Journal of Intellectual Property Rights
Vol 31, November 2026, pp. 964-977
DOI: 10.56042/jipr.v31i6.21489

Cultural Heritage and Economic Identity: An Exploration of Geographical Indications in West Bengal

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Received: 10th July 2025; revised: 18th September 2025

The paper explores the evolving landscape of Geographical Indications (GIs) in West Bengal, India, with a focus on their cultural, economic, and legal dimensions. Using a mixed-method approach, it analyzes registered, pending, withdrawn, and rejected GI applications from the state based on data obtained from the GI Registry as of May 2025. The study reveals that West Bengal, home to India's first GI—Darjeeling Tea—has emerged as a significant contributor to India's GI ecosystem, particularly in handicrafts and agricultural products. It highlights the role of GIs in preserving intangible cultural heritage, supporting rural livelihoods, and promoting regional identity. The paper identifies key administrative, legal, and policy challenges that inhibit the full potential of GIs. The study advocates for a more inclusive, awareness-driven, and institutionally supported GI framework to ensure equitable recognition and sustainable development for producer communities in West Bengal.

Keywords: Geographical Indication, Cultural Heritage, GI Registry, GI Act, GI Tourism

A Geographical Indication (GI) is a distinctive sign used to identify products that originate from a particular region; where a given quality, reputation, or other essential characteristics of the product are inherently linked to their geographical origin.[1–3] More than a mere legal construct, a GI is a cultural marker that encapsulates the historical memory, collective know-how, and socio-economic identity of a community.[4] In a country as geographically and culturally diverse as India, GIs serve as an important vehicle for preserving traditional knowledge systems, safeguarding rural livelihoods, and fostering inclusive and sustainable development.[5] Globally, the concept of GI protection gained importance through the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO).[6] Articles 22 and 23 of the TRIPS Agreement establish the framework for defining, recognizing, and protecting GIs, mandating all member states to develop domestic legislation that ensures fair use and prevents misappropriation of region-specific products.[7] The TRIPS framework recognizes the unique contribution of GIs to promote fair trade, rural development, and cultural diversity in a globalized economy.

In compliance with its TRIPS obligations, India enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which came into effect on 15th September 2003. This legislation enables producers and associations to register region-specific goods, thereby granting them legal protection against unauthorized use, imitation, or dilution.[1] GI registration enhances product credibility, promotes market differentiation, and contributes to rural economic empowerment. Notably, it also acts as a tool of soft power in global trade diplomacy, enabling India to project its cultural assets on the international stage.

As of now, India has registered over 697 GI products across diverse domains such as Agricultural, natural, manufactured, handicrafts and foodstuffs.[8] Among these, 39 are foreign applications and 658 are domestic.[9] These registrations represent an intricate tapestry of India's cultural geography—each product telling a story of human ingenuity, natural bounty, and intergenerational knowledge. Following the adoption of the National IPR Policy in 2016, the Indian government has launched targeted initiatives to increase public awareness, support producer communities, and create better market linkages for GI-tagged goods both domestically and internationally.

Against this national backdrop, the state of West Bengal emerges as a significant contributor to India's GI landscape. Strategically located in eastern India, West Bengal spans from the Himalayan foothills in

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the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south, encompassing an area of approximately 88,752 square kilometres. Its varied topography—ranging from the Darjeeling hills to the Gangetic plains and the Sundarbans delta—has given rise to a rich repository of cultural traditions and region-specific products. Rivers such as the Ganges, Damodar, Teesta, and Mayurakshi nourish the land, influencing both its agro-ecological zones and artisanal practices.[10]West Bengal has secured GI registrations for a diverse range of products including Darjeeling Tea, BanglarRasogolla, Malda Mango, NakshiKantha, and Bankura Terracotta, each emblematic of the region's historical depth and creative expression.[8] These products have not only garnered national recognition but have also carved out a space in global markets, reinforcing the state's cultural diplomacy and economic distinctiveness.

The paper seeks to examine the role of GIs in preserving West Bengal's intangible cultural heritage while simultaneously contributing to local development and global visibility. We analyze the existing GI landscape in the state through legal, economic, and socio-cultural lenses to understand how GI protection can act as a catalyst for rural innovation, gender equity, and sustainable livelihoods.This study argues that a GI is not merely a statutory designation; it is a living heritage, embodying the identity, resilience, and aspirations of local communities. By capturing the interplay between place, people, and production, GIs offer a promising pathway to reconcile tradition with market dynamics in a rapidly changing global economy.

The study adopts a mixed-methods research framework, combining both quantitative data analysis and qualitative interpretive techniques to examine the GI landscape of West Bengal. The primary data were sourced from the official GI Registry of India, with all records downloaded and reviewed as of 21 May 2025. The dataset includes information on registered, pending, abandoned, withdrawn applications associated with West Bengal.Quantitatively, the study involves a manual examination of the official GI Registry maintained by the Geographical Indications Registry, Chennai. As the registry does not provide state-wise filtering or a searchable database, data collection required reviewing static PDF lists available under categories including 'Registered,' 'Pending,' 'Abandoned,' and 'Withdrawn' applications. Each entry had to be individually opened using the 'View' option to determine the product's origin and identify those pertaining to West Bengal.Qualitatively, the study delves into the cultural significance and economic relevance of GI registrations.

Discussion

Analysis of GIs from West Bengal

West Bengal holds a strategically significant and pioneering position in India's GI landscape. The state is home to Darjeeling Tea, the first product in India to receive a GI tag, officially registered in 2004-05 under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. Often referred to as the "Champagne of Teas," Darjeeling Tea is celebrated for its delicate flavor and distinctive aroma. Its attributes are closely tied to the region's unique climate and terrain. Its registration marked a historic milestone in India's GI movement, setting the precedent for legal protection of traditional and region-specific products.[11,12]

Building on this foundation, West Bengal has actively pursued GI recognition across a broad spectrum of domains, including agricultural, handicrafts, food stuffs, etc. The state's rich topographical and cultural diversity is reflected in the variety of its GI-tagged goods—ranging from rural women's embroidery in NakshiKantha to the mangoes of Malda, from the Chhau masks of Purulia to the Bankura Terracotta figurines. These products not only symbolize the region's artisanal excellence and traditional knowledge but also function as economic assets for local communities. By leveraging the GI Act, West Bengal has demonstrated how legal recognition can safeguard cultural heritage, provide economic security to producers, and enhance global market access.

As of 21 May 2025, the state has submitted a total of 63 GI applications. Of these, 34 products have been successfully registered, while 3 applications have been refused, 5 withdrawn, 1 abandoned, and 22 remains pending (see Fig. 1).

Registered GIs

At present, a total of 34 products from West Bengal have received GI tags (Table 1). These products are not only reflections of the state's traditional occupations and cultural heritage but also hold significant economic value.[12]

An analysis of the registered products shows that the handicraft sector accounts for the highest share, with 16 items, representing 47.06% of the total GI-

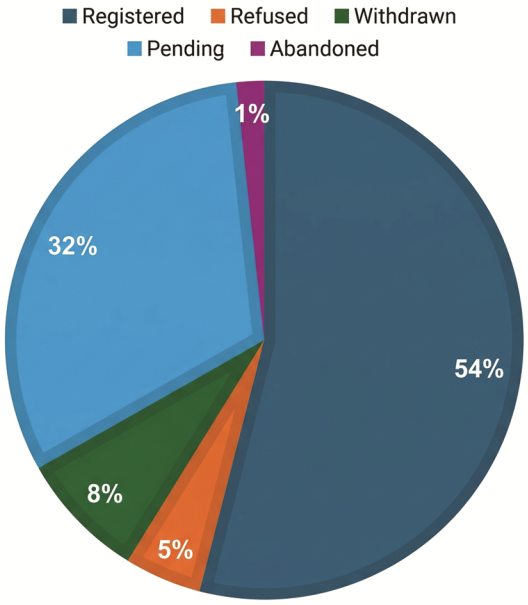


Fig. 1 — Current status of GIs from West Bengal

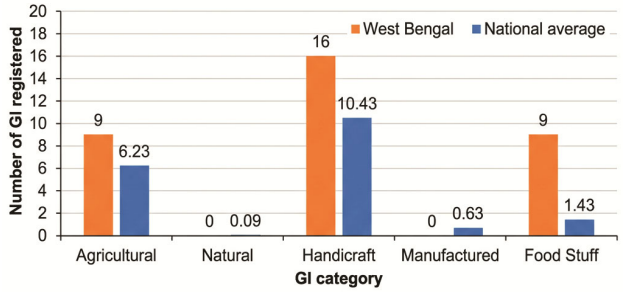


Fig. 2 — Category of registered GIsfrom West Bengal till now

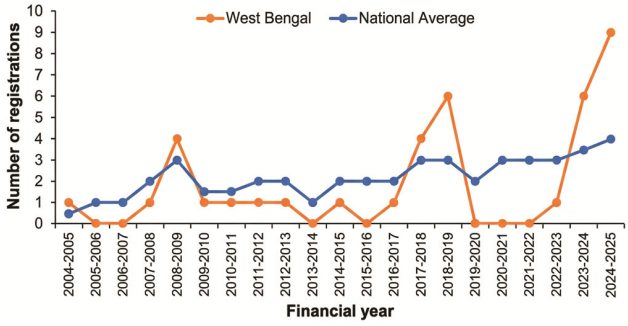


Fig. 3 — No. of GI registrations with year

tagged products from the state. This is followed by the agricultural and food product categories, each contributing 9 items, which is 26.47% of the total in each case. This data clearly highlights the dominance of the handicraft sector in West Bengal's GI registration landscape, underlining the strategic importance of artisanal skills and rural craftsmanship in the state's economy. Figure 2 shows the comparison of registered GI categories in West Bengal with the National average. This data has been collected from the recent press release by Press Information Bureau of India[9]. West Bengal records a higher number of registered GIs than the National average in agriculture, handicrafts, and foodstuffs. Specifically, West Bengal has 9 registered foodstuffs, far above the Nationalaverage of 1.43. Among these 9 foodstuffs, 8 are sweets of Bengal (See Table 1 for details).

Figure 3 shows the temporal trend of GI registrations in West Bengal relative to the national average.

District Level Disparity and Institutional Gaps

The GI landscape in West Bengal is spatially uneven. Among the 23 districts of West Bengal, the representation of products with GI tags has not been uniform. Table 1A shows the district-wise mapping of registered GIs from West Bengal.

Districts like Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Hooghly, and Malda have secured a comparatively higher number of GI tags, and may be considered relatively "GI rich,".On the other hand, no application has been filed from the two newly formed districts—Jhargram and Alipurduar. This might be due to:

(i) Limited awareness: Many weavers, artisans, and small producers remain unfamiliar with the legal and market advantages of GI protection.

(ii) Legal/technical resource gaps: Robust GI applications require documented product specifications, process descriptions, historical evidence, and mapped geographical boundaries. These are difficult to complete without expert guidance.

(iii) Absence of district level facilitation structures: Few districts maintain dedicated GI support cells to coordinate documentation, training, aggregation of producer evidence, and follow up with the Registry. Producer communities therefore fall behind procedurally.

Addressing these gaps through active administrative involvement and community-based initiatives is essential to ensure more inclusive and balanced GI representation across the state. If local stakeholders identify a candidate product, these districts could:

(i) Form a producers' association or consortium to document its geographical origin, method of production, and reputation.

(ii) Engage the West Bengal State Science & Technology Department or Patent Information Centre to assist with filing.

Table 1 — GI Tag Registration of West Bengal

S.No	App. No.	Geographical Indications	Goods (As per Sec 2 (f) of GI Act 1999)	Year of Regis.	District	Application Name & Applicant Address
1	1 & 2	Darjeeling Tea (word & logo)	Agricultural	2004	Darjeeling	Tea Board 14, B.T.M. Sarani (Brabourne Road), P.O.Box No.2172, Kolkatta - 700 001, India.
2	52	Nakshi Kantha	Handicraft	2007	Birbhum	KAARU – KUL FOUNDATION, F-463, (Khasra No.316), Gali No.2, Lado Sarai, New Delhi - 110 030, INDIA
3	104	Santiniketan Leather Goods	Handicraft	2008	Birbhum	Santiniketani Artistic Leather Goods Manufacturer's Welfare Association, Village-Surul, Post Office - Sriniketan (Santiniketan), District - Birbhum, West Bengal - 731 236.
4	111	Malda Laxman Bhog Mango	Agricultural	2008	Malda	Patent Information Centre, West Bengal State Council of Science & Technology, Department of Science & Technology (DST), GoWB, BikasBhavan, North Block, 4th Floor, Salt Lake, Kolkata - 700 091 West Bengal, Kolkata, West Bengal, INDIA
5	112	Malda Khirsapati (Himsagar) Mango				
6	113	Malda Fazli Mango				
7	138	Santipore Saree	Handicraft	2009	Nadia	
8	173	Baluchari Saree	Handicraft	2011	Bankura	
9	176	Dhaniakhali Saree	Handicraft	2011	Hooghly	Directorate of Textiles, Department of Micro & SmallScale Enterprise & Textile, Government of West Bengal, Office of the Commissioner of Textile, New Secretariat Buildings, 6th Floor, 'A' - Block, 1, Kiron Sankar Roy Road, Kolkata - 700001, West Bengal, India
10	382	Joynagar Moa	Food Stuff	2014	South 24 Parganas	Joynagar Moa Nirmankari society, Radhaballavtala Road, Joynagar - 743338, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India
11	525	Bardhaman Sitabhog	Food Stuff	2016	Bardhaman	BardhamanSitabhog and Mihidana Traders Welfare Association 2. District Industries Centre, Bardhaman, District Industries Centre, PurtoBhawan (5th Floor), Sadarghat, Post Sripally, Burdwan, West Bengal 713103 India
12	526	Bardhaman Mihidana	Food Stuff	2016		
13	531	Gobindobhog Rice	Agricultural	2017	8 districts, Bardhaman, Bankura, Hooghly, Nadia, Birbhum, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, Howrah	1. State Agriculture Management & Extension Training Institute (SAMETI) and 2. Bidhan Chandra KrishiVishwavidyalaya 1. Government of West Bengal, Ramkrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, South 24 Parganas – 700 103, West Bengal, India and 2. P.O. KrishiViswavidyalaya, Nadia, West Bengal, India, 741 252
14	530	Tulapanji Rice	Agricultural	2017	Uttar Dinajpur, DakshinDinajpur and negligible area in Darjeeling district.	1. State Agriculture Management &Extension Training Institute (SAMETI) and 2. Uttar BangaKrishiViswasvidyalaya 1. Government of West Bengal, Ramkrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, South 24 Parganas – 700 103, West Bengal, India; 2. P.O. Pundibari, Coochbehar, West Bengal, India, 736 165
15	533	Banglar Rasogolla	Food Stuff	2017	all over West Bengal, excluding Darjeeling District	West Bengal State Food Processing and Horticulture Development corporation Limited 2nd floor MayukhBhavan, DF Block Sector-I,Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700 091, West Bengal, India

(*Contd.*)

Table 1 — GI Tag Registration of West Bengal (*Contd.*)

S.No	App. No.	Geographical Indications	Goods (As per Sec 2 (f) of GI Act 1999)	Year of Regis.	District	Application Name & Applicant Address
16	453	Bankura Panchmura Terracotta Craft	Handicraft	2017	Bankura	PanchmuraMritShilpiSamabaySamity Village & P.O. Panchmura,Bankura, West Bengal, India, 722156
17	563	Bengal Dokra	Handicraft	2017	Bardhaman, Bankura, Purulia	Chitrataru 1. Bankura Bikna Dokra Hastajata Kutir Shilpa Kalyan Samity 2. Dariyapur Dhokra Artisans Co-operatives Industrial Society Limited 1. ShilpaDanga, Bikna, Bankura-723 152, West Bengal, India, 2., Dokrapara, Dariyapur, Bardhaman - 713 128, West Bengal, India
18	564	Bengal Patachitra	Handicraft	2017	Paschim Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum	Chitrataru Village: Naya, GP: Maligram, Block: Pingla, PaschimMedinipur, West Bengal, India, 721140
19	565	Purulia Chau Mask	Handicraft	2017	Purulia	Chau MukhoshShilpi Sangha Village: Charida, GP - Sindri, Block - Baghmundi, Purulia, West Bengal, India, 723 152
20	566	Wooden Mask of Kushmandi	Handicraft	2017	Dakshin Dinajpur	MahisbathanHastashilpasamabaysamiti Limited village: Mahisbathan, post: Manikar, P.s-Kushmandi, Block - Kushmandi, District: DakshinDinajpur - 733 132, west Bengal, India
21	567	Madurkathi	Handicraft	2017	Paschim or PurbaMedinipur	The West Bengal Khadi& Village Industry Board, Goverment of West Bengal West Bengal Khadi& Village Industry Board, Government of West Bengal, HemantaBasuKhadi 'O' graminShilpaBhaban, 12, B.B.D. Bag (East), 2nd & 3rd Floor, , Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 700 001
22	702	Tangail Saree of Bengal	Handicraft	2023	Purba Bardhaman, Nadia, Dakshin Dinajpur,	The West Bengal State Handloom Weavers Co - Operative Society Limited TantujaBhavan Block-DD, Plot-18/4, Sector-I, Salt Lake City, District: Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 700 064
23	703	Garad Saree	Handicraft	2023	Murshidabad, Birbhum	
24	704	Korial saree	Handicraft	2023	Murshidabad, Birbhum	
25	743	Kalonunia Rice	Agricultural	2023	North Bengal (Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Darjeeling, Kalimpong)	State Agricultural Management & Extension Training Institute (SAMETI) Government of West Bengal, Ramkrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, District: South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India, 700103
26	769	Sundarban Honey	Food Stuff	2023	North 24 Parganas	West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited (WBFDCL) AranyaBikash, KB19, Sector-III, Salt Lake City, District: Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 700 106

(*Contd.)*

Table 1 — GI Tag Registration of West Bengal (*Contd.*)

S.No	App. No.	Geographical Indications	Goods (As per Sec 2 (f) of GI Act 1999)	Year of Regis.	District	Application Name & Applicant Address
27	676	Banglar Muslin	Handicraft	2023	Murshidabad Bankura Jhargram Malda Hooghly Birbhum Nadia Howrah	West Bengal Khadi& Village Industry Board Government of West Bengal, HemantaBasuKhadi 'O' GraminShilpaBhaban 12, B.B.D. Bag (East), 2nd & 3rd Floor, District: Kolkata – 700 001, West Bengal, India.
28	1020	Kamarpukur Sada Bode	Food Stuff	2025	Hooghly	MishtiUdyog (Sweets &Savouries Entrepreneurs' Association of Bengal) 532, RabindraSarani, Bagbazar, District: Kolkata - 700 003, West Bengal, India
29	1062	Baruipur Guava	Agricultural	2025	South 24 Parganas	Baruipur Farmers Producer Company Limited Village: Himchi, Post: Nabogram, P.S: Baruipur, Distict: South 24 Parganas – 743 372, West Bengal, India.
30	921	Malda Nistari Silk Yarn	Handicraft	2025	Malda & Murshidabad and Birbhum districts.	Malda Silk Yarn Producers Association Village: GayeshbariKalaphar, P.S: Gayeshbari, P.S: Kaliachak, District: Malda – 732 206, West Bengal, India
31	1042	Radhunipagal Rice	Agricultural	2025	Birbhum Bankura Nadia Burdwan Howrah Hooghly MurshidabadNorth&South 24 Parganas Paschim Medinipur	State Agricultural Management & Extension Training Institute (SAMETI) Government of West Bengal, Ramkrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, District: South 24 Parganas – 700 103, West Bengal, India.
32	1022	Banglar Nolen Gur Sandesh	Food Stuff	2025	all over West Bengal except the northern hilly district i.e Darjeeling, Kalimpong etc.	MishtiUdyog (Sweets &Savouries Entrepreneurs‟ Association of Bengal) 532, RabindraSarani, Bagbazar, District: Kolkata - 700 003, West Bengal, India
33	1036	Bishnupur Motichur Laddu	Food Stuff	2025	Bankura	
34	1035	Murshidabad Chhanabora	Food Stuff	2025	Murshidabad	

Table 1A — District-wise mapping of registered GI products from West Bengal

District	Number of product registered	Names of the registered products
Bardhaman	6	BardhamanSitabhog, BardhamanMihidana, Bengal Dokra, Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Tangail Saree of Bengal (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Birbhum	6	NakshiKantha, Santiniketan Leather Goods, Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Garad Saree (shared), Korial Saree (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Bankura	6	Baluchari Saree, Gobindobhog Rice (shared), BankuraPanchmura Terracotta Craft, Bengal Dokra (shared), Bengal Patachitra (shared), BishnupurMotichurLaddu, Banglar Muslin (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)

(*Contd.*)

Table 1A — District-wise mapping of registered GI products from West Bengal (*Contd.*)

District	Number of product registered	Names of the registered products
Murshidabad	6	Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Garad Saree (shared), Korial Saree (shared), Banglar Muslin (shared), Malda Nistari Silk Yarn (shared), Murshidabad Chhanabora, Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
South 24 Parganas	4	Joynagar Moa, Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Sundarban Honey, Baruipur Guava, Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Malda	4	MaldaLaxmanBhog Mango, Malda Khirsapati (Himsagar) Mango, Malda Fazli Mango, Malda Nistari Silk Yarn (shared), Banglar Muslin (shared)
Hooghly	4	Dhaniakhali Saree, Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Kamarpukur Sada Bode, Banglar Muslin (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Nadia	4	Santipore Saree, Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Tangail Saree of Bengal (shared), Banglar Muslin (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Purulia	3	Bengal Dokra (shared), Bengal Patachitra (shared), Purulia Chau Mask
Dakshin Dinajpur	3	Tulapanji Rice (shared), Wooden Mask of Kushmandi, Tangail Saree of Bengal (shared)
Darjeeling	2	Darjeeling Tea (word & logo), Tulapanji Rice (negligible area, shared), Kalonunia Rice (shared)
Paschim Medinipur	2	Bengal Patachitra (shared), Madur Kathi (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
North 24 Parganas	2	Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Howrah	2	Gobindobhog Rice (shared), Banglar Muslin (shared), Radhunipagal Rice (shared)
Purba Medinipur	1	MadurKathi (shared)
Uttar Dinajpur	1	Tulapanji Rice (shared)
Jalpaiguri	1	Kalonunia Rice (shared)
Cooch Behar	1	Kalonunia Rice (shared)
Alipurduar	1	Kalonunia Rice (shared)
Kalimpong	1	Kalonunia Rice (shared)
All over West Bengal	2	Banglar Rasogolla, Banglar Nolen Gur Sandesh

Table 2— List of refused applications

S.No	Application No.	Geographical Indications	Goods	District	Year of Refusal
1	448	Solapith Crafts of Birbhum District	Handicraft	Birbhum	2019
2	579	Krishnagar Sarpuria	Food Stuff	Nadia	2019
3	580	Krishnagar Sarbhaja	Food Stuff	Nadia	2019

(iii) Submit a formal application with required maps, standards, and historical documentation.

The district- and year-wise analysis clearly shows that while West Bengal has made significant strides in the development of its GI ecosystem, some critical gaps remain. To ensure that the unique cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and agricultural products of every district receive proper recognition, there is a need for comprehensive awareness campaigns, a well-structured support system, and inclusive policy measures. With the effective implementation of these initiatives, GI tags can become more than just symbolic recognition—they can serve as powerful economic tools. This can lead to direct benefits for local producers, artisans, and communities, while also enhancing West Bengal's cultural and economic profile at both national and global levels.

Refused, Withdrawn, and Abandoned Applications

Several applications have been rejected, withdrawn, or abandoned due to various reasons. The primary causes of refusal include the lack of necessary documentation and evidence, inability to adequately establish the product's geographical distinctiveness, and failure to clearly describe the production process, unique characteristics, and traditional methods of preparation[13]. Table 2 shows the list of refused applications as of now. In many cases, there was insufficient proof of the product's historical origin and reputation. Additionally, the absence of supporting documents or the non-existence of a recognized producer association further weakened these applications. Such deficiencies have been key factors behind the rejection or discontinuation of GI claims.

In West Bengal, a total of 5 GI applications has been withdrawn, where the applicants either

Table 3 — List of withdrawn applications

S.No	Application No.	Geographical Indications	Goods	District	Year of Withdrawn
1	705	Santipur Saree Logo	Handicraft	Nadia	2021
2	738	Sundarban Honey	Agricultural	South 24 Parganas	2021
3	942	Khalsi Honey of Sundarban	Natural	South 24 Parganas	2025
4	568	Darjeeling White	Agricultural	Darjeeling	2019
5	569	Darjeeling Green	Agricultural	Darjeeling	2019

Table 4 — Abandoned GI application

Application No.	Geographical Indications	Goods	District	Year of Abandoned
449	BurdwanNatungram Wood Craft	Handicraft	Burdwan	2022

voluntarily withdrew their applications or did not pursue the process after submission (Table 3).

Withdrawn Applications

(i) Since “Santipur Saree” has already been registered as a Geographical Indication, the application for Santipur Saree Logo is not maintainable. The report explains that the proposed logo may cause confusion, making it liable for refusal under Section 9(a) of the GI Act. Moreover, GI cannot be a brand created by an individual or organization.

(ii) Sundarban Honey with application number 738received an objection that “No one can apply for GI of Sundarban honey without permission of Govt. of West Bengal which one is the sole authority of major Sundarban area in the State of West Bengal in India”. It was withdrawn subsequently.

(iii) The GI application for Khalsi Honey of Sundarban (Application No. 942) has been officially withdrawn. This decision was taken during the GI hearing held on 20 November 2024. Since Sundarban Honey had already been granted GI registration (Registration No. 540, dated 2 January 2024) in the name of the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited (WBFDCL), the National GI Drive Mission decided to withdraw the overlapping application to avoid duplication.

(iv) The GI applications for ‘Darjeeling White’ (No. 568) and ‘Darjeeling Green’ (No. 569) were withdrawn by the Tea Board of India after requesting an amendment to the original Darjeeling GI (No. 1) to include these variants. These variants are advertised as amendment in GI Journal No. 118 (March 29, 2019).

GI application has been abandoned, as it was not properly completed and the process did not move forward within the stipulated time, leading the authorities to reject or disregard it (Table 4). The GI application for "BurdwanNutangram Wood Craft" was submitted on 16th September 2013. However, the applicant failed to provide the required documents or responses within the stipulated timeframe, and despite multiple opportunities, no one appeared for the scheduled hearings. In 2015, based on recommendations from the Consultative Committee appointed by the GI Registrar, an examination report was issued. This report requested detailed information about the product’s history, unique characteristics, production process, and evidence of geographical linkage. The applicant failed to furnish the necessary documents to address these queries. As a result, GI Application No. 449 for "BurdwanNutangram Wood Craft" was declared abandoned due to non-compliance with legal procedures and continued default by the applicant.

Pending Applications

As of 21 May 2025, more than 20 GI applications from West Bengal remain in the pipeline, either in the Examination or Pre-Examination stages (Table 5).

Table 5A shows the pending applications based on the district they are applied from. Bankura has the highest number of applications in the line.

Cultural Significance

GI products are deeply embedded in the historical, cultural, and identity fabric of a region and its communities. These products carry with them the passing of traditional knowledge, artisanal skill, aesthetic traditions, and community-based rituals[14]. The GI products of any state are a testament to this rich cultural legacy.

Preservation of Traditional Knowledge and Craftsmanship

Products such as Nakshi Kantha, Shantiniketan Leather Goods, Santipore, Baluchari, Dhanikhali,

Table 5 — List of pending applications

S.No	Application No.	Geographical Indications	Goods	District	Year of Filing	Status
1	1017	Bankura Conch Shell Craft	Handicraft	Bankura	2022	Examination
2	1018	Beliatore Mecha Sandesh	Food Stuff	Bankura	2022	Examination
3	1019	Bishnupur Dashavatar Tash	Handicraft	Bankura	2022	Examination
4	1021	Kanakchur Rice	Agricultural	Bankura	2022	Examination
5	932	Bengal Sabai	Handicraft	Kolkata	2022	Examination
6	1023	Sholapith Craft of West Bengal	Handicraft	Birbhum	2022	Examination
7	876	Lac of Purulia	Natural	Purulia	2022	Examination
8	1024	Khagra Brass & Bell Metal Utensils	Handicraft	Murshidabad	2022	Examination
9	1039	Banglar Nolen Gur	Food Stuff	Kolkata	2022	Examination
10	901	Cooch Behar Sitalpati	Handicraft	Cooch Behar	2022	Examination
11	1181	Jamdani Sarees of West Bengal	Handicraft	PurbaBardhaman	2024	Pre Examination
12	1391	Southeast West Bengal Brahmi	Agricultural	North 24 Parganas	2024	Pre Examination
13	943	Darjeeling Mandarin	Agricultural	Cooch Behar	2022	Examination
14	991	Bengal Singing Bowl	Handicraft	Bankura	2022	Examination
15	993	ShantiniketanAlpona	Handicraft	Birbhum	2022	Examination
16	1034	Bankura Brass & Bell Metals Utensils	Handicraft	Bankura	2022	Examination
17	1044	Murshidabad Silk	Handicraft	Murshidabad	2023	Examination
18	892	FuliaJamdani Sarees	Handicraft	Nadia	2022	Examination
19	877	Begampur Cotton Handloom Saree	Handicraft	Hooghly	2022	Examination
20	795	Clay Doll of Krishnanagar	Handicraft	Nadia	2021	Examination
21	875	Kolkatti Jewelry	Handicraft	Kolkata	2022	Examination
22	1084	Rabri of Hooghly	Food Stuff	Hooghly	2023	Pre Examination

Table 5A— District wise mapping of pending applications

S. No.	Name of districts	Product name
1		Bankura Conch Shell Craft
2	Bankura	BeliatoreMechaSandesh
3		BishnupurDashavatar Tash
4		Kanakchur Rice
5		Bengal Singing Bowl
6		Bankura Brass & Bell Metals Utensils
7	Kolkata	Bengal Sabai
8		Banglar Nolen Gur
9		Kolkatti Jewelry
10	Birbhum	Sholapith Craft of West Bengal
11		ShantiniketanAlpona
12	Purulia	Lac of Purulia
13	Murshidabad	Khagra Brass & Bell Metal Utensils
14		Murshidabad Silk
15	Cooch Behar	Cooch Behar Sitalpati
16		Darjeeling Mandarin
17	PurbaBardhaman	Jamdani Sarees of West Bengal
18	Nadia	Fulia Jamdani Sarees
19		Clay Doll of Krishnanagar
20	Hooghly	Begampur Cotton Handloom Saree
21		Rabri of Hooghly
22	North 24 Parganas	Southeast West Bengal Brahmi

Tangail, Garad, and Korial sarees reflect Bengal's rich weaving tradition and the enduring legacy of women artisans.[15–18] These crafts have been transmitted orally and through hands-on training within families and communities across generations. GI recognition helps safeguard and formalize this transmission. Likewise, Bengal's Muslin and Malda'sNistari silk yarn embodies the region's historic excellence in textile craftsmanship.



Fig. 4 — Registered mango varieties of West Bengal (source:[21])

Emblems of Regional Identity and Pride

Products like Darjeeling Teaand Bishnupur Terracotta are not just valued for their inherent qualities, they symbolize regional pride and identity on the global stage.[19,20] Additionally, West Bengal is the only state in India to have three distinct mango varieties—LakshmanBhog, Himsagar, and Fazli—granted GI registration, all of which originate from the mango-rich district of Malda, renowned for its exceptional quality and diverse cultivars (Fig. 4).[21]

Agricultural products such as Kalonunia rice of Basirhat; Gobindobhog, Tulaipanji, and Radhunipagal rice varieties; Baruipur guava; and Sundarbans honey, reflect the agro-ecological diversity and traditional farming heritage of Bengal. Similarly, Joynagar Moa, Sitabhog and Mihidana of Bardhaman, Banglar Rasogolla, Nolen Gur Sandesh, Bishnupur Motichur Laddu, Murshidabad's Chhanabora, and Kamar pukur's SadaBoda are essential to Bengal's hospitality, culinary culture, and festive traditions.

Reflection of Language, Storytelling, and Aesthetic Heritage

Baluchari sarees feature woven mythological tales on their borders, while the vibrant colors and stylization of Chhau masks capture the spirit of folklore—revealing Bengal's deep-rooted storytelling traditions[17]. Artistic expressions found in Bankura Terracotta, BankuraDokra, Bengal Patachitra, Kushmandi's Wooden Masks, and MadurKathi mats visually narrate folk beliefs, religious symbolism, and regional aesthetics. These GI products embody Bengal's cultural sensibilities through intricate motifs, narrative designs, and artisanal elegance.[22]

Support for Social Cohesion and Community Structures

Many GI-linked crafts, such as weaving, Dokra casting, or leatherwork, are practiced within family units or cooperative frameworks, mostly located in rural or semi-urban areas. These systems foster local economies and social cohesion. Women artisans play a vital role in these industries, contributing to both household incomes and rural empowerment.[16]

Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Several GI products are closely associated with UNESCO-recognized Intangible Cultural Heritage. For instance, the making of Chhau masks is integral to the Chhau dance tradition, which has received international recognition[23]. GI products like these serve as effective tools for preserving cultural practices that are otherwise vulnerable to decline.

Threats to Cultural Endurance and the Role of GIs

Modern urbanization, shifting market demands, and the growing disinterest of younger generations in traditional occupations have placed many of West Bengal's age-old crafts and artisanal practices at risk.

Intergenerational transmission of artisanal knowledge is weakening within craft communities, leading to the gradual disappearance of numerous heritage products due to neglect and marginalization. In this context, the GI Act and National GI policy serve not merely as a tool for commercial protection but as an effective strategy for safeguarding cultural heritage. Through GI recognition, traditional production methods, associated communities, and specific geographic regions receive legal protection and institutional validation. This, in turn, enhances the confidence and economic resilience of local artisans. Moreover, GI registration often leads to increased market value for the products, which can incentivize younger generations to re-engage and preserve traditional livelihoods.[24]

Economic Relevance

GI products serve both as carriers of cultural memory and drivers of economic vitality—they serve as powerful tools for local economic development and sustainable livelihoods. Once a product receives GI recognition, its market value typically increases, its reputation expands, and consumer demand rises.[24]Being inherently tied to a specific geographical area and traditional methods of production, GI products significantly contribute to strengthening rural economies, generating employment, and encouraging local entrepreneurship.[24]

Protection of Producers' Rights and Recognition

GI tags act as a safeguard, ensuring that only authentic producers from a designated region can market the product, safeguard their rights and reduce unfair competition. The GI label also serves as a mark of authenticity and quality, enhancing consumer trust and thereby increasing demand and pricing. Producers benefit from fair trade, and the influence of middlemen is reduced. For example, the GI recognition of Baluchari Sarees, Bankura'sPanchmura Terracotta, Dokra metalcraft, Joynagar Moa, and Bardhaman'sSitabhog and Mihidana has helped these products expand their markets and boost sales.[25]

Employment Generation

The production and marketing of GI-tagged items involve thousands of artisans, weavers, farmers, and micro-entrepreneurs across the value chain.[26] From weaving, painting, metal and woodwork to packaging—many local workers are engaged in these stages, keeping rural economies active and creating multiple layers of employment opportunities.

Export Potential and Brand recognition globally

Biswa Bangla is a state-operated enterprise launched in 2013 under the MSME & Textiles Department. It promotes and markets West Bengal's handloom, handicraft, and food products, including a number of GI-tagged items like Dokra, Chhau masks, Madurkathi, Nakshikantha, Darjeeling tea, etc.through a network of retail showrooms at airports and cities, e-commerce platforms, district fairs, and design-innovation support initiatives, thereby enhancing market access and livelihoods for artisan communities.

In the recent India UK free trade agreement, four of West Bengal's products have been showcased—Baluchari saree, Darjeeling tea, Natungram Doll, and Shantiniketan Leather[9]. Many GI products from West Bengal already enjoy significant recognition on the international stage.[27,28] Products such as Darjeeling Tea, Shantiniketan Leather Goods, Gobindobhog Rice, and Bengal Muslin have carved out a distinct and prestigious niche in global markets. Their superior quality, traditional production methods, and strong geographical identity attract international buyers, offering India valuable opportunities for foreign exchange earnings. Among them, Darjeeling Tea, stands out as a global ambassador of Indian tea, for its unique aroma, flavor, and refined quality. However, this prestige comes with a serious challenge—the widespread counterfeiting of Darjeeling Tea, in global markets.According to AnshumanKanoria, Chairman of the Indian Tea Exporters' Association, the actual annual production of Darjeeling Tea, is around 8.5 million kilograms, yet nearly 50 million kilograms are sold worldwide under the label Darjeeling—showing that a huge number of counterfeit products are out there in that name.[29]

Inclusion of Women and Marginalized Communities

Women play a prominent role in sectors like handloom weaving and handicrafts. GI-related industries often provide opportunities for rural women, helping to promote gender equity and economic empowerment among traditionally marginalized groups.[16]

Promotion of Local Tourism

Festivals, fairs, exhibitions, and craft markets centered around GI products have the potential to enhance both cultural and craft-based tourism in West Bengal. For instance, events like the PoushMela or

BasantaUtsav in Santiniketan are not only cultural celebrations but also platforms for the direct sale of local leather goods, embroidered textiles, Patachitra paintings, and other GI-tagged crafts. These events attract tourists, both domestic and international, increase artisan incomes, and contribute to the broader local economy. In this regard, the state can develop themed cultural circuits like "Tea & Textile Trail" (Darjeeling Tea; Santipur/Tangail Sarees) and "Sweet Heritage Circuit" (Joynagar Moa; BardhamanSitabhog & Mihidana; BanglarRasogolla)—linking heritage consumption to rural tourism revenue. These can appear under the circuit section of *West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation Ltd*.[30]

Administrative and Policy Challenges

While the GI products of West Bengal hold immense cultural and economic significance, several administrative and policy-level challenges continue to hinder their effective protection, promotion, and commercialization as mentioned below. These challenges span across all stages of the GI process—application, registration, utilization, and marketing.

Lack of Awareness among Producers

Many artisans, weavers, and farmers associated with GI products remain unaware of the legal significance and commercial potential of GI recognition. A majority are unorganized and do not belong to any registered cooperative or association, which is often a prerequisite for filing GI applications. As a result, despite possessing traditional knowledge and skills, they are excluded from the GI registration process. For example, the newly formed district Jhargram has not filed any GI application yet. One of the main reasons for that can be the higher jungle coverage of the district and more than 95% of the population living in rural areas.[31] This leads to the fact that the awareness about GI is low among the population and no administrative support is there for filing one. However, there can be potential GI products from tribal regions that have not yet been explored.

Cumbersome Procedures and Delays

The GI application process is highly bureaucratic and complex, requiring extensive documentation, legal assistance, and continuous follow-up. Providing historical and origin-based evidence is often a burden for small producer groups. Moreover, even after submission, the examination and dispute resolution stages involve unnecessary delays. Currently, more than 20 GI applications from West Bengal are stuck in the 'Examination' or 'Pre-examination' phases for prolonged periods. Notable examples include ShantiniketanAlpona, Jamdani Sarees, Murshidabad Silk, Banglar Nolen Gur, and Beliatore Mecha Sandesh. These delays create uncertainty for the artisans and producer communities waiting for recognition.

Lack of Post-Registration Support

Although the GI Act grants legal protection upon registration, it does not automatically ensure economic success. Most GI-registered products strive to receive government assistance in areas such as marketing, branding, packaging, export facilitation, or skill development. However, with the implementation of National GI Policy, it is expected these angles will be taken care of soon.

Weak Monitoring and Enforcement

Effective enforcement of GI rights remains a major challenge. In most cases, there is no structured mechanism to detect and prevent counterfeiting or unauthorized use of GI products. As discussed, Darjeeling tea has an annual production of around 8.5 million kg, yet nearly 50 million kg are sold globally under the same label.[29]

Absence of a Coordinated Institutional Framework

There is no dedicated or integrated GI promotion body in West Bengal that can coordinate efforts between the government, NGOs, cooperatives, and trade associations. This results in fragmented initiatives, lack of expertise, and duplication of efforts. At the state level, there is also no robust GI-focused policy currently in place. The scenario is almost similar throughout the country.

Financial and Infrastructure Limitations

Most GI-based industries, especially handicrafts and agricultural products, still face infrastructure deficits—such as lack of access to credit, storage, and modern marketing platforms. Existing government schemes for MSMEs often fail to reach the actual producers of GI products.

Export Barriers and Certification Issues

Although many GI products like Darjeeling Tea, Bengal Muslin, Shantiniketan Leather Goods, and Joynagar Moa have significant export potential, they often face hurdles in acquiring international GI

recognition, quality certifications, and meeting global market compliance.Foodstuff category has an additional layer of challenge pertaining to their shelf life.[32] The state can introduce tech-enabled traceability, e.g., adopt QR coded, geo tagged, and batch verified GI labels to deter counterfeiting and enhance consumer trust across domestic and export markets.

To address these challenges, the following measures may be considered:

- Creation of a GI Development Cell: Establish a dedicated GI cell under the West Bengal government's MSME or Handicrafts department to support applications, provide legal guidance, branding strategies, and market linkages.
- Awareness and Capacity Building: Organize training programs and workshops in GI-rich districts to educate producers about GI laws, quality control, and business management.
- Post-Registration Assistance: Launch targeted schemes for packaging, certification, integration with e-commerce platforms, and export support tailored to GI products.
- Strengthen Enforcement Mechanisms: Collaborate with customs, online marketplaces, and international trade bodies to detect and eliminate counterfeit GI products.
- Link GI to Tourism and Rural Development: Promote GI products through cultural tourism and rural development initiatives to unlock new economic opportunities.

DPIIT has undertaken several initiatives to promote GIs:

- ODOP for GI Promotion – Transforming districts into export hubs, with many ODOPs being agricultural and foodstuff GIs; includes export training and embassy engagement.
- Events & Trade Fairs – Organized the "India GI Fair" (2022, 2023) and GI pavilions at major trade fairs to provide wider platforms for GI products.
- Awareness Campaigns – Launched "Gift a GI" and "Spot a GI," along with promotional and educational videos to highlight the uniqueness of Indian GIs.
- Media Collaborations – Created the "Great Indian GI Wedding" video series and partnered with Celebrity MasterChef India (Sony LIV, 2025) to showcase GI-tagged products and their cultural heritage.

The study is primarily based on secondary data from the GI Registry. While this offers useful insights into registration challenges, the lack of primary data, such as stakeholder interviews, limits context-specific understanding. Future research using primary data could provide deeper, ground-level perspectives.

Conclusion

GI products of West Bengal are more than commodities—they are authentic bearers of the state's history, traditions, and human-centered way of life. They help preserve cultural continuity, safeguard ethnic memories, and foster a strong sense of local identity. GI products should be seen as living cultural documents that embody the soul of Bengal.A comprehensive review of the GI ecosystem in West Bengal reveals that the state has emerged as one of the pioneers in India's GI movement. What began with Darjeeling Tea, has now expanded across multiple sectors—agricultural products, handicrafts, food items, and cultural artifacts. GI-tagged products from West Bengal not only provide legal recognition for the state's rich heritage, culture, and artisanal traditions, but also play a significant role in strengthening the local economy. GIs are not merely legal certifications or economic tools. They are living representations of a region's collective memory, heritage, and identity. Behind each GI product lies generations of traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, rituals, and cultural expression. In a culturally rich and diverse state like West Bengal, GI products are more than market commodities—they are vital carriers of living cultural heritage. Textile GIs under handicraft good like the Baluchari Saree, NakshiKantha, Santipur, and Dhaniakhali handloom sarees are not just garments, but reflections of Bengal's artistic and cultural ethos. Joynagar Moa, Bardhaman'sSitabhog and Mihidana, and BanglarRasogolla are not merely sweets but integral to Bengali hospitality and celebrations. Agricultural GIs like Darjeeling Tea, Gobindobhog and Tulaipanji rice, and Sundarban Honey capture the agro-biodiversity and livelihoods rooted in Bengal's rural traditions. The GI tag validates the cultural and economic value of these traditional products. Rather than viewing GIs solely as market-oriented labels, they must be recognized as living repositories of a community's identity, creativity, and continuity. GIs serve as a vital link between the past and the

present—preserving the essence of culture for future generations. To further strengthen this ecosystem, targeted measures are essential. Market access and branding strategies should include the creation of GI product kiosks at airports, major rail and metro hubs, and state emporia. There is also a strong case for integrating GI products into leading e-commerce platforms and designing export-oriented promotional schemes for globally recognized products like Darjeeling Tea and Baluchari Sarees. In parallel, administrative efficiency must be improved through the introduction of statutory timelines for the examination and opposition phases of GI applications. The deployment of a real-time, publicly accessible online GI status dashboard would bring much-needed transparency and accountability to the system.

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