

GI Tags: The Roadmap towards Viksit Bharat

As India advances toward its vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, Geographical Indication (GI) tags emerge as powerful instruments for inclusive growth, cultural preservation, and rural empowerment. GI tags, a form of Intellectual Property Right (IPR), certify products that originate from specific regions and embody unique characteristics shaped by local geography, tradition, and craftsmanship. With over 600 GIs registered, India is further targeting to register 10,000 GIs by 2030, by increasing impetus on local empowerment, heritage branding, and sustainable exports. GI-related legal and compliance work is poised to become a promising niche for CS professionals.



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INTRODUCTION

As India envisions its transformation into a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047; marking a century of independence, the roadmap involves not just technological advancement and infrastructure, but also the revival and empowerment of traditional industries, rural artisans, and indigenous producers. In this ambitious pursuit, Geographical Indications (GI) Tags offer a powerful, yet underutilized, tool to catalyze inclusive and sustainable growth.

A GI tag is more than a legal certificate; it is a badge of cultural identity, a guarantor of authenticity, and a passport to global markets for region-specific goods. Whether it is the aromatic Darjeeling Tea, the intricate Pochampally Ikat, or the delicious Hyderabad Haleem, GI-tagged products represent the legacy, craftsmanship, and natural uniqueness of India's diverse regions. Harnessing the full potential of GI tags can make them an engine of rural development, a catalyst for self-reliance, and a key pillar in building a Viksit Bharat.

WHAT IS A GI TAG?

A Geographical Indication (GI) is a specialized form of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) that identifies a product as originating from a specific geographical region, locality, or territory, where its quality, reputation, or other key characteristics are directly linked to its geographical origin. A GI tag serves as a certification of authenticity, ensuring that only those goods actually produced within

the designated region, and adhering to the prescribed standards, can legally use the registered name.

KEY FEATURES OF GI TAGS

1. **Link to Geography:** The distinctive quality, flavour, craftsmanship, or reputation of the product must stem from its natural factors (climate, soil, topography) or human factors (traditional knowledge, skills, cultural practices) specific to that region.
2. **Collective Right:** Unlike trademarks that protect individual brand owners, GI tags are collective rights; they belong to all authorized producers within the defined geographical region.
3. **Non-transferable Ownership:** A GI cannot be transferred, assigned, or licensed like traditional intellectual property because its value is tied inherently to its location.
4. **Economic and Cultural Significance:** GI protection helps preserve traditional practices and supports rural economies by boosting the market value of local and indigenous products.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

In India, the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, and the accompanying Rules of 2002, provide the legal foundation for GI registration. The Act came into force on 15 September 2003. It aligns with India's obligations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) TRIPS Agreement (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), which mandates member countries to recognize and protect geographical indications.

The GIs Registry is headquartered in Chennai, and administers applications and registrations of GI tags. The Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks serves as the Registrar of Geographical Indications.

CATEGORIES OF GOODS COVERED

GI tags can be registered for various types of goods that reflect the region's heritage and production expertise:

1. **Agricultural Products:** e.g., Basmati Rice, Darjeeling Tea, Alphonso Mangoes, Nagpur Oranges.

2. **Handicrafts:** e.g., Silk weaving handicraft, Madhubani Paintings, Pashmina Shawls, Kondapalli Toys.
3. **Manufactured Goods:** e.g., Channapatna Toys, Mysore Sandal Soap.
4. **Food Items:** e.g., Bikaneri Bhujia, Tirupati Laddu, Rasgulla, Malabar Parotta.

GI REGISTRATION PROCESS

- **Application:** Filed by an association of producers, a government body, or an organization representing the interests of the producers.
- **Examination:** The registry examines the application for accuracy and legal compliance.
- **Publication and Opposition:** The proposed GI is published - objections may be raised by affected parties.
- **Registration and Protection:** Upon approval, the GI is registered, granting exclusive rights to authorized users for 10 years (renewable indefinitely).

EXAMPLE: INDIA'S FIRST GI TAG

Darjeeling Tea became the first Indian product to receive a GI tag in 2004, renowned worldwide for its unique flavour and aroma linked to the climate and soil composition of the Darjeeling region in West Bengal.

IMPORTANCE OF GI PROTECTION

- **Economic benefits:** Geographical Indication (GI) protection significantly enhances the export potential of regional products by legally distinguishing their unique qualities tied to geographic origin. This exclusivity helps local producers command premium prices and ensures fair returns by preventing unauthorized use or imitation of the product name. Hence, producers gain market advantage and better income, promoting economic prosperity in rural and artisanal communities.
- **Cultural preservation:** GI protection safeguards traditional knowledge, skills, and regional identities by legally recognizing and tying unique products to their area of origin. It helps preserve centuries-old craftsmanship, indigenous practices, and biodiversity linked to specific local environments. This legal recognition motivates communities to continue age-old production methods, thus maintaining cultural heritage and passing it down generations.
- **Consumer Trust:** For buyers, GIs act as a guarantee of authenticity and quality. The GI tag confirms that the product originates from the specified region and meets traditional standards, which assures consumers they are purchasing genuine, origin-specific goods rather than imitations. This transparency fosters informed purchasing decisions and builds long-term trust in the product's brand.

In essence, GI combine intellectual property rights with cultural heritage and economic development. They empower local producers economically, preserve valuable cultural and natural resources, and protect consumers from counterfeit products. Together, these factors help local communities thrive sustainably while preserving the distinct identities of unique regional products on national and global platforms.

WHY GI TAGS MATTER IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT?

In the Indian context, GI tags matter greatly for several important reasons:

- **Legal Protection Against Unauthorized Use:** GI tags grant legal rights to producers allowing them to prevent unauthorized parties from using the name or mark associated with their regional products. This protection safeguards against counterfeiting and misuse that could damage the reputation and economic value of authentic products.
- **Market Differentiation Based on Authenticity:** GI tags help products stand out in the market by certifying their authenticity and origin. This differentiation allows consumers to identify and trust genuine goods linked to specific regions, enabling producers to command premium prices and access both domestic and international markets.
- **Promotion of Traditional Knowledge:** GI tags legally recognize the unique traditional know-how, skills, and cultural heritage embedded in regional products. This recognition sustains and incentivizes the continuation of age-old craftsmanship and indigenous production methods.
- **Rural Employment and Economic Upliftment:** Many GI-tagged products are created by rural artisans, farmers, and indigenous communities. By protecting these products, GI tags promote sustainable livelihoods, stimulate local economies, curb urban migration, and provide significant employment opportunities, including among women.
- **Branding for Export Markets:** GI tags act as powerful marketing tools that facilitate the global recognition of Indian products based on their geographical origin, aiding export growth. This branding improves economic gains for producers and enhances the soft power and cultural diplomacy of India globally.

India's vast cultural and geographical diversity endows it with immense potential for numerous GI products. However, this potential is often underutilized due to lack of adequate awareness, promotion, and institutional support. Strengthening efforts to leverage GI tags can unlock significant socio-economic and cultural benefits, driving rural development, preserving heritage, and enhancing India's image on the world stage.

ROLE OF COMPANY SECRETARIES IN GI TAGS

Traditionally, a Company Secretary handles legal compliance, corporate governance, regulatory filings, and acts as a bridge between the board, management, and regulators. The GI domain is more specialized: it combines IP law, regulatory compliance, marketing, heritage/cultural protection, standards, local stakeholder coordination etc. But there's quite a lot of overlap or adjacent possibilities where a Company Secretary can add value. Some possible roles/situations:

1. **Legal and Compliance Advisory:** The Company Secretary professionals can assist producer organizations, cooperatives, or Associations of Persons (AOP) in GI registration process under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, drafting and filing of applications, statements of case, and supporting documents, ensuring ongoing compliance with GI regulations and protection measures.
2. **Regulatory Compliance & IP Enforcement:** Once a GI is registered, protecting it (monitoring misuse, ensuring only authorized users use the tag, taking legal steps against infringement) involves IP law and regulatory processes. A Company Secretary with specialised knowledge of IP law can help.
3. **Documentation, Reporting, Standards Enforcement:** The Company Secretary could audit or maintain records showing conformity with quality standards, traceability and documentation required under GI specifications. (e.g. how product needs to be made, raw material origin, processing norms, etc.).
4. **Policy / Government Liaison:** Since GI registration is with government bodies, and many schemes grant support, subsidies, or promotional schemes for GI products, there is scope to work with or through government departments, helping in policy compliance or applying for benefits.
5. **Marketing/Branding Compliance:** With GI tags being used as a marketing tool, there might be regulations/specifications around labelling, claims, advertising. Ensuring that marketing materials correctly represent the GI (authorized users, origin, quality, branding rules) is important to avoid misuse or loss of GI benefits.
6. **Agreements and Contracts:** Company Secretaries can help in drafting, negotiating, ensuring legal enforceability etc. of contracts with authorized users, contracts for licensing, partnerships, export contracts etc., where the GI tag might be a value addition.

The field of GIs is expanding in India and there is increasing demand not just for registration, but for ongoing compliance, enforcement, branding, market integration etc. establishing a promising niche for a Company Secretary who builds skills in IPR, regulatory law, and stakeholder coordination.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR COMPANY SECRETARIES

Given the trends, the future seems quite promising for Company Secretary professionals who position themselves in this niche segment. Some key indicators and possibilities are:

- **Growing number of GI registrations:** The government's target to go from 605 to 10,000 by 2030 means many new products will seek GI tags. The Company Secretaries can extend their support in legal and administrative areas.
- **Incremental importance of heritage, authenticity and origin branding:** Consumers both in domestic and international markets are more sensitive to origin, and authenticity of local products. So businesses will value the services of Company Secretary professionals to meet GI standards and protection of their rights.
- **Export potential:** GI products have potential in exports. Company Secretary professionals can provide guidance in export contracts, trade law, intellectual property rights in foreign jurisdictions, labelling, etc.
- **Institutional/Government programs:** A Company Secretary could be employed or consulted implementing schemes like ODOP (One District One Product), MSME support, grants for GI awareness, assistance, marketing etc. These areas will need professionals who understand both IPR compliance and governance.
- **Corporate engagement:** Private companies using GI-tagged raw materials, or companies wanting to launch products with GI branding, or collaborations with artisan clusters, may need assistance of Company Secretaries for legal/compliance work.
- **Multidisciplinary roles:** Opportunity to combine Company Secretary role with IP law, contract law, export law, quality standards, etc.
- **Sustainability and rural development angle:** As numerous Geographic Indication (GI) products are rooted in rural, craft, and agro-based sectors, government policy often encourages connections to development, heritage conservation, and local job creation. Company Secretary professionals could work in NGOs, development agencies, or CSR wings, helping to structure GI initiatives.

To summarise, the field of GIs is expanding in India and there is increasing demand not just for registration, but for ongoing compliance, enforcement, branding, market integration etc. For a Company Secretary who builds skills in IPR, regulatory law, and stakeholder coordination, this is a promising niche.

GI TAGS AS A TOOL FOR CREATING VIKSIT BHARAT

The vision of **Viksit Bharat** is not limited to GDP figures; it encompasses **inclusive growth, self-reliance, sustainable development, and cultural preservation**. GI tags play a significant role in realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat by contributing to inclusive growth, self-reliance, sustainable development, and cultural preservation in several ways:

- **Rural Economic Empowerment:** GI tags help rural and tribal producers gain better prices, wider market access, and recognition for their unique products tied to specific regions. For example, Araku Coffee by tribal farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Channapatna Toys by artisans in Karnataka, and Maheshwari Sarees by weavers in Madhya Pradesh receive value addition through GI recognition, which uplifts rural livelihoods, curbs urban migration, and strengthens regional economies.
- **Women and Community Participation:** GI-based industries often engage women and community groups, providing flexible, home-based employment that empowers financial independence. Traditional crafts and arts in states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, and West Bengal thrive under GI protection, enabling rural women to sustain themselves through crafts like embroidery, textiles, and folk art. Examples include Kangra Paintings in Himachal Pradesh and Madhubani Art in Bihar, where GI tagging has fostered empowerment among women.
- **Cultural Preservation and Pride:** By safeguarding the history, stories, and traditional techniques behind products, GI tags preserve India's intangible cultural heritage in a globalized economy dominated by mass production. The GI tag for Kolhapuri Chappals protects the unique identity of traditional leather artisans against market homogenization while fostering regional pride and motivating future generations to preserve such crafts.
- **Boosting Exports and India's Soft Power:** GI tags boost the global competitiveness of Indian products by ensuring their quality, uniqueness, and authenticity. Iconic Indian GI products like Darjeeling Tea, Basmati Rice, and Pashmina Wool enjoy strong export demand, enhancing India's cultural diplomacy and soft power by projecting its rich craftsmanship and tradition globally.
- **Sustainable and Localized Development:** Many GI-tagged goods are produced via eco-friendly, traditional methods. Supporting these industries promotes sustainable development aligned with localization and self-reliance goals. Muga Silk production in Assam and lead-free Blue Pottery from Jaipur exemplify how GI products contribute to environmental sustainability while strengthening local economies.

In essence, GI tags align with the vision of Viksit Bharat by fostering economic empowerment, preserving cultural

heritage, promoting gender inclusivity, enhancing exports, and supporting sustainable rural development. This holistic approach aids India in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth while celebrating its rich cultural diversity.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES SUPPORTING GI TAGS

The Indian government has implemented several initiatives to support and promote GI tagged products. These initiatives play a vital role in preserving heritage, empowering producers, and expanding market access:

1. **One District One Product (ODOP):** This scheme encourages the identification, development, and promotion of unique products from each district, many of which have GI tags. It aims to enhance domestic consumption and export capabilities by showcasing regional specialties, thereby providing livelihood opportunities and strengthening local economies.
2. **GI Mahotsav and Trade Fairs:** Events like the GI Mahotsav are organized to display GI-tagged goods from across India. These festivals generate awareness among consumers and buyers, boost sales, and help producers network with traders and exporters, facilitating better market linkage for rural artisans and farmers.
3. **E-commerce Integration:** The government facilitates GI product promotion through online platforms such as Tribes India, GeM (Government e-Marketplace), Amazon Karigar, and Flipkart Samarth. These platforms help artisans gain access to national and international markets, overcoming traditional barriers of distribution and enhancing visibility.
4. **International Recognition:** India actively pursues international agreements and trade deals like the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to secure mutual recognition and protection of GIs abroad. This move helps Indian GI products gain legal protection in foreign markets, expanding export potential and guarding against counterfeiting.

Together, these government initiatives reinforce the protection, promotion, and global competitiveness of Indian GI-tagged products, contributing to rural development, cultural preservation, and economic growth.

GI TAGS AND THE VISION OF VIKSIT BHARAT @ 2047

GI tag is integral to the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047, a comprehensive development initiative by the Government of India aimed at transforming India into a developed nation by its centenary year of independence.

The vision of Viksit Bharat encompasses not just economic growth but also inclusive social progress, environmental sustainability, innovation, and cultural preservation.

The **Viksit Bharat vision**, aspires to:

- Make India a developed economy by 2047.
- Ensure inclusive growth that reaches the grassroots.
- Leverage traditional knowledge systems for modern innovation.

GI tags align beautifully with this vision. They represent “**Vocal for Local**”, “**Atmanirbhar Bharat**”, and “**Make in India**” — the pillars of India’s development philosophy. By empowering GI producers through better training, marketing, technology integration, legal protection, and policy support, India can turn its cultural heritage into a sustainable growth engine.

THE WAY FORWARD TO MAXIMIZE GI IMPACT

To fully harness the potential of GI tags for nation-building and the Viksit Bharat agenda, key steps are essential:

1. **Mass Awareness and Training:** National campaigns should educate both producers and consumers about GI tags’ value, while artisans need training in design innovation, branding, and digital marketing to compete in modern markets.
2. **Legal Support and Enforcement:** Strengthening anti-counterfeiting measures and providing legal aid to GI associations will ensure effective protection against misuse of GI names.
3. **International Branding:** India must develop a strategic approach to brand its GI products globally, emulating the success of countries like France with Champagne or Italy with Olive Oil.
4. **Youth and Technology Integration:** Engaging young designers, technologists, and entrepreneurs will revitalize GI products through modern techniques, e-commerce platforms, AR/VR experiences, and supply chain innovations.

CONCLUSION

India’s journey towards Viksit Bharat is not just about GDP numbers, digital infrastructure, or skyscrapers—it is about inclusive, sustainable, and culturally rooted development. It is about honouring the essence of our land—the weaver in Varanasi crafting Banaras sarees with devotion, the tea grower in Darjeeling nurturing delicate leaves in the misty dawn, and the artisan in Kutch shaping tradition into tangible beauty.

These are not isolated stories. They are the living soul of India, and the GIs tag serves as a powerful tool to recognize, protect, and promote this soul. GI tags are far more than legal certificates; they are economic lifelines, cultural shields, and marketing bridges that connect our timeless traditions with modern global opportunities. In this transformative journey, the Company Secretary stands as a strategic enabler; a bridge between law, business, and social impact. With their expertise in governance, legal compliance, and regulatory frameworks, Company Secretary professionals can:

- empower rural producers and artisans by helping register and manage GI tags,
- structure cooperative entities like FPOs, SHGs, and artisan collectives with transparent governance and equitable benefit-sharing,
- ensure post-registration compliance, enforce IP rights, and support branding and exports, and,
- link local enterprises with national and global markets, ensuring that India’s traditional products meet modern standards without losing their identity.

As we approach the centenary of our independence, Viksit Bharat must be a nation that is not only economically advanced but also rich in heritage, self-reliant in communities, and sustainable in values. The weaver’s hands, the farmer’s toil, the artisan’s brush—each one tells a story of India and through the legal scaffolding provided by GI protection and the governance guided by Company Secretaries, these stories are not just preserved—they are empowered to thrive.

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