



Tamil Nadu's GI Legacy in the Indian Context: Tradition, Identity, and Inclusive Development-Where Craft Meets Soil, and Heritage Finds Its Voice

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As part of India's evolving cultural diplomacy and soft power strategies, the Prime Minister has increasingly chosen Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged products as symbolic gifts for foreign dignitaries. These curated items embody not only regional craftsmanship but also legally protected heritage, offering a tactile representation of India's diverse artisanal legacy. Noteworthy examples include:

- **Gulabi Meenakari cufflinks and brooch** from *Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh*, presented to U.S. President Joe Biden; exemplifying the intricate enamel work unique to the region.
- **Black Pottery** from *Nizamabad, Uttar Pradesh*, gifted to the Prime Minister of Japan; showcasing the sophisticated, carbonised clay artistry native to its origin.
- **Zardozi Ittar Box** from *Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh*, offered to the President of France; merging fragrant elegance with royal embroidery traditions.

Such gestures serve as diplomatic signifiers, where GI products transcend commercial value and become vehicles of cultural messaging. By aligning heritage with international engagement, India articulates identity through material culture, while subtly advocating for the recognition and protection of indigenous knowledge systems.

Geographical Indications (GIs) are intellectual property rights that identify products originating from a specific location, possessing qualities, reputation, or characteristics inherently linked to that origin. In India, GI protection is governed by the *Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999*. These tags not only safeguard traditional knowledge and cultural heritage but also enhance rural livelihoods and global marketability. Internationally, GIs are protected under:

- The Paris Convention and Lisbon Agreement (Article 2)
- TRIPS Agreement (Articles 22–24), part of the Uruguay Round of GATT (Global Agreement on Trade and Tariffs)
- TRIPS Definition (Article 22.1)

“Indications which identify a good as originating in the territory of a member... where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic is essentially attributable to its geographic origin.”

GI-labelled products bridge geography and identity, reinforcing the cultural and economic fabric of local communities as mentioned in research studies of Devi and Cardoso conducted in 2021 and 2022 respectively.





Identifying GI Products: A Stepwise Approach

Step 1: Local Identification

- Initiated by State Departments, DICs, FPOs, or Agricultural university
- Based on historical relevance, trade practices, and community traditions

Step 2: Geographic Link

- Product must exhibit qualities or reputation tied to its origin

Step 3: Traditional Knowledge

- Supported by historical records, oral traditions, and indigenous practices

Step 4: Scientific Validation

- Conducted by institutions like State Agricultural Universities or NABL-accredited labs

Sources: *The Hindu* (Feb 2025), *The Indian Express* (Mar 2024)

Legal Framework and Institutional Mechanism

India's GI regime became operational in 2003. The first GI tag was awarded to Darjeeling Tea in 2004. Acquiring GI certification is a holistic process which comprises agencies from district level to national level. The roles and responsibilities of different agencies are listed below.

Level	Agency/Body	Role
National	Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.	Examines and registers GI applications
	Quality Council of India (QCI)	Develops GI logos, holograms, and ensures post-registration quality
	APEDA, DC-Handicrafts, TRIFED	Promote GI products across sectors
State	State IPR Cells, Agriculture/Industries Dept.	Coordinate documentation, lab testing, and producer mobilization
	GI Facilitation Cells (e.g., State Agricultural Universities, State Agriculture Department)	Assist FPOs, draft applications, and liaise with labs
District	DICs, KVKs, Universities	Identify products, validate uniqueness, and support producers

Source: *The Hindu* (Feb 2025)

Empowering Artisans Through GI

Tamil Nadu placed second position following Maharashtra in GI certifications, with over 69 products recognized. The first was *Salem Ven Pattu* (2005). Other notable products include:

- Negamam Cotton Sarees
- Manapparai Murukku
- Cumbum Paneer Grapes
- Mailadi Stone Carvings
- Marthandam Honey

GI tags preserve traditional craftsmanship, enhance economic opportunities, and protect against imitation. Artisans benefit through:

- Market access and premium pricing
- Capacity-building workshops
- Legal recognition of authenticity

Sources: Malini, S. (2023); Niranjan, D.A. (2023)

GI Tag Validity

The initial registration of a Geographical Indication (GI) is valid for 10 years and can be renewed every 10 years thereafter. Source: GI Act, 1999

Tamil Nadu's GI Product List (2025)

Click here to view the full list: [CLICK](#)

GI Tags and Tamil Nadu's \$1 Trillion Economy Vision

Tamil Nadu has set an ambitious goal to become a \$1 trillion economy by 2030. This vision was unveiled during the Global Investors Meet 2024 in Chennai and is built on a foundation of inclusive, innovation-driven, and investment-led growth. Ensuring equitable growth across all districts with a strong emphasis on climate resilience and sustainability. As the GI tag acquisition ensures the sustainable growth the heritage-bound products of Tamil Nadu is being identified for the purpose.

GI tags are instrumental in Tamil Nadu's economic roadmap by:

- Enhancing product value and global recognition
- Boosting exports and rural income
- Creating jobs in agriculture, textiles, and crafts
- Supporting MSMEs and traditional industries

For instance, Darjeeling Tea's GI status led to a fivefold price increase. Similar potential exists for Tamil Nadu's agro and craft sectors. Source: Quing Publications, 2023

Comparative Snapshot: New vs Previous GI Tags

Tamil Nadu has strategically shifted its focus on Geographical Indications (GI) from widely recognized cultural icons to locally used, region-specific products. This multi-faceted approach aims to spotlight lesser-known areas of the state, positioning them as emerging hubs to attract global investors and promote inclusive regional development.

Feature	New 6 GI Tags (2025)	Previous 63 GI Tags (2004–2024)
Focus Region	Southern & Central TN	State-wide
Product Type	Agriculture	Mixed (Handicrafts, Food, Textiles)
Cultural Link	High local usage, gaining attention	Deep-rooted cultural icons (e.g., Kanchipuram Silk)
Economic Impact	Agro-market development	Tourism, exports, artisan income
Public Awareness	Low but rising	High for iconic products
Government Strategy	Promote lesser-known regions	Boost exports and state branding

Source: DTNext (Apr 2025)

Special Features of Six New GI-Tagged Products in Tamil Nadu (2025)

Not every product can receive a Geographical Indication (GI) tag due to several legal, cultural, and technical constraints. The applicants must provide scientific, historical, and cultural evidence that the product's uniqueness is due to its geography. Many products, though popular, lack formal documentation or standardized production methods, making them ineligible. GI tags must align with WTO's TRIPS Agreement, which sets international standards for intellectual property protection. This ensures that only authentic, non-generic, and non-deceptive products are protected. The unique characteristics of the recently GI tagged products in Tamil Nadu are mentioned here.

1. Panruti Jackfruit (Cuddalore District)

- Exceptionally large fruits (often >15 kg) with sweet, firm yellow bulbs
- Naturally ripened, chemical-free cultivation
- Rich in sugars and nutrients; long shelf life and distinct aroma
- A staple in traditional Panruti farming practices i.e., mono-crop cultivation, high yield suitable for consumption as both fruit and culinary staple.

2. Panruti Cashew (Cuddalore District)

- Cashew apples are round, bright red, and uniquely flavorful
- High protein content (23g/100g) and low moisture-ideal for processing
- Recognized for superior quality in international studies

3. Puliyanakudi Acid Lime (Tenkasi District)

- High citrus acid content, juicy with a bright yellow-green rind
- Drought-resistant and long shelf life
- Grown using organic manure, intercropping, and traditional irrigation

4. Virudhunagar Sambal Vathal (Virudhunagar District)

- Sun-dried red chillies cured with salt and curd
- Adds tangy spice to Tamil dishes like sambar
- Produced by women SHGs using traditional sun-drying methods

5. Chettikulam Small Onion (Perambalur District)

- Small, aromatic shallots with excellent shelf life
- Cultivated in red soil using tank irrigation and organic manure
- Rich in antioxidants and sulfur compounds

6. Ramanathapuram Chithiraikar Rice (Ramanathapuram District)

- Drought-resistant, tall red rice variety grown in coastal sandy soils
- Used in temple rituals and Siddha medicine
- Grown organically in rainfed areas; 110-day crop cycle
- High local demand and premium pricing due to cultural preference

Impact of GI Tags

Although securing a GI tag involves considerable effort, its long-term advantages make the pursuit worthwhile. Below are some key pieces of positive evidence that highlight its impact.

Economic Upliftment

- Boosts income for thousands of families (e.g., 25,000+ silk weavers in Kanchipuram)
- Expands domestic and global market reach
- Encourages cooperative models, reducing middlemen exploitation

Cultural Preservation

- Revives traditional techniques and motifs
- Inspires youth to continue artisanal legacies
- Protects regional identity and craftsmanship

Legal Protection & Branding

- Prevents misuse of product names (e.g., "Kanchipuram Saree")
- Builds brand identity for local producers
- Encourages traceability through QR codes and holograms

Post-GI Recognition Challenges

Securing a GI tag alone does not guarantee an improvement in the living standards of its practitioners, as it often ushers in a series of subsequent challenges.

1. Lack of Post-Production Quality Control

- Absence of mandatory inspection bodies leads to inconsistent product standards.
- “Free-riders” within GI communities may dilute quality to compete, harming collective reputation.

2. Limited Market Access & Branding

- Many GI holders lack marketing skills, infrastructure, and digital presence.
- Without strategic branding, GI products struggle to differentiate themselves in crowded markets.

3. Inadequate Legal Enforcement

- Counterfeit and imitation products (e.g., Banarasi-style sarees from Surat or China) flood markets.
- Legal remedies like cancellation under Section 27 of the GI Act are slow and rarely pursued.

4. Low Awareness among Producers

- Artisans and farmers often remain unaware of how to leverage GI status for commercial gain.
- Registration doesn’t guarantee economic benefit unless followed by capacity building.

5. Scientific Validation Gaps

- Agricultural GIs sometimes lack rigorous scientific criteria to prove uniqueness.
- This weakens credibility in international markets and among discerning consumers.

6. Uneven Regional Support

- Some states (e.g., Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh) actively promote GI products, while others lag due to poor institutional coordination

Government & Institutional Support

The Government of India can enhance the outreach of GI products through various measures, such as establishing GI help desks across the country to assist artisans with documentation, branding, and legal formalities. Capacity-building workshops for artisans and farmers shall be conducted more often. GI products should also be prominently featured in international buyer-seller meets, often coordinated with Indian embassies to promote exports. Moreover, the 'One District One Product' initiative, which highlights one distinctive product per district, many of which are GI-tagged could be further intensified to maximize impact.

Summary

Geographical Indications are more than just labels—they are lifelines for preserving India’s rich cultural heritage and empowering rural economies. From Salem venpattu to Ramanathapuram’s red rice, GI tags validate authenticity, elevate market value, and protect traditional knowledge. However, to unlock their full potential, stronger enforcement, digital traceability, and consumer education are essential. With the right support, GI-tagged products can become powerful tools for sustainable development, cultural pride, and economic resilience.