

GI Tag for Natural & Manufactured Products

India has many unique agricultural, handicraft, handloom and food items

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Should civilisations, now fragmented by boundaries on linguistic lines, fight over trivialities like rasogolla to cement their monopoly over such heritage? While the intelligentsia stood mute witness when people of West Bengal and Odisha made a mountain of a sweet recently, there were sane voices dubbing it a useless fight.

"It is 'Banglar rasogolla', and not rasogolla, which has been GI-tagged in flavour of a West Bengal government agency. Odisha, which never filed its objections before the Geographical Indications (GI) registry in the first place, can apply for its own unique Odishara rasogolla," said advocate and IPR attorney P Sanjai Gandhi, who wrote to the Odisha chief minister about the option.

So, why so much fuss about GI and is it worth the fight?

India is full of unique agricultural, handicraft, handloom, and food items—both natural and manufactured—which are worthy of being given a special status. This would enable people making or growing the products to exploit them commercially. The very objective of GI tagging is to identify unique characteristics of a product, trace its territorial significance and give it a statutory protection, so that no bogus goods flood the market and tarnish the reputation of centuries.

Tamil Nadu is home to 22 GI-tagged products which includes Kancheepuram silk, said Sanjai Gandhi, who applied and got the recognition for the handloom product. Pointing out that GI tag is not for 'silk' per se, he said arni silk and Salem white silk too got their own GI tagging. Rasogolla, therefore, could take the 'silk route' to avoid confrontation and peaceful co-existence.

Of course, the issue of GI-tagging basmati rice is now mired in a massive litigation before the GI Registry and courts because of few districts of Madhya Pradesh were not considered. It could mean a big loss to Madhya Pradesh, unless it is either clubbed with other Basmati-growing areas of central India, or it manages to have its own GI-tagged Basmati brand.

Real threats to the nation's artistic, cultural and culinary legacy may come from other nations. A brewing conflict between India and Bangladesh over GI tag for 'khadi' is a fine example. While Chennai-based Intellectual Property Rights Attorneys Association (IPRAA) has sought GI status for khadi, on behalf of all 29 states in India, Bangladesh has also submitted a similar application.

IPRAA has now written to Bangladesh to withdraw its application because khadi is a quintessential handloom legacy of India. "Instead of quibbling among ourselves, we must be alert to stave off threats from across the border," said Sanjai Gandhi, president of IPRAA, adding that the Indian Government has done little to prevent exploitation and false claim over 'khadar' in foreign countries. Even Basmati is being branded by private parties and marketed in many countries, but India has not yet filed formal revocation applications in those countries to prevent their misuse.

Ideally, India should be sitting on hundreds of GI tags for its products by now. But the total GI-tagged products in the country are only about 200. While Karnataka leads the bunch with 34 GI products, it is followed by Maharashtra (26) and Odisha (23). The fourth slot is jointly held by Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with 22 GI products each. There will be a dramatic increase in Tamil Nadu's tally in coming months, as it has filed applications for 29 different products. They are pending before the GI registry, and products that are likely to get GI-tagged by middle of next year include Manamadurai ghatam (mud pot-drum), Tuticorin macarons, Kovilpatti groundnut mittai and rice garland of Thanjavur.

GI is a crown of thorn, too. Once an association or society earns it, judiciously exploiting it even while guarding it against misuse is tough. Darjeeling tea and its authorised users are examples. Users of the brand are alert against misuse and they have filed revocation petitions in several countries to safeguard the uniqueness of the tea. It has had a telling effect on the fortunes of tea-growers of Darjeeling, as they alone are reaping the benefits of their product.

That is the idea. GI regime is designed to help genuine makers of products go laughing all the way to the bank, without compromising on the quality of the product. GI holds out no empty threats to violators. In case of GI infringement or false claim, there is a fine of Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 2 lakh, and jail term from six months to three years.

What is a GI Tag?

A GI tag is a geographical indication of an item which is specific to a particular place. GI status can be sought for agricultural products, handicrafts, handloom and food products. The RGI (registration of geographical indications) logo given to a particular product can only be used by registered and authorised users. When marketed, a GI tagged product may carry a logo showing its place of origin. Civil and crimi-

Table. GI Tag granted so far in India.

State	Total GI Tag granted	Some Products
Jammu & Kashmir	8	Kashmir Pashmina, Kashmir Sozani Craft.
Himachal Pradesh	6	Chamba Rumal, Kangra Painting.
Punjab	2	Basmati Rice, Phulkari.
Haryana	2	Basmati Rice.
Uttarakhand	2	Uttarakhand Tejpatta.
Uttar Pradesh	21	Banaras Brocades and Sarees, Lucknow Chicken Craft, Firozabad Glass Work.
Delhi	1	Basmati Rice.
Rajasthan	9	Blue Pottery of Jaipur, Kathputlis of Rajasthan, Bikaneri Bhujia.
Madhya Pradesh	5	Bagh Prints of Madhya Pradesh, Chanderi Sarees.
Bihar	4	Sikki Grass Craft, Bhagalpur Silks.
West Bengal	14	Darjeeling Tea, Bangalar Rasogolla, Gobindbhog Rice.
Sikkim	1	Sikkim Large Cardamom.
Assam	4	Muga Silk of Assam, Assam Tea.
Nagaland	3	Naga Mircha, Naga Tree Tomato.
Manipur	4	Shaphee Ianphee.
Mizoram	1	Mizo Chilli.
Tripura	1	Tripura Green Pineapple.
Meghalaya	2	Khasi Mandarin, Memong Narangi.
Odisha	23	Orrisa Ikat, Orissa Pattachitra, Pipili Applique Work.
Chhattisgarh	3	Bastar Dhokra, Bastar Wooden Craft.
Gujarat	10	Gir Kesar Mango, Patan Patola, Kutch Embroidery.
Maharashtra	26	Nagpur Oranges, Nashik Valley Wine, Solapur Chaddar.
Goa	1	Fenni.
Karnataka	34	Byadgi Chilli, Mysore Silk, Mysore Sandal Oil.
Telangana	9	Hyderabadi Haleem, Pochampally Sarees.
Andhra Pradesh	17	Banaganapalle Mangoes, Tirupathi Laddu, Andhra Pradesh Leather Puppetry.
Tamil Nadu	22	Kancheepuram Silk, Thanjavur Paintings, Swamimalai Bronze Icons, Arni Silk, Salem White Silk.
Kerala	22	Aranmula Kannadi, Malabar Pepper, Brass Broidered Coconut Shell craft of Kerala.

nal proceedings can be initiated against those using the logo in unauthorised manner.

How to Apply?

An association or collective body can apply to GI Registry. Application should be backed by proof of uniqueness, historical records to show proof of origin, quality and special character. After rounds of verification, presentation and meetings, if registry is satisfied, application goes to GI Registry journal. If application receives no opposition within four months, it gets the GI tag.

Bitter Melon may help cure Cancer

The humble bitter melon or 'karela' may potentially help fight deadly head and neck cancers, a new study by an Indian-origin scientist suggests.

Experts found that bitter melon extract, a vegetable commonly used in Indian and Chinese diets, reduces the head and neck cancer cell growth in the animal model.