

GI Tag: Creating Viksit Bharat

This article deliberates on the emergence of Geographical Indications (GIs) as a vital instrument for protecting the authenticity of India's diverse array of traditional products. This article delves into the significance of GIs in India's developmental trajectory, particularly in the context of *Viksit Bharat@2047*, and underscores the indispensable role of Company Secretaries in this ecosystem.



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INTRODUCTION

India's rich tapestry of cultural heritage is mirrored in its diverse array of traditional products, each bearing unique characteristics linked to its geographical origin. From the intricate handlooms of Kanchipuram to the aromatic spices of Kerala, these products not only represent regional identities but also embody centuries of artisanal expertise. However, the advent of globalization has posed challenges, including the proliferation of counterfeit goods and the erosion of traditional knowledge.

In this context, **Geographical Indications (GIs)** emerge as a vital instrument for protecting the authenticity of these products, ensuring fair trade, and promoting sustainable development. GIs serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, offering a pathway to economic empowerment while preserving cultural heritage. The role of **Company Secretaries** becomes crucial in this framework, as they navigate the legal, regulatory, and strategic landscapes to facilitate the effective utilization of GIs.

This article delves into the significance of GIs in India's developmental trajectory, particularly in the context of *Viksit Bharat@2047*, and underscores the indispensable role of Company Secretaries in this ecosystem.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR GI PROTECTION IN INDIA

1. Evolution and International Obligations

The concept of GIs is rooted in international intellectual property law, particularly under the **Trade-Related**

Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, which India, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), is obligated to adhere to. The TRIPS Agreement mandates the protection of GIs to prevent unfair competition and ensure that consumers are not misled about the origin of goods.

In alignment with these international obligations, India enacted the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**, which came into force on 15th September 2003. This Act provides a legal framework for the registration and protection of GIs, ensuring that products with unique geographical characteristics are safeguarded against misuse and misrepresentation.

2. The Geographical Indications Act, 1999

The Act defines GIs as indications that identify goods as originating from a specific territory, where a given quality, reputation, or other characteristic of the goods is essentially attributable to their geographical origin. It establishes the **Geographical Indications Registry**, located in Chennai, under the administration of the **Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks (CGPDTM)**.

The registration process involves the submission of an application by an association of persons or producers, detailing the unique qualities of the product and its link to the geographical area. Upon successful registration, the GI is protected under the Act, granting exclusive rights to the registered users and preventing unauthorized use by others.

3. Institutional Framework

The **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, oversees the implementation of the GI Act. It collaborates with various stakeholders, including state governments, industry bodies, and producer associations, to promote and protect GIs.

State-level institutions play a pivotal role in facilitating the registration process, providing training to producers, and ensuring compliance with quality standards. Additionally, initiatives like the **One District One Product (ODOP)** scheme aim to promote GI products by integrating them into the broader economic framework.

4. Interface with Other Intellectual Property Regimes

GIs complement other forms of intellectual property protection, such as trademarks and patents. While trademarks protect brand names and logos, GIs safeguard the collective reputation of a product linked to its geographical origin. The interplay between these regimes ensures comprehensive protection for products, fostering innovation while preserving traditional knowledge.

5. Enforcement Mechanisms

Effective enforcement of GI rights is essential to prevent infringement and misuse. The GI Act provides for civil and criminal remedies, including injunctions and penalties, to address violations. Customs authorities are also empowered to prevent the importation of counterfeit goods bearing false GI claims.

Technological advancements, such as blockchain and QR codes, are being explored to enhance traceability and authenticity, thereby strengthening enforcement mechanisms.

3. Market Access and Export Potential

GIs enhance the marketability of products by certifying their authenticity and quality. This certification builds consumer trust and opens avenues for both domestic and international markets. GI products often command higher prices, contributing to increased revenue for producers.

The **Mysore Silk** GI, for example, has facilitated the export of silk products to international markets, boosting the local economy and promoting cultural exchange. Similarly, the **Alphonso Mango** GI has expanded the reach of Indian mangoes, establishing them as a premium product globally.

4. Empowering MSMEs and Women Entrepreneurs

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in the GI ecosystem by adding value to raw materials and creating finished products. GIs provide MSMEs with the recognition and protection needed to compete in the market, thereby fostering entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurs, particularly in rural areas, leverage GI recognition to establish and expand their businesses. By accessing training, financial resources, and market linkages, they contribute to the economic development of their communities.

5. Regional Branding and Tourism

GIs contribute to regional branding by associating products with their geographical origin, thereby enhancing the identity and reputation of the region. This branding attracts tourists, who are interested in experiencing authentic local products and traditions. The **Pondicherry Coir** GI has promoted eco-tourism by highlighting the traditional coir products of the region, leading to increased tourist footfall and economic benefits for local communities.

6. Sustainable and Ethical Growth

GI-linked production systems often emphasize sustainable agricultural practices, ethical labour standards, and environmental conservation. By adhering to traditional methods and promoting biodiversity, GI products contribute to the preservation of ecosystems and cultural landscapes. The **Kashmir Pashmina** GI, for instance, supports sustainable grazing practices and the conservation of the Changthangi goat, ensuring the long-term viability of the industry and the protection of natural resources.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF GIs IN INDIA

1. GI as a Driver of Inclusive Growth

GIs serve as a catalyst for inclusive economic development by empowering rural communities and marginalized groups. By linking products to their geographical origin, GIs create opportunities for producers to access wider markets, command premium prices, and achieve economic sustainability.

For instance, the **Darjeeling Tea** GI has enabled small-scale tea growers to collectively market their produce, ensuring fair trade and improved livelihoods. Similarly, the **Kullu Shawl** GI has provided artisans with a platform to showcase their craftsmanship, leading to enhanced income and socio-economic upliftment.

Central institutions, such as the DPIIT, CGPD TM, and APEDA, play a crucial role in the GI ecosystem by formulating policies, providing technical assistance, and facilitating market access.

2. Rural Employment and Livelihood Generation

The GI framework contributes to rural employment by fostering the growth of local industries and value chains. It encourages the establishment of processing units, quality control mechanisms, and marketing networks, thereby creating jobs and reducing migration to urban areas.

Women and indigenous communities, in particular, benefit from GI initiatives, as they often possess traditional knowledge and skills that are integral to the production of GI products. By recognizing and valuing their contributions, GIs promote gender equity and social inclusion.

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION THROUGH GIs

1. Heritage as an Economic Asset

GIs transform cultural heritage into economic assets by recognizing and protecting traditional knowledge and practices. This recognition not only preserves cultural identities but also provides communities with the means to sustain their heritage through economic activities. The **Madhubani Paintings** GI has enabled artists to gain recognition for their unique art form, leading to increased demand and appreciation, while preserving the traditional painting techniques.

2. Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage

GIs play a pivotal role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional craftsmanship, rituals, and knowledge systems. By linking these elements to specific products, GIs ensure that cultural practices are maintained and transmitted to future generations. The **Kangra Paintings** GI has facilitated the preservation of traditional painting styles, promoting cultural continuity and artistic expression.

3. GI and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

GIs recognize and protect indigenous knowledge systems that are integral to the production of traditional goods. This recognition empowers indigenous communities by validating their knowledge and practices, leading to greater autonomy and self-determination. The **Bamboo Craft of Assam** GI acknowledges the indigenous techniques used in bamboo weaving, promoting cultural pride and economic development.

4. Reviving Traditional Industries

GIs contribute to the revival of traditional industries that may otherwise face extinction due to modernization and changing market dynamics. By providing legal protection and market access, GIs encourage the continuation and growth of these industries. The **Bidriware** GI has revitalized the traditional metalwork industry in Karnataka, leading to increased production, innovation, and global recognition.

5. GI as a Tool for Cultural Diplomacy and Nation Branding

GIs serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy by showcasing India's rich heritage to the world. They enhance the country's image, promote cultural exchange, and foster international relations. The **Tanjore Paintings** GI has

introduced the unique art form to global audiences, fostering appreciation and collaboration across cultures.

6. Integration with Tourism and Creative Economy

GIs are increasingly integrated into tourism and the creative economy, offering tourists authentic cultural experiences and supporting creative industries. This integration enhances the economic value of cultural assets and promotes sustainable tourism.

The **Kutch Embroidery** GI has attracted tourists interested in traditional crafts, leading to the development of craft villages and cultural tourism circuits.

7. Protection Against Cultural Dilution

GIs protect cultural expressions from dilution and misrepresentation by ensuring that only authentic products bearing the GI label are marketed. This protection maintains the integrity and value of cultural heritage.

The **Kashmir Shawl** GI prevents the sale of counterfeit products, preserving the reputation and authenticity of traditional Kashmiri shawls.

8. Community Empowerment

GIs empower communities by recognizing their traditional knowledge and practices, providing them with economic opportunities, and fostering social cohesion. Community participation in GI initiatives leads to collective action and shared benefits. The **Coorg Orange** GI has united local farmers in preserving traditional cultivation methods, leading to improved yields and community development.

GI ECOSYSTEM AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT IN INDIA

1. Role of Central Institutions

Central institutions, such as the DPIIT, CGPDITM, and APEDA, play a crucial role in the GI ecosystem by formulating policies, providing technical assistance, and facilitating market access. These institutions collaborate with state governments, industry bodies, and producer associations to promote and protect GIs.

2. Role of State Governments

State governments are instrumental in implementing GI-related initiatives at the grassroots level. They facilitate the registration process, provide training to producers, and ensure compliance with quality standards. State-level institutions also play a pivotal role in promoting GI products through various schemes and programs.

3. Integration with National Initiatives

India's national initiatives, such as One District One Product (ODOP) and Vocal for Local, provide platforms for the promotion of GI products. These initiatives aim to create sustainable livelihoods, boost local economies, and enhance India's global trade footprint. Company Secretaries play a critical role in ensuring that businesses and producer groups align with these initiatives. They facilitate strategic planning, governance compliance, and financial reporting, ensuring that GI-related projects are legally compliant and economically viable. Company Secretaries also act as liaisons between government agencies and producers, streamlining registration processes and monitoring the implementation of quality standards.

4. Technology and Market Linkages

The integration of technology has become a cornerstone of GI promotion. Digital marketplaces, blockchain-based traceability systems, and QR code verification enhance the authenticity of GI products while providing wider market access. Company Secretaries contribute significantly to this digital transition by ensuring adherence to regulatory requirements for e-commerce operations, advising on contractual agreements, and implementing risk management frameworks. Their role ensures that producers not only adopt technological solutions effectively but also maintain compliance with data security, export regulations, and corporate governance standards.

ROLE OF COMPANY SECRETARIES IN GI DEVELOPMENT

Company Secretaries occupy a unique position in the GI ecosystem, serving as custodians of governance, compliance, and strategic development. Their involvement spans the lifecycle of a GI product—from conceptualization and registration to marketing and enforcement.

Firstly, Company Secretaries guide producer associations and businesses through the GI registration process, ensuring accurate documentation, adherence to statutory timelines, and compliance with the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. They assist in preparing detailed product specifications, establishing production standards, and defining authorized users, which is critical for legal protection.

Secondly, Company Secretaries play a pivotal role in corporate governance and risk management. They ensure that GI-linked businesses comply with both domestic and international regulations, mitigating legal and operational risks. This includes overseeing intellectual property



rights management, anti-counterfeiting strategies, and contractual obligations with distributors and export partners.

Thirdly, Company Secretaries facilitate strategic planning and market expansion. They advise businesses on aligning GI products with national initiatives, securing funding, integrating with CSR programs, and entering global markets. Their expertise in legal, financial, and strategic matters helps producer groups scale operations while maintaining the authenticity and quality of GI products.

Moreover, Company Secretaries contribute to community engagement and social empowerment, guiding producer groups in forming cooperatives, adhering to labour standards, and establishing equitable profit-sharing mechanisms. Their role ensures that GI initiatives promote inclusivity, gender equality, and sustainable development, reflecting the broader vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

Finally, Company Secretaries act as intermediaries between government, industry, and community stakeholders, facilitating collaboration, monitoring compliance, and advising on policy interventions. By bridging the gap between regulatory requirements and practical implementation, Company Secretaries ensure that GI products achieve both economic and social objectives.

CHALLENGES IN GI PROMOTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CS INTERVENTION

Despite the proven benefits of GI protection, several challenges hinder its widespread adoption. Low awareness among producers, fragmented markets, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and the prevalence of counterfeit products remain significant obstacles. Technological gaps and limited access to global supply chains also impede the full potential of GI products.

Company Secretaries are uniquely positioned to address these challenges. Their expertise in legal compliance allows them to navigate complex regulatory frameworks, protecting GI products from infringement and unauthorized use. Company Secretaries can design awareness programs, educate producers about their rights, and facilitate training on quality standards, branding, and marketing. They also ensure that technological solutions, such as traceability systems, are implemented in a manner that complies with data privacy and export regulations.

Additionally, Company Secretaries play a vital role in **policy advocacy**, representing the interests of producer groups to government agencies and industry bodies. By providing strategic guidance, facilitating partnerships, and ensuring transparent governance, Company Secretaries help overcome structural challenges and create sustainable ecosystems for GI products.

GI TAGS AS CATALYSTS FOR VIKSIT BHARAT@2047

The vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 encompasses economic growth, social inclusion, cultural preservation, and global competitiveness. GIs align seamlessly with this vision by transforming traditional knowledge and regional specialties into valuable economic assets. GI products empower rural communities, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance India's global brand identity.

Through the involvement of Company Secretaries, GI initiatives are transformed from legal protections into structured, strategic, and sustainable development projects. Company Secretaries ensure that businesses leverage GIs for economic growth, comply with regulatory frameworks, and integrate social and environmental considerations into their operations. Their governance expertise strengthens producer associations, enhances operational efficiency, and promotes equitable profit distribution.

Furthermore, GI-based industries contribute to rural development by generating employment, supporting women and marginalized groups, and promoting environmentally sustainable practices. By facilitating market access, integrating technology, and guiding policy compliance, Company Secretaries enable these industries to thrive domestically and internationally.

Ultimately, GIs are not merely legal tools—they are instruments for **nation-building**, linking heritage with modern commerce, and local livelihoods with global markets. With the strategic guidance of Company Secretaries, India can fully harness the potential of its GI assets, creating a future where cultural heritage, economic prosperity, and social equity converge to achieve the dream of Viksit Bharat@2047.

CONCLUSION

GIs represent a unique confluence of law, culture, and commerce. By protecting the authenticity and reputation of regional products, GIs promote economic empowerment, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance India's global competitiveness. The role of Company Secretaries is central to this ecosystem, encompassing legal compliance, governance, strategic planning, risk management, and community engagement.

Company Secretaries ensure that GI initiatives are structured, transparent, and sustainable, bridging the gap between producers, government agencies, and markets. Their involvement strengthens rural livelihoods, empowers women and indigenous communities, and facilitates market expansion both domestically and internationally. By aligning GI initiatives with national development objectives, Company Secretaries contribute directly to the realization of Viksit Bharat@2047.

In essence, GIs, coupled with the strategic intervention of Company Secretaries, offer a roadmap for India to preserve its heritage, promote inclusive growth, and establish itself as a global economic and cultural leader. As India progresses toward its centenary of independence, GIs exemplify the nation's commitment to safeguarding tradition while embracing modernity, ensuring that development is sustainable, equitable, and culturally rooted.

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