



Impact Of GI Tagging In The Handicrafts Sector Of Kerala

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Abstract

Geographical Indications (GIs) are a form of intellectual property right designed to protect the name, reputation, and unique qualities of goods related to a specific region. They aim for rural development, preserving cultural heritage, and economic development of a nation. Kerala, with its handicraft products, has obtained GI registrations for handlooms, coconut shell crafts, coir, etc. This review focuses on academic literature and government records to assess the influence of GI tagging on Kerala's handicraft sector. The analysis focuses on four key dimensions: economic impacts, socio-cultural impacts and tourism/branding synergies. Findings of this study indicate that GI recognition has improved product visibility and, in certain cases, enabled premium pricing and tourism-driven demand. However, the benefits for primary artisans remain poor, constrained by weak enforcement, limited organisational capacity among artisans, and the dominance of intermediaries. The study concludes with strategic recommendations to strengthen artisans' participation, ensure economic development, and safeguard the authenticity of Kerala's handicraft heritage.

Keywords-G. I tag, handicrafts, positive impact of G.I., challenges

1.Introduction

Geographical Indications (GIs) signal that a product possesses qualities, reputation, or characteristics essentially attributable to a defined geographical origin. India's GI system has been used for agricultural products, foods, industrial products, and handicrafts; Kerala's GI portfolio includes several handicraft and agricultural products that embody strong local knowledge and ecosystems. The state government and IP authorities present GI registration as a mechanism to protect authenticity, protect artisan rights, and stimulate rural development. This review analyses the impact of GI tagging on Kerala's handicraft sector and what is the challenges of G.I tagging in handicraft sector

2. Methods and Scope of the Review

We conducted a targeted review of:

- Primary registry sources (GI applications/lists)
- Peer-reviewed studies
- Grey literature

3. Kerala's G.I tagged handicrafts-Overview

Sl.No	Name of handicrafts	G.I tagged year
1	Aranmula Kannadi	2004
2	Palakkad Maddalam	2008
3	Payyanur Pavithra Ring	2004
4	Cannanore Home Furnishings	2009
+*5	Brass Broidered Coconut Shell Crafts	2008
6	Screw Pine Craft of Kerala	2008
7	Chendamangalam Dhoties & Set Mundu	2011
8	Balaramapuram Sarees and Fine Cotton Fabrics	2010
9	Kasaragod Saree	2009
10	Kuthampully Dhoties & Set Mundu	2015
11.	Kuthampully sarees	2011

4. Governance and support ecosystem

The governance of Geographical Indications (GIs) in India is managed within a multi-level framework that combines national law, state support, and local artisans' action. At the **national level**, the GI Registry in Chennai under the **CGPDTM** examines applications, grants registrations (valid for ten years and renewable indefinitely), and maintains the register. Central ministries—particularly the **Development Commissioners for Handicrafts and Handlooms**—supplement this by offering cluster development, technical assistance, and market promotion through schemes such as the **NHDP**. At the **state level**, Kerala has played an active role through the **Department of Industries and Commerce** and **K-BIP**, which have promoted awareness, supported GI applications, and facilitated cluster projects. At the **grassroots**, cooperatives, producer companies, and craft societies act as **authorized users**, handling branding, certification, and enforcement. Civil society bodies, design institutes, and partnerships with e-commerce and tourism boards further strengthen market access.

5.Need for G.I tagging

- **Legal recognition:** GI registration grants a product-name protection to producers from a defined territory, helping prevent misuse of the name by outside producers.
- **Quality signalling:** A GI label communicates provenance and authenticity to consumers, helping premium positioning.
- **Collective asset:** Unlike a trademark, GI is a collective right — it benefits the registered community rather than an individual.
- **Preservation incentive:** It incentivizes transmission of traditional skills and standards, because the reputation of the GI depends on maintaining quality.

6.Positive impacts observed in Kerala's handicraft sector

▪ Stronger market differentiation and pricing power

GI-tagged crafts gain a trust signal for buyers — domestic and international — who are increasingly willing to pay a premium for authentic, traceable handicrafts. For small producer groups that previously sold as anonymous suppliers, GI labelling can enable direct-to-consumer marketing and placement in curated retail channels (museums, specialty stores, ethical e-commerce).

▪ Community-level coordination and value capture

GI registration often motivates artisans to form producer associations, cooperatives, or societies to manage the GI (producer registries, quality checks, branding). This collective action can reduce middlemen capture, support bulk procurement of raw materials, and create better bargaining power with buyers.

▪ Heritage conservation and craft revival

The prestige and visibility that come with GI recognition can spark local pride and encourage younger generations to take up traditional crafts. Where GI-linked management includes training and apprenticeships, it has a direct role in skills transfer and cultural continuity.

▪ Tourism and place-based branding

GI crafts tied to specific locales contribute to destination branding. Tourists seeking authentic souvenirs are an important market — linking craft trails, workshops, and museums to GI products reinforces both tourism incomes and craft demand

7.Challenges that limit impact

▪ Awareness and administrative capacity

Many artisan groups lack awareness of GI benefits or are unfamiliar with the registration and compliance processes. Managing a GI — maintaining product standards, documenting production, and policing misuse — requires governance capacity that local groups often lack.

▪ Enforcement and counterfeit goods

A GI on paper does not automatically stop mislabelling or inferior copies entering the market. Effective enforcement requires monitoring, legal action capacity and consumer awareness — all resource-intensive.

▪ Access to markets and business skills

GI status enhances branding potential, but artisanal producers still need design development, packaging, e-commerce skills, logistics, and relationships with buyers. Without business support, the GI becomes a label without market traction.

▪ Internal inequality risks

If management of the GI is captured by a few intermediaries or better-connected producers, benefits may not trickle to the most vulnerable artisans — women, seasonal workers or home-based producers. Safeguards and inclusive governance are essential.

8.How to turn GI recognition into durable gains

A. For Government of Kerala & Public Institutions

1. Make GI support a service, not a one-off event. Provide standardized *GI starter kits*: model code of practice, plain-language specs, labeling guides, simple inspection templates, and checklists for renewals and logo use. Maintain an always-updated public list of GI crafts with producer contacts and verified retailers (the existing GI product pages are a base to build from).
2. Backstop enforcement. Fund a small legal/market-watch cell to scan e-commerce and tourist markets for misuse of Kerala GI names (e.g., “Balaramapuram-style” without authorization) and issue quick notices. Coordinate with the national registry’s published rolls for accuracy.
3. Integrate GIs with tourism and ODOP/export plans. Bundle GI craft experiences (loom visits, demonstrations) into district tourism itineraries; connect crafts to *One District One Product* and export-promotion schemes so that GI value translates into orders.
4. Leverage development finance. NABARD has recently sanctioned impact evaluations of GI products; Kerala clusters can align proposals (tooling, design labs, working capital) to results-based financing that targets incomes, youth apprenticeships, and women’s participation.

B. For Producer Societies & NGOs

1. Inclusive governance. Publish membership criteria and benefits, set quotas or representation for women and home-based artisans, and adopt transparent pricing/royalty sharing tied to GI label use.
2. Design and quality systems. Treat the GI *code of practice* as living: run annual design clinics, maintain sample libraries, and train master artisans as internal auditors for specs such as thread counts, dyes, and finishing (critical for Balaramapuram/Kasaragod product integrity).
3. Digital presence that sells, not just tells. Use traceability stories (artisan profiles, making-of reels) alongside clear purchase paths and authenticity marks. Larger cooperatives like Kuthampully already operate online storefronts—smaller clusters can plug into common Kerala marketplaces to reduce

C. For Retailers, Brands & Market Platforms

1. Shift from transactional to developmental sourcing. Multi-season design support, pre-booking, and shared QC labs stabilize artisan cashflows and raise quality, which in turn justifies GI premiums.
2. Educate the buyer. Build point-of-sale material that explains what the GI stands for, how to verify labels (especially for logo GIs like Screw Pine Craft), and why paying a small premium sustains heritage and fair wages.

Measures to check the impact of G.I tagging

To move the conversation from anecdotes to accountability, Kerala can adopt a simple annual dashboard for each GI craft:

- Income and order book: change in average artisan income; share of direct-to-consumer sales; export orders. (Use the Varanasi benchmark to set initial targets).
- Participation: number of registered producers; % women and youth; active apprenticeships.
- Quality and enforcement: internal audit pass rates; number of infringement notices and successful takedowns.
- Market visibility: verified retail points (stores, fairs, portals); tourism footfall to workshops or craft museums.
- Innovation with integrity: new designs launched that stay within the GI code.

9. Conclusion

GI tagging is a powerful tool for protecting Kerala's handicraft heritage, but it is not an automatic economic fix. When matched with inclusive governance, capacity building, market access and enforcement mechanisms, GI protection can strengthen livelihoods, protect intangible cultural heritage, and create resilient local industries. Policymakers and practitioners should treat GI registration as the beginning — not the end — of a multi-year strategy to convert legal recognition into concrete benefits for Kerala's artisans.

10.Reference

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