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# THE ROLE OF GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION IN PROMOTING INDIGENOUS CRAFTS AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS OF MANIPUR

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of Geographical Indications (GIs) in promoting and protecting indigenous crafts and agricultural products of Manipur, a state in Northeast India renowned for its rich cultural heritage and Agro - biodiversity. The study explores how the GI (Geographical Indications) tag, form of intellectual property right, can leverage the unique qualities of Manipuri products that are linked to their geographical origin and traditional knowledge to foster socio-economic development and preserve cultural heritage. It also explores the socioeconomic impacts of GI (Geographical Indication) registration on local communities, the challenges encountered during and after the registration process, and the effectiveness of India's GI (Geographical Indications) Act of 1999 in protecting Manipur's cultural heritage. Through an analysis of registered GIs (Geographical Indications), such as Shaphee Lanphee, Wangkhei Phee, Moirang Phee, Kachai Lemon, Chak-Hao (Manipur Black Rice), Tamenglong Orange and Hathei Chilli, the paper assesses the legal framework's efficacy. It concludes with recommendations to address existing gaps, aiming to maximize the benefits of GIs for Manipur's indigenous producers and artisans.

**Keywords:** Geographical Indication (GI), Indigenous crafts/agricultural products, rural livelihoods, intellectual property, cultural identity, value chain, community governance.

## 1. Introduction

Geographical Indication (GIs) are a form of intellectual property right that identifies a product originating from a specific geographical location, which possesses unique qualities or a reputation attributable to that origin. This definition, enshrined in the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), has become a powerful tool for safeguarding the heritage and livelihood of indigenous communities worldwide. As per Section 2(e) of The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, a "Geographical Indication" refers to an indication that identifies goods whether agricultural, natural, or manufactured as originating or being produced within a specific country, region, or locality. The distinctive quality, reputation, or other unique attributes of these products must be closely tied to their geographical origin. For manufactured items, at least one phase of production, processing, or preparation must take place within the designated area. Moreover, Section 2(f) of the Act broadens the definition of "goods" to include agricultural, natural, or manufactured products, as well as handicrafts, industrial goods, and food items.<sup>1</sup> Geographical Indication (GIs) have gained prominence worldwide as a policy instrument that protects product names associated with specific regions and that signals unique quality attributes derived from local natural and human factors. In India, the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, provides the legal framework for this protection.<sup>2</sup>

Manipur, a state nestled in the verdant hills and valleys of Northeast India, is a biodiversity hotspot and a source of unique traditional knowledge and cultural practices. The state indigenous communities have for centuries cultivated unique agricultural products and perfected intricate crafts, all deeply intertwined with their natural environment and cultural identity. Yet Manipuri producers confront multiple challenges: small-scale production, limited market access, competition from mass-produced imitation, weak supply-chain linkages and inadequate institutional support. In such a context, Geographical Indications (GI) protection offers a promising pathway to preserve intangible cultural heritage while creating economic incentives for local communities. This research paper explores that a strategic and holistic approach to securing and leveraging Geographical Indications (GI) tags can be a game changer for Manipur's indigenous crafts and agriculture. The Geographical Indications (GI) framework can protect these products from misappropriation, create market differentiation, command premium prices and ultimately empower the local communities. However, this potential is accompanied by significant challenges, ranging from legal complexities and enforcement issues to logistical and marketing hurdles.

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<sup>1</sup> The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (Act 48 of 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Suresh C. Srivastava, "Geographical Indications and Legal Framework in India" 38 *The Economic and Political Weekly* 12 (2003).

### **1.1 Research questions:**

This paper is structured around the following core research question:

- a) What is the significance of Geographical Indications in protecting indigenous products?
- b) How does GI contribute to the promotion of crafts and agricultural goods in Manipur?
- c) What are the challenges faced in the implementation of GI protection?
- d) How can GI be effectively utilized for socio-economic development?

### **1.2 Research objectives**

- a) To examine the legal and conceptual framework of Geographical Indications.
- b) To analyze the role of GI in promoting indigenous crafts and agricultural products of Manipur.
- c) To evaluate the socio-economic impact of GI protection on local communities.
- d) To identify challenges in the implementation of GI in Manipur.
- e) To suggest policy measures for effective promotion and protection of GI products.

### **1.3 Research Hypothesis:**

This research hypothesizes that the registration and protection of Geographical Indications (GIs) play a significant role in promoting the indigenous crafts and agricultural products of Manipur by enhancing their market recognition, ensuring authenticity, and improving the socio-economic conditions of local producers. It assumes that GI tagging not only safeguards traditional knowledge and cultural identity but also creates economic incentives that lead to increased market demand and price premiums for authentic products such as Chak-Hao (black rice), Kachai Lemon, and Shaphee Lanphee textiles. However, the hypothesis also acknowledges that the positive impact of GIs depends on effective implementation through strong producer organizations, quality control mechanisms, and government or institutional support systems that enable local communities to fully capitalize on the benefits of GI recognition.

## **2. Legal Framework of Geographical Indications**

Over time, geographical indications (GIs) have gained recognition as an important type of intellectual property. They are more than just legal instruments; they are a means of safeguarding goods that have strong linkages to certain locations and bear unique characteristics, customs, and cultural significance. These goods are often the result of generations of local expertise and experience, which makes their preservation even more crucial.

GIs are subject to both national and international legal frameworks. When combined, these mechanisms guarantee that these goods are appropriately identified, shielded from abuse, and fairly regulated in the marketplace. This chapter examines this framework in more detail, focusing on the international commitments as well as the composition and functioning of India's legal system.

### ***2.1 International Legal Framework***

The TRIPS Agreement, which is overseen by the World Trade Organization, significantly influences the international system for safeguarding Geographical Indications (GIs). To put it simply, TRIPS establishes a common baseline, guaranteeing that nations adhere to specific basic requirements for the protection of intellectual property, including GIs. This contributes to the development of a more dependable and predictable international system.

A GI is defined as an indication that connects a product to a particular location when its reputation, quality, or other distinguishing characteristics are primarily attributable to that location under Article 22 of the TRIPS Agreement.<sup>3</sup> In actuality, this means that items like agricultural products or regional handicrafts are identified not just by their nature but also by their origins. In order to avoid deceiving customers and depriving producers of the value associated with their region, the article further mandates that member nations implement legal protections to prevent misuse.

Articles 23 and 24 provide more robust protection, but only for wines and spirits. Regardless of whether customers are genuinely puzzled, this increased level of protection stops even indirect name usage. However, there has been continuous discussion over this selective approach, particularly in nations like India where many traditional items, such as handicrafts and agricultural goods, could profit from comparable protection.<sup>4</sup>

The World Intellectual Property Organization, in addition to TRIPS, has been crucial in bolstering GI protection around the world. WIPO has worked to improve the recognition of origin-based products in

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<sup>3</sup> World Trade Organization, TRIPS Agreement, 1994, Article 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 23–24

various legal systems through agreements such as the Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin. These international frameworks work together to build a foundation that supports GIs' increasing significance in international trade and cultural preservation in addition to protecting them.

## ***2.2 National Legal Framework in India.***

Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (also known as the GI Act), India has established a very strong legal framework to protect Geographical Indications (GIs). The law was passed in 1999, but it wasn't put into effect until 2003, which was a big step toward identifying and protecting region-specific goods in the nation. The Chennai-based Geographical Indications Registry is in charge of managing this system.

A geographical indication, as defined by Section 2(1)(e) of the GI Act, is a mark used to products that have a particular geographical origin and have attributes, a reputation, or features that are fundamentally connected to that location.<sup>5</sup> To put it another way, it acknowledges that some things are distinctive and valuable because of the place from where they originate, and as such, they should be protected legally from abuse or imitation.

## **3. Geographical indications in Rural Development: The Indian and Northeastern Perspective.**

Geographical Indications (GIs) are frequently addressed in policy and scholarly discussions as though their significance for rural development is clearly apparent. In reality, their impact often emerges in more gradual and complex manners, influenced by local institutions, market opportunities, and the capacity of communities to unite around a common identity. At its core, a GI serves as a method of acknowledgment it officially indicates that a product's characteristics are not coincidental, but the result of a prolonged relationship among people, location, and practice. When properly applied, this acknowledgment can serve as a significant asset for rural economies.

### ***3.1 Geographical Indications (GIs) as tools for rural development and cultural conservation.***

Empirical studies and systematic reviews suggest that GIs can generate positive, though often modest, effects on agricultural development, local incomes and conservation of cultural practices particularly when complemented by supportive institutions, branding and market linkages. A recent analysis and empirical review indicate a positive correlation between GI adoption and agricultural development, but the effect size can be small and strongly mediated by governance, enforcement and market dynamics.

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<sup>5</sup> Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, Section 2(1)(e).

A significant immediate effect of GI protection is its capacity to distinguish products in ever more competitive markets. Rural producers, who frequently find it challenging to compete with large-scale manufactured products, acquire a means to highlight the uniqueness of their offerings. The GI system aids in minimizing imitation and misrepresentation by confining the use of a product name to those working within a specified geographical region and following specific standards. This, consequently, enhances consumer confidence. When consumers believe that a product truly comes from a certain area and possesses specific attributes, they are frequently inclined to spend more money on it.<sup>6</sup> GIs present a unique strategy for rural development one that does not depend exclusively on outside funding or industrial growth but rather leverages resources that are already present in the community. By associating economic worth with cultural identity and ecological uniqueness, they establish a system where development is not forced externally but arises, at least in part, internally. In this regard, their significance is found not just in the revenue they can produce, but also in the different perspective on development they embody one that is more gradual, focused on specific locations, and arguably more sensitive to the intricacies of rural existence.

In this context, GIs gain specific importance. The GI framework establishes a type of collective ownership by legally associating a product with a particular geographic location, which is different from traditional intellectual property rights. Instead of providing sole rights to one person or company, it acknowledges how a community and its surroundings influence the product's character. This connection is not just symbolic; it carries real legal consequences. After a product is registered as a GI, only producers located within the specified area and following established standards can sell their products under that designation. Essentially, this serves as a shield against unapproved usage and reproduction.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, it would be naive to consider GIs as a full remedy for the issue of cultural appropriation. Their success relies on multiple factors, such as the robustness of enforcement measures, the degree of awareness among producers, and the capacity of communities to organize collectively. In numerous instances, especially in underdeveloped areas, these criteria are often hard to satisfy. Small-scale producers might not have the means to oversee misuse or take legal steps, particularly when violations happen in global markets.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, GI-protected goods can still face imitation, though in less direct or noticeable ways.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, GIs continue to be among the more hopeful instruments accessible for tackling the issues of cultural appropriation in a systematic and legally acknowledged way. They

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<sup>6</sup> Rangnekar, D. (2004). *The Socio-Economics of Geographical Indications: A Review of Empirical Evidence from Europe*. UNCTAD-ICTSD

<sup>7</sup> Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), Article 22–24.

<sup>8</sup> Rangnekar, D. (2004). *The Socio-Economics of Geographical Indications: A Review of Empirical Evidence from Europe*

offer a structure that allows communities to claim some level of authority over their cultural representations in the market, even if that authority is not complete. Furthermore, they create an opportunity to reconsider the connection between culture, commerce, and rights an aspect that is poised to grow even more urgent as globalization persists in altering local economies and identities.

### ***3.2 Geographical Indication (GIs) in India and the Northeast context***

India's GI regime has registered a wide range of products from Darjeeling tea to Kani shawls and state governments have created facilitation mechanism to secure and exploit GI recognition. For Northeast India and Manipur specifically, several goods have either been registered or put forward for application: in Manipur textile items (Shanphee Lanphee,

Wangkhei Phee, Moirang Phee) and agricultural products (Chak-Hao rice, Kachai Lemon, Tamenglong Orange, Hathei chilli) are notable. Policy and academic commentaries emphasize that while GI registration is an important first step, the critical challenge is post-registration commercialization, product standardization, institutionalizing authorized-user schemes and preventing mislabeling.

A major ongoing challenge is gaining access to the market. Numerous producer groups in the Northeast function within restricted local or regional markets, often having only occasional links to broader national or international value chains. Even when chances come up, they are often hindered by inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to funding, and poor market information. In these situations, the GI label alone does not necessarily lead to higher incomes.

## **4. Indigenous Crafts and Agricultural Products of Manipur**

Manipur's rich cultural legacy, which is firmly anchored in its customary trades and farming methods, is frequently praised. These customs have been more than just means of subsistence for many generations; they are an integral component of the state's citizens' daily lives and sense of self. The information, abilities, and methods involved have been meticulously transmitted over time, representing a living tradition influenced by the environment, community, and history. This intimate connection to the land its topography, climate, and the indigenous techniques that give each product its unique character is what makes Manipuri products so distinctive.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter examines Manipur's diverse indigenous agricultural goods and crafts. It gives special consideration to both those who have already received Geographical Indication (GI) status and those that have a high likelihood of receiving it.

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<sup>9</sup> Government of Manipur, Department of Handlooms & Textiles, official reports.

#### **4.1 Major GI-Tagged Products of Manipur.**

Several products from Manipur have been granted GI status, recognizing their uniqueness and cultural significance. These products serve as prime examples of how geographical indications can protect and promote indigenous goods.<sup>10</sup>

##### **4.4.1 Chak-Hao (GI Application No-602):**

This aromatic, glutinous black rice has been cultivated in Manipur for centuries. It is known for its distinct nutty flavor, high anthocyanin content and high fiber content, which contributes to a longer cooking time. Chak-Hao is a staple of Manipuri cuisine, especially during community feast and has also been used in traditional medicine. Two types of Chak-Hao, 'Chak-Hao Amubi' and 'Chak-Hao Poireiton' are grown originally every year, from December to May and are available throughout the state. The aroma and stickiness of Manipur's Chak-Hao are what sets it apart from other types of black rice found in other parts of the world. The GI tag, granted in 2019, has helped raise the product's profile and secure its reputation.<sup>11</sup>

##### **4.4.2 Kachai Lemon (GI Application No-466):**

Grown in the Kachai village of the Ukhrul district of Manipur, this unique lemon variety is prized for its high ascorbic acid content and its distinctive flavor. Kachai Lemon is a high-yielding landrace with an equally high economic value, it is used in making pickles and juice. A dedicated "Kachai Lemon Festival" is held annually to celebrate this product. The GI tag for Kachai Lemon, awarded in 2014, has helped protect its authenticity and has been the subject of several academic studies.<sup>12</sup>

##### **4.4.3 Tamenglong Orange (GI Tagged No-590):**

Tamenglong Orange is a species of the Mandarin family, grown in the Tamenglong district of Manipur and are known for their high vitamin content and sweet and sour flavor and is grown using organic methods without the use of chemical pesticides or fertilizers. The oranges are harvested immediately after maturity between November-February). They received the GI tag in 2021, the certification has provided a boost to the local economy, tourism, provide farmer to show off their products to potential customers and add motivation by fostering a closer bond between farmers and food processing facilities, the Tamenglong Orange Festival is organized annually in the first or second week of December.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Geographical Indications Registry, GI Registered Goods List.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

#### **4.4.4 Hathei Chilli (Sirarakhong Chilli) (GI Application No-592):**

Sirarakhong Chilli, a chilli grown only in the climatic conditions of the Sirarakhong village in the Ukhrul District of Manipur is rich in calcium and vitamin C. These fiery red chillies also grown in the adjoining village but their quality in, flavour, colour, aroma and unique taste. Harvesting of the Hatei started from July onwards, to achieve a good colour, they are thoroughly swirled after being sun-dried or cured using a nearby furnace. The dried chillies are ground with a pestle and mortar and kept in a dry environment. An annual Hathei Phanit (Chilli Festival) is celebrated every year, celebrating this unique gift of God. The GI tag, granted in 2021, has helped protect its market value and promotes its production.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4.4.5 Shaphee Lanphee (GI Application No-371):**

Literally, the name of Sanphee is the fabric of animal and Lanphee is the fabric of war. This traditional handwoven shawl is characterized by a black base, red border and intricate motifs representing Manipur mythology and folklore. A Sanphee Lanphee is a type of Hand -woven Fabric shawl which is specially made by needle work on Loin and Frame Loom. Sanphee Lanphee was presented by the Meitei King to the worthy tribes of Manipur as a special recognition of honour. It marks as pride and respect to the person who possess it. The patterns are handcrafted by Meitei women and the shawl holds significant cultural value. The GI tag, awarded in 2011, recognizes the skill and heritage of the weavers.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4.4.6 Wangkhei Phee (GI Application No-372):**

Wangkhei Phee is a textile fabric made of white cotton and is popularly worn by Manipuri ladies as a special clothing item for marriage ceremonies and other festive occasions. The fabric is transparent and has many designs on its body. The fine cotton fabric is known as “Wangkhei Phee” since the fabric was first developed in the Wangkhei area by skilled weavers of the Royal family. The fabric is extremely delicate prepared in the cotton yarn. The interlacement of two threads, i.e. weft and wrap in the series, are woven far apart from each other, and as such, the cloth is almost transparent. The Manipuri weavers had been weaving this kind of cloth by using the extra weft technique design of Kheiroithek, Thangjing Tangkhai, Kabok Chaiba and many others with Moirang Phee Design on both of its longitudinal borders. Extra weft design are woven in nature like floral, fruits, motifs, etc. It is one of the most luxurious items for ladies among the local clothes used on different occasions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

#### **4.4.7 Moirang Phee (GI Tagged No-373):**

The “Moirang Phee” is a textile fabric that has a specific design called ‘Moirangpheejin’ which is woven sequentially on both longitudinal edges of the fabric and oriented towards the center of the cloth with cotton or silk threads. Originally, it was first developed in the Moirang village of Bishnupur District. The name of this particular cloth also carries significant meaning and beliefs. It is believed that the Moirang Phee was first made by the local people as a token of tribute to the then royal family of Manipur. The “Moirang Pheejin” design which is woven in the Moirang Phee is derived from the pronged teeth of the “Pakhangba”, the Pythonic God of Manipur mythology. The presence of Moirang Pheejin design in any one of the handwoven fabrics is significant as it shows that the fabric originated from Manipur.<sup>17</sup>

### **5. Role of Geographical Indications in Promotion**

Geographical Indications (GIs) have steadily grown in importance as a means of identifying and marketing goods that are firmly anchored in a certain location and formed by its own environment, expertise, and customs. GIs strengthen a product's identification in the market and draw attention to its unique features by tying it to its place of origin.

This becomes particularly significant in a state with a rich cultural heritage like Manipur. Indigenous agricultural products and crafts from the area are more than just commodities; they are symbols of cultural pride, history, and communal wisdom. In this regard, GI protection is essential for increasing the market value of these goods, expanding their recognition, and sustaining the livelihoods of regional producers.

#### **5.1 GI as a Tool for Branding and Market Differentiation**

The ability of Geographical Indications (GIs) to influence a product's identity in the marketplace is one of their most significant features. A GI tag functions similarly to a mark of authenticity in many respects, informing customers that the product they are purchasing is real, originated in a certain location, and produced using conventional knowledge and techniques. As a result, GI-labeled products are frequently seen by consumers as being of superior quality and possessing a certain cultural richness that mass-produced goods just cannot match.<sup>18</sup>

Consider goods like Chak Hao or Moirang Phee. They have a clear advantage because of their GI status, which makes them stand out in a congested market. In addition to making them stand out, this

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> World Intellectual Property Organization, Geographical Indications: An Introduction

recognition enables companies to demand higher prices and access more specialized markets both domestically and internationally.<sup>19</sup>

The ability of GI branding to close the gap between manufacturers and consumers is another significant benefit. Customers may not always be fully informed about the origins or manufacturing processes of a product in many areas. By providing a degree of assurance regarding origin and quality, a GI tag lessens this uncertainty. Customers feel more assured about their decisions as a result, while producers gain from more confidence and improved market standing.<sup>20</sup>

### ***5.2 Economic Impact on Local Communities***

Protection of Geographical Indications (GIs) significantly improves local people's economic circumstances, particularly in rural areas where agriculture and traditional skills are the main sources of income. A thing is no longer viewed as just another item on the market when it is given a GI tag; instead, it bears a heritage, a story, and an assurance of authenticity. This added value frequently enables farmers and craftspeople to get more compensation for their labor, immediately boosting income and ensuring financial security.<sup>21</sup>

This effect is especially noticeable in Manipur's handloom industry. In addition to being important sources of employment, particularly for women, traditional textiles like Wangkhei Phee serve as emblems of cultural identity. GI recognition increases these items' market visibility and legitimacy, which may increase demand and boost profits. Crucially, it also prevents intermediaries from underpaying craftspeople, guaranteeing that the real creators receive a more equitable portion of the profits.

GI-based companies support wider rural development in addition to personal income. They urge communities to invest in their traditional knowledge and skills, boost small-scale business, and generate local employment prospects. This lessens the need for people to relocate to cities in pursuit of employment, enabling them to maintain their standard of living in their local towns. In this way, GI protection helps maintain the social fabric of rural life while simultaneously boosting the local economy.<sup>22</sup>

### ***5.3 Limitations of GI as a Promotional Tool***

Geographical Indications (GIs) are not a one-stop shop for promoting domestic goods, despite their

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<sup>19</sup> Geographical Indications Registry, Registered GI Products List.

<sup>20</sup> Dev Gangjee, *Relocating the Law of Geographical Indications* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> K. C. Kailasam & Ramu Vedaraman, *Law of Trademarks and Geographical Indications* (LexisNexis, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, *Handloom Sector Report*.

many benefits. The degree of awareness among producers and consumers, the effectiveness of their implementation, and the availability of sufficient market infrastructure to support them all play a significant role in determining their actual impact.

In reality, getting a GI tag does not guarantee better market prospects or higher salaries. Many farmers and craftspeople still struggle with issues including ineffective supply chains, poor branding tactics, and restricted access to funding. They frequently aren't able to fully benefit from GI protection because of these problems.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, even while GIs offer a useful legal identity and aid in product differentiation in the market, they must be backed by robust legislative measures, improved marketing campaigns, and capacity-building programs. GIs can only genuinely support the long-term marketing of native crafts and agricultural goods when these elements are taken into account.

## **6. Challenges in Implementation of Geographical Indications in Manipur.**

Geographical Indications (GIs) have a lot of potential for promoting domestic goods, but the actual situation is frequently far more complicated. It is not always easy to transfer this potential into real advantages in a region like Manipur that is both culturally rich and economically limited. The successful use of GI protection is nevertheless hampered by a number of practical issues, from a lack of knowledge and resources to insufficient market connections.

### **6.1 Lack of Awareness Among Producers**

Making Geographical Indications (GIs) truly successful is hampered by a fundamental issue: awareness. At the core of these traditional sectors are numerous local farmers, craftspeople, and producers who frequently don't completely understand what a GI is or how it may help them. For example, expert weavers who produce goods like Moirang Phee and Wangkhei Phee still rely on traditional methods that have been passed down through the generations, but they are not able to take use of the legal and business benefits that GI designation can provide.<sup>24</sup>

There are actual repercussions from this knowledge gap. Producers are less inclined to take part in registration procedures or group projects when they are ignorant about their rights or the benefits of GI tagging. Because of this, a lot of businesses still sell their goods in the same conventional manner without utilizing the GI label, which may help set them apart from competitors. This not only makes it harder for them to demand higher pricing, but it also keeps them from getting the credit their

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<sup>23</sup> K. Sengupta, Challenges of GI Implementation in India, Journal of Rural Development.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, Handloom Sector Awareness Reports

craftsmanship merits.

In other words, even while the items themselves are extremely valuable both culturally and economically, the people who make them are frequently unable to fully profit from them because of a basic lack of knowledge. Therefore, closing this knowledge gap is essential to guaranteeing that GI protection results in actual, palpable advantages for nearby populations.

### ***6.2 Issues in Marketing and Distribution***

Reaching the correct markets is still a significant barrier, despite the fact that many GI goods from Manipur are rich in quality and heritage. The way the products are disseminated and advertised is the issue, not the things themselves. It is challenging for these items to reach a larger audience because to inadequate transportation options, poor infrastructure, and restricted access to contemporary marketing channels.<sup>25</sup>

Consider Chak Hao, or black rice. Due to its nutritional richness and distinctiveness, it has a high demand potential; yet, growers frequently face storage and transportation challenges. It becomes difficult to maintain quality and deliver the product effectively without adequate logistics.

In a similar vein, traditional handwoven textiles frequently struggle to compete in larger marketplaces despite their beauty and cultural significance. This is mostly due to the fact that they don't have an online presence, appealing packaging, or appropriate branding. This disparity disadvantages local artists in the current digital era, where customers depend more and more on e-commerce and aesthetic appeal. Because of this, many producers are unable to take full advantage of the attention that comes with GI designation. Better supply chains, more robust interaction with digital and contemporary marketing platforms, and better infrastructure are all need to fully realize their potential.

### ***6.3 Inadequate Policy Implementation***

The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, provides India with a well-established legislative framework for safeguarding Geographical Indications; nevertheless, state-level implementation of these regulations frequently presents the true problem.<sup>26</sup>

In reality, policies are often applied inconsistently and unevenly. The lack of coordination between different government agencies, which frequently operate independently rather than cohesively, is one of the main problems. Delays, duplication of effort, and decreased effectiveness in the promotion and

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<sup>25</sup> Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Marketing and Distribution Reports

<sup>26</sup> Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

enforcement of GI rights result from this disconnect.

Furthermore, states like Manipur do not often receive targeted or customized policy support, even if they have a wealth of distinctive products. The potential of GI programs is wasted due to the lack of state-specific policies, which limits their ability to actually help local producers and artisans.

## **7. Policy Recommendations and Suggestions**

Geographical Indications (GIs) have demonstrated a great deal of promise in marketing indigenous agricultural products and crafts, particularly by emphasizing their distinctiveness and cultural significance. However, because to a number of practical and structural issues on the ground, their influence has been fairly limited in areas like Manipur.

### ***7.1 Strengthening Legal Enforcement Mechanisms***

With the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, India already has a solid legal basis for safeguarding Geographical Indications (GIs). But the true test is not whether the law exists at all, but rather how well it is applied in practice. Because local monitoring is either inadequate or uneven, GI product misuse and imitation frequently persist. In order to solve this, marketplaces must be monitored more frequently and actively to make sure that only authentic goods are offered for sale with registered GI names.<sup>27</sup>

Establishing specialized enforcement cells can have a big impact. These specialized teams can assist in promptly finding infractions and taking appropriate legal action by collaborating with state authorities and the Geographical Indications Registry. Additionally, improved accountability and less delays would result from improved institutional cooperation.

The implementation of expedited procedures for settling issues pertaining to GI would be another crucial step. Protracted judicial processes frequently deter small producers and craftspeople from pursuing justice. In addition to better defending individual rights, quicker dispute resolution procedures would increase public confidence in the judicial system.

### ***7.2 Capacity Building and Awareness Programs***

The fact that many local producers are merely unaware of what Geographic Indications (GIs) are or how they might benefit from them is one of the main obstacles to employing GIs effectively. Farmers and artisans frequently carry on with their customs without recognizing that GI protection might help

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<sup>27</sup> Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

them obtain higher prices, shield their goods from copying, and become more well-known. Both governmental and non-governmental groups must actively participate in raising awareness through frequent campaigns and outreach initiatives in order to close this gap.<sup>28</sup>

Building capacity is just as important as raising awareness. Training programs should emphasize practical skills that can assist producers enhance their standard of living rather than just imparting basic knowledge. This covers recommendations for preserving product quality, implementing improved packaging strategies, creating a distinctive brand identity, and utilizing digital channels to expand into new markets.

For example, workshops that incorporate contemporary design features while maintaining the cultural and traditional character of their craft would be extremely beneficial to Moirang Phee weavers. In addition to increasing the market appeal of GI products, these initiatives give local communities the tools they need to compete more successfully in the dynamic market of today.

### ***7.3 Improving Marketing and Branding Strategies***

Effective marketing and careful branding are critical to the success of Geographical Indication (GI) products. Products from Manipur must be presented in a way that engages consumers and communicates their narrative in addition to being distinctive. Strong branding can draw attention to the items' unique character, cultural depth, and traditional expertise, increasing their attractiveness to a larger market.

Consider goods like Wangkhei Phee and Chak Hao (black rice). These are more than just products; they are symbols of tradition and legacy. They can be highlighted and consumer awareness raised by promoting them through trade shows, exhibits, and cultural events.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, by enabling direct communication between producers and craftspeople and consumers, these platforms foster appreciation and trust.

Online platforms provide even more options in the current digital era. Reaching clients outside of local marketplaces can be facilitated by advertising products on social media and selling through e-commerce websites. These products can draw in both domestic and foreign customers with the appropriate branding, storytelling, and images. Collaborations with well-known companies and designers might also lead to new opportunities. Manufacturers can manufacture goods that appeal to modern preferences while maintaining their authenticity by fusing old workmanship with contemporary design. In addition to raising market value, this guarantees that conventional abilities continue to be useful in a world that

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, Awareness and Training Reports.

<sup>29</sup> Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Marketing Promotion Reports.

is evolving.

#### ***7.4 Integration with Tourism and Cultural Promotion***

Linking GI products with tourism and cultural events is one of the most viable strategies to market them in Manipur. Manipur is well-known for its colorful customs, distinctive crafts, and rich cultural legacy, all of which draw tourists. GI items can become more visible and appreciated by including them into this cultural experience.

For example, creating craft villages where visitors may observe craftspeople in action or planning cultural festivals that highlight regional cuisine, traditional fabrics, and handicrafts can provide visitors with memorable experiences. In addition to highlighting the cultural significance of GI goods, these programs let visitors interact directly with the communities that produce them.<sup>30</sup>

By generating direct market opportunities, such initiatives can aid in closing the gap between manufacturers and consumers. In addition, they ensure that traditional knowledge and skill continue to flourish in a contemporary setting by helping to maintain and promote Manipur's cultural identity.

### **8. Conclusion**

Geographical Indication protection offers Manipur an important legal and reputational instrument to promote its indigenous crafts and agricultural products. The formal registration of Chak-Hao, Kachai Lemon, Tamenglong orange, Hathei chilli and multiple handloom textile Sanphee-Lanphee, Wangkhei-Phee, Moirang-Phee, reflects the state's eligibility to claim and protect unique place-based goods. GI status anchors product identity and provides a basis for enforcement, branding and cultural recognition. However, the available evidence indicates that GI registration on its own rarely transforms livelihoods. Real gains occur only when GI is embedded in a broader strategy: strong producer governance, quality control, market access, packaging and branding and institutional support for enforcement. For Manipur, the path ahead involves strengthening producer organization, building marketing capacity to reach urban and international niche markets, investing in packaging/traceability and linking GI promotion to state handloom and agriculture support schemes and tourism initiatives. Without these complementary measures, GI will remain a protective title with modest development returns.

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Cultural Tourism Reports.

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