

nations also participate in registering their goods in India. As of March 2023, out of the 643 GI-registered goods, 36 originate from foreign countries. Notably, Peru was the first country to register its Pisco brandy product under manufactured goods from April 2009 to March 2010. The highest number of foreign items, totaling 13, were registered between April 2021 and March 2022, with Italy leading with 9 registrations during that period. Uttar Pradesh leads with the highest number of registrations, totaling 74 items. The top five states with the most Geographical Indications are Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala.

The GI Registry receives applications for GI registration annually, but not all progress to the next stage. Table 2 below illustrates the status of GI applications obtained. Out of a total of 1250 applications received by the registry to date, only 643 have been granted GI status, while the fate of the remaining 497 applications is still under review. Additionally, 53 applications have been denied status, 29 applications have been withdrawn by the applicants, and 28 applications have been abandoned. Figure 5 portrays the percentage distribution of GI status, revealing that the majority of applications, constituting 46%, are pending, while 45% have been successfully registered. The recent surge in applications underscores the increasing awareness among Indian producers regarding the advantages of obtaining GI registration. However, there still exist unidentified products, warranting further government efforts to address this gap comprehensively.

#### Handicraft Industry of India

India is renowned for its rich cultural traditions and heritage, serving as a powerhouse for handicrafts. The term "Handicrafts" encompasses a diverse array of products crafted exclusively by hand without the use of machinery.<sup>30</sup> India's cultural diversity gives rise to a wide range of exceptional art and artisan works. With the dismantling of the license raj during economic reforms, India opened its markets to foreign businesses, facilitating global economic investment and allowing developed countries to penetrate and dominate emerging third-world economies.<sup>31</sup> Handicrafts represent unique cultural aspects, produced using locally available resources and skills. India's handicraft industry is characterized by its unorganized nature, widespread dispersion, and heavy reliance on labor. It stands as the second-largest employer after agriculture,

Table 2 — GI Application Status

GI Status	No. of Applications
Pending	497
Registered	643
Refused	53
Withdrawn	29
Abandoned	28
Total	1250

Source: GI Registry

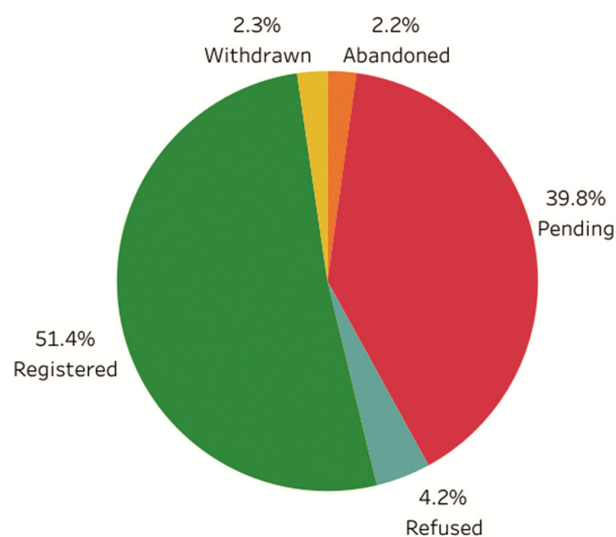


Fig. 5 — GI Application Status in %

Source: GI Registry

significantly contributing to the export economy and playing a crucial role in economic growth. Handicrafts, are products crafted entirely by hand or hand tools by skilled artisans.<sup>32</sup>

The Office of the Development Commissioner serves as the designated organization of the Government of India for the handicrafts sector. This office executes various programs aimed at promoting and developing the handicrafts industry, including the "National Handicraft Development Programme (NHDP)" and the "Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS)." India boasts a diverse range of handicrafts, encompassing Bamboo, Bell Metal, Bone and Horn, Brass, Clay or Pottery, Jute, Paper, Rock, Shell, Weaving or Embroidery, Wood, Glass, Lace or Zari, Leather, Marble, and more. According to the handicrafts census conducted during the 11th plan, there are approximately 68.86 lakh artisans, with women comprising 56.13 percent and men 43.87 percent, as indicated in Table 3. Despite this, women weavers are not actively engaged in

production; rather, they tend to participate in allied activities and often receive inadequate compensation for their work.<sup>33</sup>

Handicrafts present significant potential for providing employment opportunities to millions of artisans across the country. This sector holds economic significance due to its substantial employment potential, low capital investment requirements, high value addition rates, and significant export prospects, contributing to foreign exchange earnings for the nation. Characterized by its labor-intensive nature, the handicrafts industry is widespread across urban and rural areas throughout the country. Many artisans possess innate artistic skills that can be honed into a profession, often engaging in specific craftwork as a part-time occupation. India has long been a prominent exporter of handicrafts, with demand escalating as the nation's travel and tourism sector expands. During the 18th and 19th centuries, neighboring countries along the trade routes historically esteemed Indian crafts

above their own art, religion, or philosophy, owing to the expertise of India's skilled artisans.<sup>34,35</sup>

Substantial enhancements in the accessibility of handicraft products across various online platforms are bolstering the expansion of the Indian market. In India, there are 744 handicraft clusters employing nearly 2,12,000 artisans and producing over 35,000 items. Major clusters are found in cities like Surat, Bareilly, Varanasi, Agra, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Chennai, Mumbai, Kanpur, Farrukhabad, Saharanpur, Jaipur, among others.<sup>36</sup> Tourists significantly contribute to the economy through their expenditure on souvenirs and various handmade items, thereby providing regional craftsmen and artisans with opportunities to create and promote valuable handicrafts.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the growing demand from the gifting sector and an increasing preference for handmade decor items in residences, commercial establishments, and dining venues are propelling market expansion.<sup>38</sup> The industry is economically viable with minimal capital investment, a high value addition ratio, and considerable export potential. Indian handicrafts are not merely products; they represent artistic expressions that embody beauty, dignity, form, and style.<sup>39</sup> The diverse ingredients used in handcrafted products endow them with authentic uniqueness.<sup>40</sup> The categories of Indian handicrafts are listed in the following Fig. 6.

Table 3 — Total no. of artisans

Gender	No. of Artisans
Male	30.25 Lakhs
Female	38.61 Lakhs
Total	68.86 Lakhs

Source: Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India



Fig. 6 — Classification of Handicraft Products<sup>36</sup>

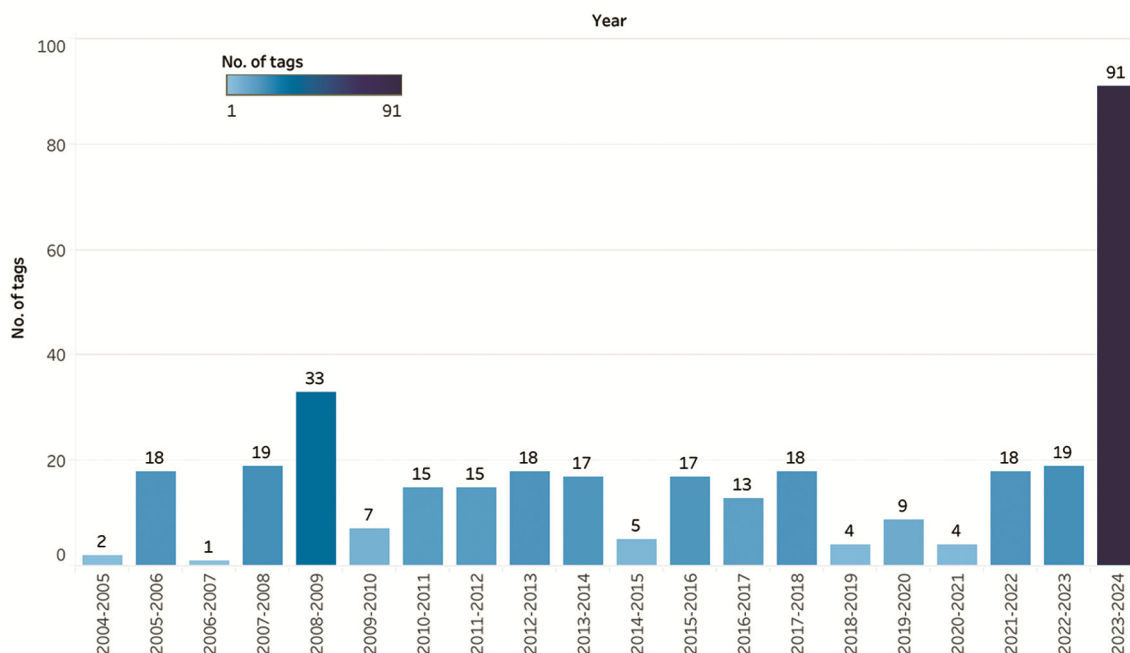


Fig. 7 — Year-wise Distribution of GI Registration under the Handicraft Category

Source: GI Registry

Exploration of the potential within the handicraft industry remains ongoing. A primary factor hindering Indian handicrafts from capturing a larger share of the global market is the neglect of "SEARCH & EXPLORATION OF HIDDEN CRAFTS OF INDIA," a topic that has largely been overlooked by the Indian handicraft business. However, the export of handmade goods is experiencing growth within the worldwide market for lifestyle products, driven by evolving customer preferences and trends across diverse regions.<sup>41</sup> In light of this, it is imperative for the Indian Handicraft Industry to prioritize the development of designs, patterns, product innovation, and

essential enhancements in production facilities. This encompasses diversifying materials, production techniques, and associated expertise to secure a leading position in the increasingly competitive global market. The transformation of the handicraft sector into a significant contributor to the country's foreign exchange earnings can be monitored through comprehensive data on India's exports.<sup>42</sup> The export performance of the Indian handicraft industry holds considerable significance due to its low capital investment, high value addition, and potential for export and foreign exchange gains. Noteworthy contributors to India's export of handicraft items include prominent states such as Uttar Pradesh,

Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan in the northwestern region, and Gujarat along the coast.

#### *Status of Geographical Indications of the Handicraft Industry in India*

The potential for handicrafts is immense, as they are crucial for sustaining millions of artisans in the country and supporting the next generation. GIs are periodically granted to the handicraft sector, with a significant surge in registered items following the registration of a few select products. As illustrated in Fig. 7, the registration process began in 2004 with the official recognition of Aranmula Kannadi from Kerala and Pochampalli Ikat from Telangana. Since then, registrations have steadily increased, reaching a peak of 91 registrations during the 2023-2024 period. Currently, 343 out of the 643 GI-registered products are handicrafts, accounting for over 50% of all registered items. This rise in handicraft-related registrations reflects a growing awareness among producers about the importance of GIs. While this trend is encouraging, significant stakeholder engagement will be necessary to identify and register items to prevent unauthorized usage.

The use of "Geographical Indications" (GIs) to protect distinctive handmade items from specific regions is particularly effective in preventing the misuse and exploitation of regional brand names. GIs provide these products with a "unified branding."

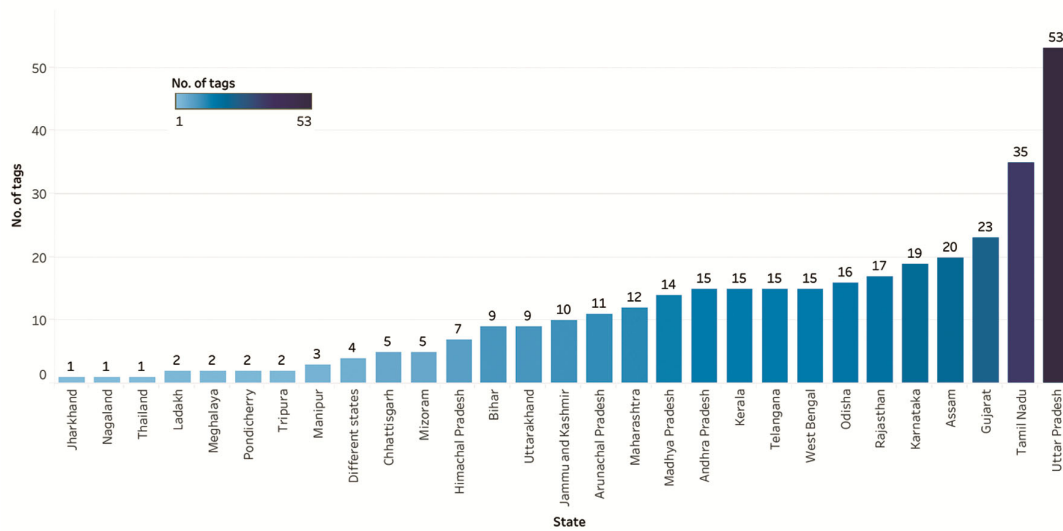


Fig. 8 — State-wise Distribution of GI Registration under the Handicraft Category  
Source: GI Registry

Beyond branding and marketing, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) protection offers numerous benefits to artisans and craft producers, such as enhancing product value, safeguarding against piracy, and improving the socioeconomic status of artisans through increased sales and profitability. The globalization of the Indian handicraft industry has had both positive and negative impacts. Indian handicraft employment and exports have reached commendable heights. India's cultural legacy is unique and rich, with every era, kingdom, and empire leaving its mark on the crafts of that period. Indian artisans have meticulously developed various intricate and attractive motifs in handcrafted goods. Additionally, Indian handicrafts generate employment with minimal investment (Din, 2014).

Figure 8 illustrates the registration of GI goods by state. A total of twenty-nine states in India and one foreign nation have registered GI products. Uttar Pradesh leads with 53 handcrafted goods, followed by Tamil Nadu with 35 items, and Gujarat with 23 items. Karnataka and Rajasthan are also making significant progress, with 19 and 17 registrations respectively. Odisha has secured 16 registrations. West Bengal, Telangana, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh each have 15 registrations. Additionally, Thailand's Lamphun Brocade Thai Silk has been protected. In contrast, Tripura, Pondicherry, Meghalaya, and Ladakh each have only two registrations. Jharkhand and Nagaland, which have recently started the registration process, have registered just one product each.

## Conclusion

The rising trend in Geographical Indications (GI) registrations in India is a promising development with significant potential for economic and cultural benefits. Sustained efforts to promote and protect GIs, along with addressing current challenges, will be essential to maximizing these benefits and ensuring the preservation and celebration of India's diverse heritage. Data indicates a substantial increase in GI registrations over the past decade, reflecting heightened awareness and proactive measures by regional and national bodies to safeguard and market local products. This rise suggests that producers recognize the value of GIs in enhancing product reputation, ensuring quality, and gaining competitive market advantages. The distribution of GI registrations reveals a concentration in certain regions, especially those with rich cultural heritages and diverse agricultural products. States like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra lead in the number of registrations, highlighting the influence of regional characteristics and unique resources. This regional disparity underscores the need for balanced support and awareness campaigns in less represented areas to ensure equitable economic benefits across the nation. Moreover, the types of products receiving GI status are predominantly agricultural and handicrafts, emphasizing the importance of traditional knowledge and skills in these sectors. However, there is a growing diversification, with an increasing number of processed foods, textiles, and manufactured goods receiving GI tags, reflecting the expanding scope and recognition of various traditional practices and innovations. To fully

harness the benefits of GIs, it is crucial to continue promoting and protecting these indications while addressing existing challenges. Such efforts will ensure that India's diverse heritage is not only preserved but also celebrated and leveraged for economic growth, thereby enriching the cultural tapestry and economic landscape of the nation.

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