Empowering Rural Communities through Geographical Indications: A Pathway to Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

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Abstract. In the field of intellectual property (IP), Geographical Indications (GIs) represent a unique set of rights that connect product quality, cultural heritage, and the geographical origin of a product. In India, GIs have evolved from being seen as simply a legal means to differentiate products in the marketplace to being tools for improving rural livelihoods, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development. The goal of this chapter is to analyze how well GIs work as a means to achieve inclusive and sustainable rural development in India. GIs are located at the intersection between IP Law and the Political Economy of Rural Development and sustainability (and thus, the Governance of Sustainability). The authors intend to go beyond the usual celebratory descriptions of GIs and assess the three sets of Institutions, Distributive Impacts and Ecological Impacts that create the context for developing inclusive or sustainable outcomes through GIs. Using a doctrinal analysis of: (1) the TRIPS Agreement and (2) the GI Act (Geographical Indications of Goods [Registration and Protection] Act, 1999) the authors will provide an evaluation of the governance structures, enforcement mechanisms and benefit-sharing arrangements that shape the implementation of GIs in India. The authors will use examples of agricultural GIs (Darjeeling Tea), handicraft GIs (Muga Silk, Banarasi sarees, Basmati Rice and Pochampally Ikat) to show the differences among regions and sectors. The analysis shows that while GIs have the potential to produce price premiums, protect traditional knowledge, reinforce community identity, and encourage environmentally sustainable practices, the extent of the developmental impacts of GIs is not consistent or predictable. The authors conclude that for GIs to contribute fully to the goal of Inclusive Growth, they must be appropriately integrated into mechanisms of participatory governance, effective enforcement, and a wider framework of rural development that includes sustainability and social justice objectives.

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1 Introduction

Geographical Indication (GI) is legally defined in Article 22(1) of the TRIPS Agreement as an indication which serves the function of identifying a good as originating in the territory of a member, or in a region or locality in that territory, where a quality, reputation, or other characteristic of the good is largely due to the geographical origin. This definition, being commonly used in national laws such as the Indian Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, focuses on three things: the good has to be associated with a particular place, the place has to have some qualities or characteristics, and these qualities are to be determined objectively (Buch & Trivedi, 2023).

GIs distinguish from other intellectual property in that they are collective. They differ from patents, which grant individual rights to an inventor, and copyrights, which grant rights to an author. GIs safeguard the collective heritage of a community. Their collective underscores their sociological importance: the right does not pertain to an individual but to all legitimate producers in the area, and the good itself resides in cultural practice, communal tradition, and ecological specificity (Cardoso, Lourenzani, Caldas, Bernardo, & Bernardo, 2022). Legal protection of a GI thus claims an economic interest and a cultural identity, translating a community's heritage into a legally sanctioned right.

Historically, GIs have time-honored origins. European instances such as Roquefort cheese or Champagne wine predate modern intellectual property law, and are an age-old connection between place, product, and status. Although the statutory foundation is relatively new in India, connecting goods to their point of origin, Banarasi sarees, Kanchipuram silk, and Mysore sandalwood have a centuries-old history in oral traditions and business practices (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). The challenge of modern law has been to transform these pre-legal social practices into enforceable intellectual property rights with the potential to generate developmental effects (Claire Bernard-Mongin, 2025).

At the heart of the GI philosophy is terroir, a French term that refers to the natural and human elements that confer a product's distinctiveness. Terroir is the convergence of geography, climate, soil quality, traditional knowledge, and human competencies (Zapata, 2009). While originally a viticultural term referring to the distinctive characteristics of wines, terroir has evolved into the intellectual underpinning that explains why GIs make a difference; they balance nature and culture.

In the Indian context, terroir is particularly distinctive. The flavor of Darjeeling tea, for instance, is derived from the Himalayan altitudes, misty climate, and soil acidity, but not any less from the laborious plucking methods developed over generations (Besky, 2014). Similarly, the Muga silk of Assam preserves the indigenous variety of silkworm and even the traditional art of breeding and weaving. Terroir thus indicates that it is not merely a physical product preserved under GIs but an ecological system of environmental and cultural transactions.

Legal codification by GI registration of terroir raises traditional ecological knowledge to the level of intellectual property. But the process is not immune to contradiction. Terroir is holistic, but law is compartmentalizing, insisting on formalized descriptions of product characteristics, delimitations of production area, and documentary proof of distinctiveness (Besky, 2014). The challenge is to ensure that the legal expression of terroir accurately reflects its socio-cultural and ecological diversity, rather than merely being a bureaucratic tick-box exercise.

International protection for GIs as a special type of intellectual property was enshrined in the TRIPS Agreement (1994), overseen by the World Trade Organization (WTO). TRIPS set binding minimum standards of protection for GIs, where all member states had to have legal remedies against passing off GIs and against acts of unfair competition. Notably, TRIPS established a two-tier quality system: general protection under Article 22, which applied to all products, and special protection under Article 23, which applied only to wine and spirits.

This asymmetry has been a recurring source of contention. Developing countries, including India, have long argued that goods such as rice, tea, and handicrafts should enjoy the same increased protection as European wines and spirits. The Doha Development Round (2001) reopened talks on the extension of Article 23-level protection, but change has been glacial, reflecting the WTO's geopolitical and economic asymmetries (Addor, F. A. & Grazioli, 2002). The structure of TRIPS therefore replicates global inequalities; whereas Champagne is granted strict protection, Banarasi sarees or Chanderi fabrics must rely on weaker protections (Jay & Taylor, 2002). India's response has been two-pronged. Nationally, it passed the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, establishing an umbrella framework for the registration, enforcement, and protection of GIs for all types. Internationally, it has pursued the expansion of the scope of enhanced protection relentlessly and created a multilateral register of GIs. These actions reaffirm the normative argument of this paper, which posits that GIs should not be viewed as a narrow legal entitlement for haute couture but rather as a development tool for communities in the Global South (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). TRIPS also poses more general theoretical issues. By locating GIs in the WTO framework, TRIPS commodifies has traditionally been a matter of cultural identity as a trade-related property right. It is a promise and a threat; it allows developing country producers to access global value chains but threatens to subject cultural heritage to market logics. The challenge for India is thus to leverage the global legal system to empower rural producers without eroding the cultural and environmental meanings on which their products are based.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. Under what governance and institutional conditions do Geographical Indications (GIs) in India contribute to inclusive rural development outcomes?
2. Why do similarly placed GI products produce divergent socio-economic and distributive impacts across regions and sectors in India?

This article contributes to the growing literature on GIs and their role in development by offering three main contributions. First, this paper focuses on factors other than celebration and social movements in determining development outcomes for GIs by examining how governance designs and methods of benefit distribution, as well as the ability to enforce GIs, are important determinants of GIs' contribution to development. Secondly, the author synthesizes three distinct fields of knowledge, including intellectual property law, rural political economy, and sustainability governance, to create an analytical framework for determining when GIs can be considered vehicles for inclusive economic growth as opposed to mechanisms for capturing the benefits of market exclusion. Finally, using Indian GIs in both agriculture and handicrafts as case studies, the authors demonstrate how current approaches to the registration of GIs are limited in their ability to realize sustainable development goals; instead, they encourage future research to adopt means of governance over GIs that promote greater levels of participation and inclusivity within a coherent strategy of supporting sustainable development goals.

Research Methodology - This paper combines the legal analysis of the International and Indian Geographical Indications frameworks with the interdisciplinary development and sustainability literature through a doctrinal and policy synthesis. The doctrinal section analyses the TRIPS Agreement and the GI Registration Protection Act, 1999, within an analytical framework of collective rights, governance structure, enforcement mechanisms, and distributive effects. The policy synthesis section draws on additional scholarship to provide an overview of rural development, political economy, and sustainability studies, examining how Geographical Indicators (GIs) serve as a development instrument, rather than a form of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). The Indian GIs cited in this paper (Darjeeling Tea, Muga Silk, Banarasi Sarees, Channapatna Toys, Basmati Rice, and Pochampally Ikat) are not used as empirical case studies but rather as illustrative examples. They have been selected to demonstrate diversity throughout the sectors of agriculture and handicrafts, governance systems, market, climate change vulnerabilities, and export orientation.

2 The Nexus of Rurality, Poverty, and Sustainability

Intellectual property law, despite controlling the debate in the area of geographical indications, is not the only game in town. To fully understand the role of GIs in India, they need to be critiqued within the major socio-economic contexts of rurality, poverty, and sustainability. These do not pose different challenges but are interrelated conditions together affecting the lives of millions of rural producers, who are the backbone of India's primary and secondary agrarian and artisanal economy. Rural development policies in India continually face the challenges of persistent poverty, vulnerabilities imposed by global market forces, and the ecological vulnerability of traditional livelihoods (Bal, Anil, Devendra, Deepa, Krishna, Ghimire, & Bhuwon, 2017). It is in this complex scenario that GIs appear as one possible tool of change through rural initiatives. This paper will deal with two interrelated narratives. The phenomena of rural development and poverty in India are first examined, tracing back through the structural dynamics that have long since curbed the economic agency of rural producers. This is followed by a discussion on the extent to which GIs can be aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the specific ways in which GIs contribute to the implementation of the key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In evaluating these two paradigms, the GIs are reconstrued not merely as instruments of legal protection, but as engines of inclusive growth, social development, and environmental care.

2.1 Rural Development and Poverty

Agricultural growth has been an important policy issue in India since Independence. Since nearly 65 percent of the population is based in rural India (Census of India, 2011 revised estimates still indicate a majority as rural), the well-being of the nation is closely linked to the well-being of rural areas. Rural India nevertheless suffers disproportionately from poverty (Jiong, 2024). According to the World Bank (2020), there is a larger relative extent of rural poverty compared to urban poverty, with rural families primarily relying on subsistence agriculture, casual work, and the manufacture of crafts for their sustenance. The persistent feature of rural poverty in India is owing to a complex interaction of structural explanations. Agricultural economy is characterized by low productivity, fragmentation of holdings, and vulnerability to climatic shocks. Rural producers are denied access to formal markets and are forced to rely on intermediaries, who reap a disproportionate share of the value added in economic terms. Poor conditions of social infrastructure, roads, power, storage, and the like, and poor connectivity, make it impossible for rural producers to market their goods far afield. Again, the consequence of social stratification, based on caste and gender factors, adds to economic disparities (Patankarz, 2021). With these facts in mind, craft and artisan economies, richly endowed with cultural heritage, are subjected to severe stresses. Banarasi saree, Channapatna toy, and Pochampally ikat fabric producers are subject to vulnerable value chains where their specific skills are not accorded value but are subjected to homogenization and commodification by both city and global markets, resulting in commensurate returns. This has created a disincentive, worst of all, for younger generations to leave the rural crafts for city-based livelihoods, resulting in a lack of cultural continuity and rural sustainability. Here is where GIs present themselves as having the potential for transformation. When they recognize and protect the cultural and geographical uniqueness of rural products, they can reverse tendencies of exploitation. The provision of legal protection enables communities to avoid misappropriation, capture a greater value in the market, and negotiate from a position of strength. In addition, the emphasis on origin and tradition may create product niches where authenticity is valued more highly, giving new worth to rural knowledge and allowing producers to escape poverty traps (Divya & Anoop, 2018). However, it is important to say that GIs are no panacea. They by themselves cannot eliminate structural rural poverty. They should rather be placed in the context of broader developmental agendas of infrastructure expenditure, institutional capacity-building, and market-enabling measures. In the absence of integrated measures, the GIs run the risk of becoming empty tags with no developmental content. The ensuing discussion of SDGs is a good basis in which to think how GIs can be synergistically brought together with other developmental priorities.

2.2 The Socio-Economic Implications of Geographical Indications

The legal identity function of Geographical Indications (GIs) remains underutilized regarding their potential for transformation. Their true value lies in the social, cultural, and economic spheres, where they serve as levers of empowerment, agents of resilience, and vehicles of differentiation. The Indian case acts as a reminder that in selective contexts, GIs can act as drivers of value, custodians of culture, and guardians of the environment. However, this is not necessary, nor absolute. The socio-economic effects of GIs necessitate a consciously critical examination of their potential for exclusion and empowerment within the institutional and market structures in which they operate (Vandecandelaere et al., 2018). This section, hence, builds the argument from three interrelated perches. Firstly, it examines the economic levers that GIs apply to increase price premiums, improve market access, and foster brand differentiation. Secondly, it examines the sociocultural foundations of GIs in terms of their contributions to the preservation of traditional knowledge, shaping of cultural identities, and strengthening of community solidarity.

Third, it examines the environmental co-benefits of GIs, specifically their potential to promote sustainable agriculture and biodiversity conservation. In summary, the axes demonstrate that GIs can, in certain contexts, be a multidimensional tool for rural development.

2.3 Economic Levers: Price Premiums, Market Access, and Brand Differentiation

At their most basic, GIs are economic tools that price products based on geographic and cultural uniqueness. The economic value proposition of a GI is that it provides producers with a price premium by guaranteeing consumers a product's uniqueness, quality, and authenticity. In information-asymmetric markets where consumers cannot distinguish between authentic and counterfeit products, GIs serve as a certification system that reduces uncertainty and fosters a greater willingness to pay (Bramley et al., 2007).

Evidence to support this claim exists. Studies on Darjeeling tea have demonstrated that GI certification has enabled producers to charge premium prices in international markets, with estimates reaching as high as three times the price of non-GI, equivalent-grade tea (Das, 2006). Basmati rice is also a globally recognized brand, and GI protection ensures that Indian producers are safeguarded from misappropriation by foreign businesses, enabling them to derive greater export value. Economic jargon defines this as a value appropriation process whereby communities derive greater value from their produce (Agarwal & Barone, 2005).

Apart from price premiums, GIs also generate market access. Through legal recognition, producers can tap into niche markets both locally and abroad, where origin and authenticity are highly valued. This becomes particularly important in the age of globalization when consumers increasingly seek out products that carry cultural heritage as well as ecological sustainability. Thus, GIs allow rural producers to be part of global value chains not anonymous producers but branded players with differentiated identities (Banga, 2008).

The third economic imperative is brand differentiation. Amidst a product-saturated market, the ability to differentiate is the source of competitiveness. GIs provide communities with a common brand distinguishing their products from generic commodities. It is especially relevant in agrarian economies where producers struggle with commoditization of their produce. GIs reinvent market dynamics in rural producers' favor by transforming rice, tea, or silk from substitutable commodities to branded specialties (Das, 2006).

But a recognition of such limitations is necessary. First, realization of price premiums depends on efficient enforcement against free riders and counterfeiters, an Indian weakness due to its weak post-registration enforcement system. Second, due to unequal distribution of economic benefits among GI-producing communities, wherein larger producers or exporters benefit disproportionately, the economic benefits from GIs might not be equally distributed. Third, without efficient marketing and institutional support, the potential of GIs to realize international market entry may never be realized. Thus, although the economic potential of GIs is definite, its realization depends on a facilitatory environment of legal enforcement, capacity building, and equitable governance (Das, 2006).

2.4 Socio-Cultural Anchors: Sustaining Traditional Knowledge and Reinforcing Community Identity Formation

GIs derive significant socio-cultural value in addition to their economic value because they preserve modern systems of knowledge, affirm identities within the surrounding community, and strengthen social ties. In this way, they counter the converging force of globalization and foster cultural diversity. Each GI product contains a treasure of wisdom passed down from generation to generation in a traditional manner. The modes of cultivation of Darjeeling tea, the weaving of Banarasi sarees, or the toy-making techniques of Channapatna toy-makers are not utilitarian, but rather pointers to the culture. There can be no means devised for the cultivation of tea or the weaving of sarees, for instance; these are modes of living that embody accumulated wisdom, adaptability to the environment, and aesthetic sensitivity, which nobody can duplicate in a different environment or culture. A GI attempts to ward off these means of practicing knowledge and treats them as legitimate intellectual property, which is protectable by law. In this way, they authenticate the identity of the community. Nothing more is needed for an indigenous occupation to develop into a symbol of shared identity than to be felt as an investment of the community. It is not merely an economic activity, such as being a producer of Darjeeling tea or a Chanderi weaver, but the possession of a culture intimately linked with place, history, and pride. The collective property system, which forms the basis of GIs, institutionalizes this identity and preserves it in various forms within the community, rather than allowing it to slip into alien hands. At this stage, GIs serve as instruments of cultural sovereignty, enabling societies worldwide to frame their imaginations in today's global markets on their own terms.

Finally, GIs stimulate cooperative forms of organization and social solidarity. It involves the necessity of cooperation and communal management, as there must be a common level of production standards among producers in the GI area and a joint administration. This is inconsistent with the individualism of trademarks and patents, and the communal social ethos existent in most rural Indian societies. By engendering cooperative societies, self-help groups, producer associations, etc. GIs have the potential to foster social solidarity and provide a basis for marginalized groups, such as women and the Scheduled Castes, to assert their rights. However, the socio-cultural advantages of GIs are not always evident. Unless persuasive forms of government are present, GI privileges can reinforce social organizational hierarchies rather than subvert them. That is to say that in some weaving communities, the processes by which GIs are verified have been dominated by powerful producers at the expense of small artisans. Equally, the role of women, while it is vital, is often also entirely ignored in terms of the official GI government. The task is to make sure that GIs do not merely have a cultural validating stimulus, but also a social stance (Parasecoli, 2010).

3 Governance and Development Outcomes of Selected Indian GIs

The above presents the notions on which the systems of Geographical Indications (GI) are based and provides a sweeping description of their economic, socio-cultural, and environmentally interrelated aspects. The positive, idealistic value of GI must be critically examined in relation to its actual effect. With the long list of registered GIs of every sort of agricultural production, whether of field and garden products, handicrafts, and foodstuffs, of India, a good field is opened for this exercise. The Indian experience illustrates both the liberating promise and the limitations of our GI systems in supporting rural development. This part presents case studies of some of the principal GIs of India. In each case, it is pointed out how the legal position is related to the social position, the Market system, and the environment. The case studies selected Muga silk, Darjeeling Tea, Channapatna Toy, Banarasi Saree, Chanderi textiles, Kashmiri Pashmina, Basmati Rice, and Pochampally Ikat, which are characteristic of different products of different geographies and experiences. Placing these products in the socio-economic and legal environment, the case study will reveal both the success in development and the system burden that even now limits the explosive potentialities of good G.I. of India.

Muga Silk is one of Assam's defining products. It is the locus of interactions between environment, community, and economy. It is produced from the silkworm, Antheraea assamensis, which can only breed under the unique climatic conditions of Assam. It is known for its natural golden lustre and durability. The process of its production is one in which environmental wisdom, traditional technology, and cultural ceremonies converge to create a fabric that is also a symbol of Assamese identity. The grant of GI status to Muga silk in 2007 marked a landmark beginning in the conservation of this heritage. The GI affords protection in principle to knowledge holders by protecting them from reproducing and facilitating the global marketing of Muga as an upmarket fabric. Studies have shown a universal increase in awareness among both local and global markets of the GI (Deb, 2024). The GI status has also led to a new sense of community pride and cultural identity, such that the younger generation indeed views silk weaving as an environmentally friendly means of living. But serious challenges still remain. The major challenge is one of fragmentation of the value chain. The majority of producers are small-scale farmers who lack the resources to participate in certification procedures and are therefore vulnerable to exclusion. Besides, the bulk of the economic value of silk production ultimately goes into the hands of traders, rather than reaching the grassroots, where the GI essentially implies the redistribution of wealth.

Ecologically, climate variation and the destruction of forest cover have reduced the availability of both the host plants from which the silkworm is bred, and have changed, in one stroke, the entire ecological basis of Muga producers. Thus, while the GI concept has brought about symbolic legitimization, the potential for poverty alleviation is still inhibited due to prevailing systemic inequalities and ecological vulnerability. (Roy, 2019).

Darjeeling Tea was the first Indian product to gain GI status in 2004, and the most widely known Indian GI. Grown in the Himalayan foothills, Darjeeling tea is distinguished by its unique characteristics, owing to altitude, soil, and climatic factors that contribute to its renowned "muscatel" flavor. With more than 80 registered gardens, Darjeeling tea showcases the export-focused potential of GIs.

The GI has also delivered genuine economic value, particularly through international branding. Darjeeling tea is positioned to command premium prices in the European and Japanese economies, and GI protection has enabled producers to prosecute free riders abroad (Das, 2010). The Indian Tea Board has also aggressively marketed the "Darjeeling" brand, utilized certification marks and advertising campaigns, making it an exemplary case of successful GI commercialization.

But the benefits are not shared equally. Export chain-supported large plantations capture most of the benefits, with smallholder farmers typically left on the periphery. Moreover, the global demand for Darjeeling tea has ironically encouraged practices that undermine sustainability, including the overexploitation of labor and production. Evidence shows that plantation labourers continue to receive low wages and enjoy insecure working conditions, raising doubts about how far GI rewards trickle down to the poorest actors in the value chain. Thus, Darjeeling tea exemplifies the potential and contradiction of GIs: successful in global branding yet with minimal poverty reduction (Das, 2010).

The case of Channapatna Toys, wood toys produced by artisans in Karnataka, demonstrates the potential of GIs for artisanal industries beyond agriculture. Renowned for their bright lacquering and green-focused patterns, the toys have been produced for centuries using the local ivory wood and traditional techniques. GI registration in 2006 aimed to protect the craft from copying and revive the industry, which was deteriorating. The GI has generated fresh interest in toys from Channapatna. Producer associations and civil society groups have employed the GI to access new markets, such as exports to the European Union and North America, where green wood toys are highly sought after. The GI has also been blended with fair-trade considerations, thereby linking cultural heritage with ethical consumption. Even more significantly, Channapatna toy manufacturing has provided opportunities for women's self-help groups, demonstrating the gender-sensitive aspect of GIs. Yet, the turnaround is precarious. Younger generations, drawn to urban employment, continue to leave the industry, and artisans struggle to compete with inexpensive plastic toys flooding domestic markets. Potentially, even weaker enforcement against counterfeit products dilutes the integrity of the GI. The case highlights the need for situating GIs within broader developmental initiatives, such as skill development, design innovation, and marketing infrastructure (Sowmya, 2020).

Banarasi Sarees, produced in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, are among India's most symbolic weaves. Heavy zari work and fine silk are well-known characteristics of Banarasi sarees, which are integral to India's cultural and religious heritage. GI registration in 2009 attempted to prevent duplication by power-loomed sarees and protect the livelihood of thousands of weavers.

The GI has established cultural awareness and created a niche market where authenticity comes with a price. Socio-economic impacts are, however, highly contentious. Most weavers are excluded from the formal GI system because of ignorance, illiteracy, and bureaucratic barriers. The gains have gone disproportionately to the traders and exporters instead of the weavers themselves. In addition, the preservation of caste hierarchies among weavers has also widened internal inequalities, with oppressed weavers frequently being excluded from certification (Mishra, 2021).

The Banarasi case, therefore, demonstrates the GIs paradox: defending cultural identity, they may fail to redistribute economic value fairly without some institutional arrangements to empower marginalized groups.

Produced in Madhya Pradesh, Chanderi Fabric is renowned for its lightness and stunning handloom designs, which are typically interwoven with silk and cotton. The 2005 GI tag was intended to protect weavers from machine-produced imitations and facilitate the marketing of the craft both domestically and globally.

GI has assisted in brand differentiation, and as a result, Chanderi fabrics are now more familiar to urban and international consumers. Various government and NGO initiatives have integrated GI protection with skill development, tourism promotion, and e-marketing. Chanderi weaving has experienced a revival, particularly among young artisans, who are redefining traditional skills (Roy, 2023).

But, as you see in Banarasi sarees, the benefit sharing is not equal. The rich master-weavers and traders reap the lion's share of GI-related advantages, and common artisans are at the mercy of the market. The longevity of the craft is also jeopardized by the shrinking cultivation of cotton in the area, which demonstrates the interdependence of economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

Kashmiri Pashmina shawls made in Kashmir are globally renowned for their unmatched softness, which originates from the soft undercoat of the Changthangi goat, a breed raised in Ladakh. The 2008 GI registration was an attempt to counter the rampant counterfeiting, which had badly damaged the reputation of authentic Pashmina.

The GI has also restored consumer confidence in authentic Pashmina, and initiatives like the "Pashmina GI mark" have been launched for product certification. This has enabled producing areas of Kashmir to recapture high-value markets, particularly in Europe and North America. The GI has also been effective in restoring cultural pride in a product closely identified with Kashmiri culture. However, there are still formidable problems. Counterfeiting continues to be a problem, particularly in the local market, where much machine-made copying is being done. More fundamentally, the socio-political instability in Kashmir has severely disrupted supply chains and diminished the developmental potential of the GI. In addition, climate change poses a peril to the already vulnerable ecosystem of the Changthang plateau, on which the livestock that supports Pashmina production may no longer be a viable form of production. Hence, while the GI confers a symbolic legitimization, its functional effectiveness is undermined by structural and ecological vulnerabilities (Wani, 2013).

Basmati rice, cultivated in the Indo-Gangetic plains, which is India's best-known GI. Famous for its smell, long grain, and soft texture, Basmati has become a central focus of highly visible and politically divisive litigation in cases of misappropriation from international companies. The GI registration of 2016 has brought protection into the frame, giving Indian farmers a means of countering unfair trading practices in international markets. The economic impact of such developments has been monumental. The impact of Basmati rice exports as a significant earner of foreign exchange for India is beyond question, and the GI tag has enabled its growers to extract significantly premium prices in markets such as Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Again, the successful litigation involving misappropriation in particular cases, such as those involving disputes with United States-based companies to trademark "Basmati," suggests how effectively GIs can serve to protect national economic interests. However, the benefits are not equally distributed. The big exporters and agribusiness companies are making extraordinarily unfair profits, while the small farmers find it difficult to supplement themselves into the value chains and certification systems. Additionally, in terms of environmental sustainability, the cultivation of Basmati is endangered, with the long-term depletion of water tables in the states of Punjab and Haryana. The case of Basmati is thus exemplary of the global possibilities of GIs but also illustrative of domestic inequalities that can arise in the value chains involved (Prasanna & Reddy, 2025).

Another pioneering illustration of GI registration in the handloom industry is Pochampally Ikat from Telangana. The GI was registered in 2004 and was a part of a larger project, which was undertaken to protect weavers from imitation of their products by power looms and market the craft in India and abroad.

The GI has by now borne positive fruit. It has created market awareness, created new consumer demand, and facilitated the entry of Pochampally products into global design markets. NGOs and cooperatives have marketed Pochampally ikat as a cultural product and an ethical product, thereby linking GIs with fair trade (Ojah et al., 2021).

Concerns can also be raised. It is seldom that weavers are aware of the GI or have the means to undergo certification. The market penetration is still hindered by low-cost fakes, and there are also serious concerns about the environmental sustainability of cotton farming. Like all handloom goods, the success of Pochampally ikat also depends on other enabling conditions, such as design innovation, marketing infrastructure, and capacity building.

3.1 Geographical Indications and Rural Development:

This link between GIs and rural development, it must be argued, should be set out in a comprehensive framework that encompasses law, economics, and sociology. GIs, while still located in the framework of intellectual property rights, have a meaning and significance greater than that of a legal concept. For rural India, they become the instruments by which economic viability can be brought into play, social unity promoted, and cultural continuity maintained. It will be argued in this paper that GIs, if properly exploited, can become an important instrument in the operation of rural transformation, which can bring the benefits of globalization to the doorstep of those who exist within the poverty-stricken agrarianism of the rural community and shop floor artisans of the many traditional crafts and products available today.

Rural development, by necessity, encompasses growth in all its aspects: economic growth, infrastructure development, social empowerment, and environmental sustainability. In India, where two-thirds of the population lives in rural areas, care and attention must be applied in development strategies, particularly for rural populations, whose economies are closely tied to traditional knowledge systems and local resource endowments. In this framework the GIs become important in that they take these products to another plane, a quality above and beyond that of commodities themselves for the products such as Darjeeling tea, cloth of Chanderi or the Pochampally ikat emerges as products loyal to tradition, loyal to culture and with them emerges the use of new ideas and methods of marketing or valuation which were not so hitherto. Economically, GIs have the meaning of a mechanism for producing price premia and protecting rural producers from exploitative middlemen. By conveying authenticity, origin, and quality, the GI label enables producers to capture a greater share of market value. This is particularly significant in India, where small-holding farmers and artisans are vulnerable to the influence of asymmetrical power relations with exporters and traders (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). GIs convey power over the bargaining position over time into the hands of producers by putting the products into a framework of a legally accepted and trading structure. Tea producers in Darjeeling have seen a growth in recognition and demand for GI-certified tea, which differentiates their product from mass-produced teas and provides consumers with greater confidence. This premiumisation provides features that enable rural households to extract higher incomes without large-scale structural changes of an industrial character, and is therefore in line with sustainable rural development paradigms (Das, 2010).

Sociologically, GIs represent instruments of collective empowerment. Unlike trademarks, which are owned by individual companies, they are rights among groups of producers. This collectivism has two important implications for rural development. Initially, it forces farmers to coalesce, cooperate, and negotiate common standards, which leads to the formation of groups that operate cooperatively in otherwise fragmented rural economies. Then, it creates a sense of pride and identity with their differing culture, and this sense of solidarity is strengthened. When rural communities come to realize that their own abilities and culture have not only survival value but are a marketable commodity in the international economy, the psychological aspects of empowerment are accentuated. This aspect is usually overlooked in analyses of economic matters but lies at the very heart of the sociology of development. Geographical indications do not overlook the gender characteristics of rural development. Most Indian craft skills, such as handloom weaving and Channapatna lacquer-turnery, are traditionally women-oriented. The formal protection of the abilities that have been initiated by GIs brings in additional income and highlights the economic effectiveness of the women. There is virtually a positive bias to achieve greater gender equity. The latter, in turn, leads to a cascade of benefits for households, child education, and community coping. When livelihoods based on GIs are related to Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality), it becomes possible to see how IP protection extends beyond its legal confines to become a mechanism of social justice.

The environmental benefits are also significant. The rural economy is highly resource-dependent, and unsustainable processes may lead to livelihood degradation and biodiversity loss. Geographical Indications (GIs), which emphasize the traditional processes inherent in a particular local ecosystem, tend to incorporate environmentally sustainable practices. For example, basmati rice cultivation in the foothills of the Himalayas involves water-saving practices well adapted to the terrain, and Muga silk cultivation in Assam relies on synergistic relationships with native tree species. Legal protection of such production systems motivates rural communities to retain rather than lose them, thus promoting sustainable rural ecosystems. Therefore, GIs are also aligned with

Sustainable Development Goal 15 (Life on Land) and Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

But believing that GIs automatically result in rural development would be false. The potential for transformation of the GIs has to be channeled through institutional and policy mechanisms. Registration does not necessarily ensure better livelihoods; the key is the presence of concurrent enforcement mechanisms, capacity building, and market linkages. Most GIs in India are not being exploited because producer groups are unaware, government agencies are not enforcing regulations, and market channels in rural areas are underdeveloped. Rural development based on GIs is thus best conceived as a contingent process rather than an automatic result of legal registration, one that requires integrated governance approaches combining law with social and economic policy (Tanweer, 2024).

A second issue is the tension between globalization and localization. While on the one hand, GIs serve as instruments to embed rural products in global value chains through the use of cultural distinctiveness, on the other hand, they enable localization through value creation in specific places and societies. The necessity of balancing this tension is apparent. While GI products are excessively commercialized and commodified for export markets worldwide, the community loses control over production systems and the authenticity that has been deemed sufficient to justify GI protection. On the other hand, if the producers become too inward-looking, they risk exclusion from the growing international markets. Accordingly, the balance of strategies devised for effective rural development must strike a balance between these two objectives, allowing for both market growth and the preservation of culture (Mishra, (2022).

The Indian constitutional tradition, particularly its emphasis on rural development and social justice, provides an ideal framework for interpreting GIs as development tools. Certainly, Article 43 of the Directive Principles of State Policy enjoins the State to take the development of cottage industries seriously, either on an individual or co-operative basis, in rural areas. It is true that GIs were not specifically envisaged in the drafting of the Constitution, but the functional role of GIs is consistent with these constitutional directives. A jurisprudential interpretation of GIs permits them to be placed within the broader context of Indian development, encompassing not only economic development but also distributive justice and cultural preservation (Addor & Grazioli, 2002)

In short, the GIs have tremendous potential as instruments of rural development in India, serving as economic levers, sociological anchors, and ecological buffers. Their capacity to push the value down to the weakest sections, to empower women, to promote biodiversity, and protect cultural identity has placed them in the interstices among law, economics, and sociology. There is nothing auto-actualizing about this potential (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). What are the critical institutions that backstop them, the enforcement mechanisms in place, and the extent to which there is policy intrusion? The GIs in the Indian countryside, therefore, must be visualized not merely as proxies for intellectual property, but as points of a developmental matrix that has the capacity to bridge the chasm between tradition and modernity, between local communities and global markets, and ultimately between poverty and prosperity.

4 Obstacle to the development of GI

The promise of geographical indication development in India, articulated in earlier chapters as a convergence of legal recognition, economic valorisation, and socio-cultural stewardship, encounters a sequence of deep-seated and recursively constitutive constraints. These impediments emerge at various stages in the life cycle of a GI, from the gestational phase of identification and registration to the routine tasks of post-grant administration, market intermediation, quality control, and enforcement (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). They are juridical and extra-juridical in origin; some are a function of the design of Indian GI law and procedure, while others stem from the political economy of rural production, the sociology of collective action, the informational asymmetries of modern markets, and climate-induced ecological instability. The analytic task is therefore to disaggregate these impediments without losing sight of their systemic entwinement. This chapter addresses pre-registration impediments first, followed by post-registration governance and enforcement shortcomings. Next, the analysis sequesters the discrete issues of free riding and consumer deception, the chronic inadequacy of producer and consumer awareness, the climate volatility-induced destabilization of terroir-based claims, and the chronic under-provision of financial resources. The argument that emerges is cumulative and normative; the efficacy of GIs as tools for poverty alleviation and rural resilience will hinge on institutional redesign to minimize transaction costs, build equitable producer governance, embed ecological protections, and align legal enforcement with the market realities of the digital age and global value chains**.**

4.1 Pre-Registration Status of Geographical Indication

Pre-registration barriers are best described in the idiom of transaction cost economics and collective action sociology. Even if the Indian Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, establishes an open-access sui generis regime, the process of transitioning from community aspiration to formal registration remains costly in terms of information, organization, and finances. Applications involve boundary delimitation of the geographical area, documentation of historical proof of reputation for quality, specification codification of the product, and proposed mechanisms of inspection. Each of these involves assumptions beyond the capabilities of many rural producer groups. Proofs of historical reputation through archival research, technical dossiers to document process standards, and drafting governance bylaws for producer associations require legal counsel, scientific expertise, and administrative coordination, which are often unavailable in peripheral regions. In practice, these deficits make way for the introduction of external intermediaries, such as traders, exporters, NGOs, and consultants, to undertake the registration process (Das, 2010). While intermediation may be beneficial, it has a tendency to introduce asymmetries of control which foreshadow subsequent inequities of value capture (Agrawal & Baronets, 2016).

Collective action theory also explains why compiling a representative sample of applicants is challenging. In the GI context, the benefits of registration authenticity signalling, legal exclusivity, and potential premiums are non-excludable within the given territory once acquired, while a subset of active organizers incurs the costs of summoning meetings, drawing specifications, and hiring counsel. Free-riding thus reigns even before the GI is registered, in the guise of participation deficits and strategic abstention (Agrawal et al., 2014). In addition, intra-community hierarchies of caste, gender, and occupation can prevent the selection of a representative sample of applicants. In producer associations controlled by traditional elites, marginalized artisan women in clustering of weavers, smallholder growers of tea or rice may be under-represented, and the distributive legitimacy of the resulting GI is undermined.

The second pre-registration barrier is the epistemic translation required by law. As outlined above, the terroir concept interweaves ecological and cultural threads in a complex web. Law requires a categorical form, including discrete lines on a map, enumerated production processes, and measurable quality parameters (Chakrabarti, 2021). This translation is technical, yet it can reinscribe power. Heterogeneous production cultures in villages or sub-castes can be reduced to one "official" practice of ruling groups. Unintentionally, the specification document can delete rich micro-traditions and constrain future innovation by inscribing a narrow orthodoxy. The paradox is thus sharp: communities are compelled to stabilize and textualize their living practices in order to seek legal protection, but this stabilization can calcify into exclusion and path dependence (Banga, 2016).

Finally, physical and temporal distance from administrative centres contribute to these obstacles. The Registry is remote from most producing areas, plans are indistinct, and the level of resistance may be intimidating to unaccustomed groups. The aggregate result is a high cost of joining the GI system. This is feasible for prosperous export-oriented enclaves but impossible for poor communities, leading precisely to the kind of "adverse selection" a development-oriented GI policy would be keen to eliminate.

4.2 Post Registration Status of GI

Registration is initiation, not conclusion. Post-grant entails an infrastructure of quality control, registered user registration, internal grievance redressal, marketing, and enforcement. Institutional frictions are also high here. The Indian system makes the distinction between the registered proprietor, usually an association of producers or a public body, and "authorized users," individual producers who are conferred the right to use the GI. Enrolling a large, heterogeneous body of actual producers into formally authorized users entails verification procedures, periodic renewals, and record-keeping

(Chakrabarti, 2021). Lacking an enabling bureaucracy at the local level, the role of authorized users remains narrow, subjecting governance to capture by large estates, master weavers, or export houses, and excluding itinerant or home-based workers whose contributions are indispensable but easily made invisible.

Quality control poses a second, and notionally dubious, challenge. GI value depends on sound assurance that the product meets codified standards. A successful inspection agency must therefore be in place with the powers to audit, certify, and enforce compliance. However, the expense of laboratory analysis, field testing, and recurrent audits is high compared to the margin received by small producers (Manchikanti, 2022). If funded by compulsory fees, compliance is regressive; if subsidized by the government, inspection is at risk of discretionary budget and administrative caprice. The politics of inspection thus vacillates between under-enforcement, which derails the GIs quality signal, and over-zealous enforcement, which criminalizes artisanal freedom and discourages entry (Banga, 2016). A proportionate regime that enforces key quality attributes while excusing benign artisanal variation requires both technical capacity and social legitimacy.

Marketing and stewardship of the brand introduce a third order of complexity. A GI is not an independent brand. It needs to be established and defended through communication that demonstrates and upholds provenance, process, and ethics, so that consumers perceive the mark above the noise of rival claims. This requires coordination with trade associations, diplomatic representations, and retail partners in export markets, as well as the education and mobilization of urban cultural intermediaries, designers, chefs, and influencers who can translate rural heritage into contemporary tastes in home markets. Producer associations are rarely endowed with such capacities ex ante. In the absence of professionalized stewardship of the brand, the GI serves as a legal marker whose economic value remains unrealized.

The final post-registration barrier is remedial fragmentation. Indian law provides civil and criminal remedies against GI infringement and passing off; however, these remedies are often expensive and time-consuming to institute. Strategic litigation is often beyond the means of small producers, and public authorities typically lack the budgets for ongoing action in multiple jurisdictions. Administrative coordination with food safety regulators, metrology offices, and e-commerce intermediaries is patchy

(Buch & Trivedi, 2023). Border controls are the essential requirement to police imports of Indian GIs or exports pretending to be such abroad, which depend on specialist co-operation with patchily available customs. The consequence is a chronic "remedies gap": the formal right is present, but the effective power to enforce it is fitful.

4.3 Freeriding Effect under GI

Freeriding has various forms in real and virtual markets. Conventional counterfeiting is, on one end, misbranded products masquerading as Darjeeling tea, Basmati rice, or Pashmina shawls. At the other end is less blatant parasitism: taking advantage of confusingly similar descriptors ("Darjeeling-like," "Banarsi style"), utilizing geographic names as generic adjectives, and brand strategies that benefit from the cultural cachet of a place without satisfying GI requirements. Online trade increases these threats by lowering barriers to entry for fraudulent sellers, dispersing jurisdiction, and dulling the salience of haptic quality cues that consumers would otherwise base their choices on in physical markets (Das, 2010).

Economically, freeriding erodes the premium price underpinning GI-based livelihoods, eroding consumer confidence and undermining the quality-signalling function that confers a competitive advantage on GIs (Buch, 2022). Legally, it drives trademark doctrines into territory where collective rights, homonymous indications, and terroir-based claims introduce complexity. Thus, the distinction between lawful comparative speech and evocation enough to sustain an action is notoriously difficult to enforce. Where courts require proof of confusion on standards set to trademarks, GI owners face evidentiary difficulties unsuited to collective goods. By contrast, generous interpretations of evocation risk chilling legitimate descriptive use and curtailing competitive speech.

The issue of genericide is most acute in multinational markets. Terms like "pashmina" or "banarsi" can take on colloquial generic meaning, unmoored from a legally defined area and process. Once it becomes common usage, generic usage serves as a shield for free riders and a hindrance to enforcement. Preventing genericide is an administrative as well as legal task, requiring continuous consumer education, aggressive brand management, and concerted effort on packaging control and retail description. In the absence of such ancillary controls, litigation alone will not stem semantic drift (Zapata, 2009).

Around the world, freeriding coexists with the geopolitics of intellectual property. Indian GIs are most commonly prey to misappropriation abroad in countries with multiple levels of protection, different standards of "evocation," and different administrative capabilities. Bilateral regimes and mutual recognition systems offer stopgap measures, but at the cost of diplomatic bandwidth and ongoing follow-up that are not typically within the capabilities of most producer groups. Without a robust multilateral register with presumptive value, a goal that has languished at the WTO, the transnational policing burden falls on the weakest links in the chain.

4.4 Awareness

The premise of fair participation and enforcement is awareness. Knowledge gaps exist on both the demand and supply sides. For producers, the majority have only a surface-level awareness of what registration entails, who is an authorized user, how to document compliance, and what recourse is available against abuse (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). The result is under-enrollment of eligible producers, skewed quality compliance, and dismal mobilization in the event of infringement. Sociologically, these knowledge gaps reflect exclusionary modalities: home-based women artisans, subordinated caste members, and migrant workers are least likely to be covered by formal training schemes and least able to deal with paperwork, charges, and trips to distant offices.

On the consumer side, consciousness is a form of semiotics. The GI tag must mean something beyond the place of origin, implying quality that can be traced, ethical production, and cultural integrity. Where consumers are not aware of the meaning of the GI logo, they use it as decoration, rather than a certification, tending to prioritize price over provenance. City retail spaces are filled with labels, organic, handmade, fair trade, vying for moral attention (Buch & Trivedi, 2023). In such a crowded market, the GI can be another mark without meaning if consistent stories and genuine traceability do not underpin it.

The architecture of contemporary online platforms compounds these gaps in information. Price filters and search terms are more popular with online marketplaces than provenance filters. Until platform architectures are redesigned to support origin signals, consumers are required to work harder to find and verify GI-compliant products. Producers are not yet tech-savvy enough to maximize listings, utilize authentication tools, or remove counterfeit listings. Awareness is not just an educational question but about institutional design at state agencies, civil society intermediaries, and private platforms.

GIs are particularly susceptible to climatic variability because the legal case of distinctness relies upon the ecological norms of terroir. Shifting precipitation regimes, more frequent extreme weather events, and temperature change can remake soil chemistry, pest pressures, flowering dates, and harvest windows. For teas grown at high altitudes, moderate warming can mute the delicate flavor profiles upon which their reputation rests; for silks reliant on native host trees, fluctuations in rain regimes can destabilize moth populations; for saffron grown within narrow agro-climatic ranges, heatwaves or premature rains can destroy yields. In all instances, ecological deviation threatens livelihood as much as the epistemic basis of the GI its claim that quality is "essentially attributable" to place (Cardoso, 2022).

The law is not well-suited to metabolize such non-stationarity. Specifications on registration capture past practice under past conditions. With the buildup of climatic impacts, compliance with them may become excessively expensive or ecologically irrational. Producers are presented with a trilemma: stay dogmatically and risk crop loss or quality degradation; adapt their practice and risk non-compliance; or leave the GI and lose the premium. None of these is development friendly. Normatively, GI regulation must thus shift in the direction of adaptive management, with science-informed, inclusive, and ecologically rational mechanisms to re-specify. Mechanisms need to be able to sort out changes, preserving the spirit of terroir, as measured by sensory profiles, biodiversity indices, and cultural continuity, from changes that disembody the product from its place.

Climate change also reconfigures spatial equity. As agro-climatic zones shift, formerly marginal areas may become productive for production once confined to core GI areas. Law is confronted with a fine balance: whether to maintain fixed boundaries as a barrier for incumbent groups or to open boundaries in recognition of new climatic conditions. Both alternatives have distributive consequences. A rigid boundary protects incumbents but may render the GI economically unviable; an open boundary may undermine scarcity and incapacitate incumbents' ability to capitalize on premiums. Only a governance regime that values inter-generational equity, embedding present livelihoods in the integrity of future terroirs, can resolve these tensions.

Lastly, the climatic barrier is inextricably linked with finance and knowledge. Adaptation of agro-forestry for shade, water harvesting, heat-tolerant varietal trials, and integrated pest management entails expenditure and scientific collaboration. Rural GI communities tend to lack both (Besky, 2014). In the absence of institutional bridges to agronomic research stations, meteorological services, and credit lines reserved for climate adaptation, the ecological essence of Indian GIs stands in danger of progressive erosion.

5 Conclusion

The analysis conducted throughout this study has attempted to critically evaluate the role of Geographical Indications (GIs) in the Indian legal framework and their broader implications for rural development, poverty reduction, and cultural heritage. Far from being a secondary intellectual property right, GIs occupy a unique position at the intersection of law, economics, sociology, and political science. They are at once tools of commercial technique, signifiers of cultural identity, and sites of struggle over distributive justice. The concluding section below serves not so much to reiterate previously made arguments, but rather to place the above analysis within a wider interdisciplinary framework, thus providing an integrative evaluation of GIs as legal, economic, and social constructions in post-colonial India.

At the most basic doctrinal level, GIs are a legal recognition of the bond between a product and the area in which it is made. The Indian legal regime, shaped by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, attempted to align national practice with the TRIPS requirements. However, the very act of legal codification raises profound theoretical questions regarding the transposition of living traditions, artisanal expertise, and local knowledge into the realm of legal protection. While TRIPS situates GIs within the intellectual property paradigm as a whole, and thus focuses on exclusivity and market differentiation, it has been claimed by critical legal theorists that the character of collective cultural heritage is skewed by the internalized contradiction of subjecting it to the logic of proprietary rights. This tension between commodification and the protection of culture has been central to the Indian experience with GIs, part of wider global debates about the purposes and limits of intellectual property law. There are generally strong economic defences of GIs as rural developmental agents. By requiring premium pricing for products known specifically for their point of origin, they are supposed to give higher income to local producers, engender an entrepreneurial spirit in the rural sector, and invite access to lucrative export markets. Darjeeling teas, basmati rice, Pochampally ikat, and Chanderi are but samples of how GIs can brand produce as being internationally known brands. The economics of information are at the heart of the case here: asymmetrically informed consumers on quality are willing to part with more of their money if good signals (like GI certification) can cut through the fog of uncertainty. The economic potentialities of GIs are, however, highly uneven. The empirical studies indicate that while only a few Indian GIs are ruling the market, most have little commercial significance in the larger economy. The difference is structural: a lack of marketing infrastructure, producer ignorance, inadequate state encouragement of effective enforcement, and ineffective institutions for collective action. Economists have also warned of the "rent capture problem," where large, elite producers or middlemen capture disproportionate amounts of the rents from GI recognition, with little benefit extending to small-scale cultivators, artisans, and female workers. Hence, the economic dimension of GIs cannot be viewed in isolation from a political economy, norms of distributive justice, and relative power.

From a sociological perspective, GIs are a complex interaction of modernity, tradition, and identity. They objectivise collective knowledge and practices, thereby protecting cultural heritage from the onslaught of globalisation. The significance of a Banarasi sari or Kanchipuram silk lies more in the symbolic value of the centuries-old collaborative knowledge, rituals, and art of the community than in the material value of the product itself. Thus, GIs represent indices of cultural capital that strengthen community pride and identity in local traditions. However, sociology reminds us that communities do not constitute homogeneous wholes, but are rather horizontal aggregates that are stratified by class, caste, gender, and access to resources. It is possible, therefore, that the supposed benefits of GIs could strengthen the existing hierarchies within the same community, rather than erasing them. For instance, male master-weaver producers may gain visibility on a GIs basis and economic advantages, while women and apprentices who perform equally necessary but non-recognised tasks are outside the ambit of decision-making. A sociologically conscious examination of GIs must therefore raise itself to the plane of these inequalities and question them, since preservation of culture contributed to by law can support not only empowerment but also forms of domination. The political dimension of GIs extends beyond the scope of national legislation to encompass international negotiations and cultural diplomacy. For India, GIs are instruments of conscience in establishing sovereignty over India's agricultural and cultural heritage in a globalizing milieu. The struggle between Pakistan and India over Basmati, as well as the patents on turmeric and neem in Western courts, highlights the geopolitical factors involved in preserving traditional knowledge from misappropriation.

In promoting GIs, India positions itself as a guardian of cultural heritage and champion of Global South interests against neo-colonial appropriations of indigenous knowledge. At the same time, the state's use of GIs reveals internal political decisions, including which products to protect, which societies to benefit, and how to balance national branding against regional empowerment. Thus, GIs are as much a tool of the politics of recognition as they are of the politics of redistribution. The normative concern, then, is not whether GIs are good, but rather how the legal and institutional framework of GIs can be reshaped to maximize inclusivity and justice. Juridically, the Indian GI Act can be purposively interpreted to be in line with the Directive Principles of State Policy, which enjoin the State to promote social justice, equitable distribution of economic resources, and cultural heritage. Such an interpretation would transcend a property-right paradigm and instead see GIs as tools of constitutional welfare. Law, here, must not merely protect heritage as a static good but must enable heritage to dynamically operate as a lever of empowerment, of livelihood security, of cultural resilience. This would require participatory governance arrangements in which excluded producers, including women and smallholders, are not passive recipients but active stakeholders in decision-making.

It is also important to consider the interaction of GIs with sustainability. The kinds of agricultural processes that go into GI products, such as organic tea production in

Darjeeling, for instance, or the traditional production of rice in Kerala, are almost invariably ecologically sustainable. By highlighting these agricultural processes, GIs can also contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and climate resilience. At the same time, GI products are fundamentally threatened by climate change, as they are altered by the changes in the underlying ecological conditions that yield their uniqueness. Legal structures must therefore supply responses that assist in the navigation of the round of changes to climate, ecology, and cultural heritage, and this necessitates a knowing release of the old fixed concept of GIs as bound to a territory with a concept as dynamic as to changing ecological realities, but without sacrificing the rights of those in the community. It is clear from the intertwining of these legal, economic, sociological, and political threads that the transformational power of GIs in the Indian scenario is conditional and fragile. Recognition under the GI Act does not necessarily mean empowerment or poverty alleviation. It refers to a legal basis of efficacy whose developmental impact is contingent upon the structure of the institutions involved, the governmental attitudes seeking to utilize the Act, and the broader socio-economic context. The danger is that GIs are to be reduced to veritable symbolic points of heritage background with no reality distribution of wealth or rent-shifting appreciation. To avoid this danger, it is necessary to consider the totality of the strategy as it were. For they will involve streamlining registration avenues, improving facilitation for small producers, pursuing legal action against counterfeiting, mainstreaming GIs into national rural development and trade policy, and fostering international cooperation for the transnational recognition of GIs. Ultimately, it must be framed within a participatory governance process committed to equity, gender sensitivity, and sustainability. Finally, the entire phenomenon of GI, as seen in India, needs to be viewed as an international endeavour to grapple with the Commons of the area of GI as a balancing act in the field of intellectual property and social justice. In this respect, trademarks and patents facilitate individual invention, while GIs support collective knowledge, place-based knowledge, and the wisdom passed down through generations. Such use is antiliberal in respect of property, as it acknowledges that value may not originate from the individual's mind but rather is derived from the collective cultural consciousness. It is challenging to navigate intellectual property, but such an interpretation invites rethinking the purpose of intellectual property law - as a means to an end of exclusivity rather than a means to inclusive development and cultural vitality. To summarize, the GI experience in India remains an unfinished project. It holds out the possibility of placing the cultural heritage of the people in a form and manner of the tool of capitalistic energy empowerment, but it can also tip over into a privilege of the elite, into disempowerment of people, into commodification of culture, and hence, among other things, into privations of lack of use of products. Success or failure depends therefore not so much on documentation with laws as on the institutions or the population or the government to make lots of other things work with laws in an applicable nature which means that laws to be just economy and so, to make those things work, and culture has to come back into the picture in relation to the conveniences of the definition of sustainability. If this is so, the development of GIs is but a magnified picture of the challenge of reconciling modern developments of intellectual property so as to give an effective, balanced individual right with the challenges presented by globalization as opposed to local justice in their value systems, and transforming the memory of culture materially into an instrument for human development, meaning the development is inclusive.

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