

Mapping the Geographical Indication-Tagged Handicraft Landscape of West Bengal: A Documentary Analysis of Distribution, Diversity, and Craft Traditions

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ABSTRACT

Geographical Indication (GI) offers an institutional framework for safeguarding authentic region-based products, along with the indigenous technology and knowledge used to produce them. The present research examines the GI-tagged handicrafts in West Bengal through document analysis of the Geographical Indications Registry of Intellectual Property India. Of the 35 recognised GI products, 16 are handicraft items, and this study analysed them in terms of representation, craft variety, chronology, and spatial distribution using descriptive analysis. Findings of this study reveal that handicrafts form the highest proportion (45.71%) of the total number of GI products in West Bengal, and textiles, weaving, and embroidery comprise half of all handicrafts. The temporal distribution of GI recognition shows high clustering in 2013-2018, while spatial distribution shows clustering only in some selected craft-producing regions, mainly Bankura. The analysis reveals that GI recognition is not only diverse but also uneven in terms of crafts, regions, and period in West Bengal. The research provides documentary foundational information for a better comprehension of the recognition of handicraft traditions and points out directions for future studies regarding the GI system.

Keywords: geographical indication; GI handicrafts; West Bengal; traditional knowledge; craft heritage; documentary analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Geographical Indication (GI) is a form of intellectual property that safeguards the distinctive regional authenticity of a product. The GI system legally secures the link between the product and its place of origin through its provisions and conserves traditional knowledge while increasing the market value of regional products (Belletti et al., 2017; Singhal, 2017). The plethora of diverse ecological, cultural and artisanal heritage reflects India's indigenous wealth (Chaudhary et al., 2022; Goyal et al., 2025). The enactment of the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, created an appropriate legal environment for GI protection and helped increase the number of registered GIs in agricultural products, food

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products, handicrafts, manufactured products, and natural products (Intellectual Property India, 1999). Among all of these, handicrafts have a distinctive place as it showcases the traditional skills, crafts, and cultural expressions of the natives.

Extending from the Himalaya to the coast, West Bengal stands as one of India's most culturally enriched states, having an age-old handicraft tradition shaped by history, culture, and art (Department of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises and Textiles, Government of West Bengal, n.d.). The handicrafts sector in West Bengal includes a wide array of traditions, such as the world-renowned tradition of weaving in Baluchari, Santipore, Dhaniakhali, Tangail, Garad, Korial, and Banglar Muslin, along with unique handicrafts like the Bankura Panchmura Terracotta, Madurkathi, Santiniketan Leather Goods, Bengal Dokra, Bengal Patachitra, Purulia Chau Mask, Wooden Mask of Kushmandi, and Malda Nistari Silk Yarn (Intellectual Property India, 2025). Registration of these handicrafts in the GI category has not only provided legal recognition to them but also increased their visibility on national as well as international platforms and uplifted the artisanal communities associated with these crafts (Chaudhary et al., 2022; Halder, 2020).

Most of the prior research done on Geographical Indications has focused on intellectual property rights, rural development, competitive advantage, traditional knowledge, and socio-economic impacts of GI tagging. While all of these studies have made important contributions to understanding the legal and economic importance of GIs, relatively limited research has been done on systematically describing the dimensions and diversity of GI-tagged handicrafts, particularly within a specific state.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the landscape of GI-tagged handicrafts in West Bengal using the Geographical Indications Registry's GI product list of the Intellectual Property Office of India. The study aims to deepen understanding of West Bengal's rich handicraft culture by compiling a comprehensive portfolio of registered GI-tagged handicrafts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Geographical Indication in India has mainly focused on the legal framework, traditional methods, benefits of GI tagging, and socio-cultural aspects of crafts. Bashir (2020), examines GI protection in various states in India and found that there were certain gaps regarding enforcement and awareness among stakeholders. Similarly, Ghosh et al. (2025) evaluate the implementation of India's GI Act and found that legal recognition does not necessarily mean market protection and awareness of GI goods.

Traditional knowledge is another key aspect in the studies of Geographical Indications. The link between traditional knowledge and intellectual property was examined by Yadav and Bohra (2022), emphasising the importance of geographical indications in preserving community knowledge. The relationship between Intellectual property and traditional knowledge is further explored by Yadav (2024), highlighting the conceptual and institutional problems associated with protecting traditional knowledge through IP systems. This scholarly literature forms an essential theoretical framework for studying handicraft artefacts based on traditional wisdom and local culture.

The pre and post-registration protection of handicraft products through Geographical Indication in India was studied by Kulkarni and Konde (2011), stressing the proper safeguarding from infringement and unauthorised use. Following this, Chaudhary et al. (2022) examined the handicraft industry in Uttar Pradesh and investigated the situation regarding handicrafts registered under the GI scheme as well as issues associated with the implementation of GI, highlighting that artisan awareness is crucial to make GI work effectively for handicrafts.

In the context of West Bengal, the GI registration of handicraft products is explored in terms of branding, market opportunities, rural development and the challenges faced by artisans (Halder, 2020). However, the study lacks a systematic mapping of the registered handicrafts, their spatial distribution and chronological trends.

Recent scholarship on GI in India draws attention to the changing landscape of GI registration across the country. Chaudhary & Agarwal (2025) have studied recent trends regarding GI registration and pointed out the dominant role of handicraft products in the GI list of India. Lukose (2022) has also observed that there is a significant presence of agricultural and handicraft products in the GI register of India. The more recent research on GI-related handicrafts has highlighted the fact that the advantages of GI recognition depend on several issues such as institutional support and market accessibility rather than mere registration (Yadav & Deshmukh, 2026).

Collectively, the existing studies have considerably enriched the knowledge about the GI system by analysing the legal framework, market trends, and socio-economic dimensions of these crafts. Relatively little attention has been given to exploring the registered GI handicrafts of any individual state as an ensemble, particularly in relation to their spatial representation, craft variety, and evolution in time and space.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Despite the growing body of literature on Geographical Indications, there is a significant lack of systematic documentation and analysis of the GI-tagged handicrafts registered in each state. The case of the registered GI-tagged handicrafts of West Bengal still lacks detailed descriptive research analysis. Existing studies are mainly concerned with the legal aspects of protection, intellectual property rights, rural development, competitiveness in the market, and the socioeconomic consequences of GI registration. The present study aims to fill this lacuna by presenting an overview of the GI-tagged handicrafts of West Bengal using the latest data available from the Geographical Indications Registry of India.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To identify and document the GI-tagged handicrafts of West Bengal.
- 2) To examine the regional distribution of GI-tagged handicrafts across West Bengal.
- 3) To explore the diversity of these handicrafts across different craft traditions
- 4) To analyse the temporal pattern of GI registration of handicrafts in West Bengal.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design: A descriptive documentary research design was employed for the study to understand the GI-tagged handicrafts. The study emphasised the documentation of GI-registered crafts of West Bengal, including their distribution, diversity, time span, and type of crafts. Since all data used for the analysis in this research have been derived only from official records, no primary data were collected.

5.2 Data Sources and Data Preparation: Secondary data have been gathered through the Geographical Indications Registry available on the Intellectual Property India (IP India) website. This dataset contained registered GIs of West Bengal up to the year 2026. For the entire state dataset, the identification of GI products was done through the classification of the different types of goods into various categories such as Agricultural, Foodstuff, and Handicraft. The current study concentrated on the 16 GI-tagged handicrafts in West Bengal. However, the larger dataset containing 35 GI products was considered only for positioning the handicrafts. The data were collected from the IP India GI Registry in 2026 and comprised the GI products of West Bengal present in the database at the time of data collection. In case of temporal analysis, the date taken into consideration was that of Certificate Date and not that of **Date of Filing.

The obtained database was further divided into a structured format, which included data items such as GI Serial Number, GI Number, Product Name, Registration Status, Date of Registration, Product Type, and State. The handicrafts were then classified according to the type of craft tradition to which they belonged, such as textile & weaving, terracotta, metal craft, leather craft, folk paintings, masks, natural fibre crafts, and silken crafts, depending on the nature of the registered product.

5.3 Data Analysis and Analytical Framework: Descriptive analysis was used to explore the GI handicrafts landscape. The frequencies and percentages were used to establish the proportion of the handicrafts in relation to the total number of GIs in the state. Registration years were analysed in chronological order to see the temporal trends of GI identification. GI-registered handicrafts were also analysed geographically to find out the geographic spread of recognised craft forms in West Bengal. The results were then shown through tabulations and graphics for proper interpretation of the distribution and diversity of GI-tagged handicrafts.

These areas of focus in the analysis were distribution, diversity, temporal evolution and geographical distribution. While distribution was studied in terms of the spatial distribution and representation of the handicrafts that have been registered under GI protection, diversity related to the number of handicraft traditions that have found representation within the GI tag. Development over time was analyzed in the form of looking at the years of registration. Together, these three aspects helped to describe a comprehensive picture of GI-tagged handicraft traditions of West Bengal.

5.4 Limitation: This study is confined to the data present in the GI registration documents and hence constitutes the recorded GI scenario, and not the complete universe of handicrafts that have been traditionally practised in West Bengal. Hence, any handicraft that is unregistered or still pending for registration cannot be included in the analysis. It does not evaluate the socio-

economic effect of registering GI, living conditions of the artisans, market performance, or the success of GI registration. The results of this study should thus be taken as a documentary and descriptive exercise.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Through the dimensions of representation, craft diversity, temporal development, and geographical identity, the analysis represents the West Bengal landscape of GI-tagged handicrafts. The results of the analysis are presented in four analytical tables, each of which covers a particular feature of the registered GI-based handicrafts landscape.

Table 1: Representation of Handicrafts in West Bengal's GI Portfolio

The distribution of the registered GI products reflects the initial status of handicrafts within the entire portfolio of GI products in West Bengal. The category-wise distribution of 35 registered GI products is shown in Table 1 below.

GI Product Category	Registered Products	Share of State GI Portfolio (%)	Relative Position
Handicraft	16	45.71	Largest
Agricultural	10	28.57	Second
Food Stuff	9	25.71	Third
Total	35	100.00	—

Interpretation: The distribution reveals that handicrafts hold a prominent place in West Bengal GI representation. Out of the 35 registered GI products, 16 (45.71%) are handicraft products. Hence, handicrafts are the largest category among these. Agricultural products represent 28.57% of the total, and food products represent 25.71% of the total GIs. Therefore, handicrafts contribute to nearly half of the registered GIs in West Bengal, providing a solid foundation for studying the handicrafts of West Bengal.

Table 2: Craft Diversity Profile of West Bengal's GI-Tagged Handicrafts

The 16 GI products belong to a variety of traditional handicrafts with different manufacturing methods and cultural implications. Table 2 classifies the GI handicrafts by their respective craft traditions to analyse the diversity present in the portfolio of West Bengal.

Craft Tradition	GI-Tagged Handicrafts	No. of Products	Share (%)
Textile, Weaving & Embroidery	Nakshi Kantha; Santipore Saree; Baluchari Saree; Dhaniakhali Saree; Banglar Muslin; Tangail Saree of Bengal; Garad Saree; Korial Saree	8	50.00

Mask-making	Purulia Chau Mask; Wooden Mask of Kushmandi	2	12.50
Terracotta	Bankura Panchmura Terracotta Craft	1	6.25
Metal Craft	Bengal Dokra	1	6.25
Folk Painting	Bengal Patachitra	1	6.25
Leather Craft	Santiniketan Leather Goods	1	6.25
Natural Fibre Craft	Madurkathi	1	6.25
Silk-related Craft	Malda Nistari Silk Yarn	1	6.25
Total	16 GI-tagged handicrafts	16	100.00

(Note: The classification under categories of craft tradition has been made to provide analysis of the products listed and does not reflect the official classification in the GI Registry)

Interpretation: From the diversity matrix, there is evidence of dominance of textiles, weaving, and embroidery, where these handicrafts constitute 8 of the 16 GI handicrafts that have been registered (50%). Mask making is the next largest group of handicrafts, with two registered products. Terracotta, metal crafts, folk painting, leather crafts, natural fibre crafts, and silk crafts are some of the other handicrafts that have been registered under one product each. However, the clustering of registrations in textile-based practices is also a testament to the particular presence of these traditions in the state's officially designated craft heritage.

Table 3: Temporal Pattern of GI Recognition among West Bengal's Handicrafts

The registration dates allow us to analyse the development of GI recognition of the crafts. The registration history of GI-tagged handicrafts was analysed by means of the Certificate Date from the official GI Registry. The concentration of handicrafts registered during these periods, together with their cumulation in the registered GI handicraft collection of the state, is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Registration Period	GI-Registered Handicrafts	No. of Handicrafts	Share (%)	Cumulative Share (%)
2008–2012	Nakshi Kantha (21.01.2008); Santiniketan Leather Goods (09.09.2008); Santipore Saree (04.09.2009); Baluchari Saree (06.01.2012); Dhaniakhali Saree (06.01.2012)	5	31.25	31.25
2013–2018	Bankura Panchmura Terracotta Craft (28.03.2018); Bengal Dokra (28.03.2018); Bengal Patachitra	6	37.50	68.75

	(28.03.2018); Purulia Chau Mask (28.03.2018); Wooden Mask of Kushmandi (28.03.2018); Madurkathi (28.03.2018)			
2019–2025	Tangail Saree of Bengal (02.01.2024); Garad Saree (02.01.2024); Korial Saree (02.01.2024); Banglar Muslin (01.03.2024); Malda Nistari Silk Yarn (31.03.2025)	5	31.25	100.00
Total		16	100.00	—

Interpretation: The temporal distribution analysis indicates that there have been three major phases of GI registration of the handicrafts from West Bengal. A higher concentration is witnessed in the second phase. In the first phase (2008-2012), there are five handicrafts (31.25%), whereas the second phase (2013-2018) has recorded the maximum number of handicrafts (37.50%) getting registered under GI protection. The third phase (2019-2025) consists of five handicrafts (31.25%). Thus, the temporal analysis suggests that the GI registration has not followed a uniform trend over the years.

Table 4: Spatial Distribution of GI-Tagged Handicrafts in West Bengal

The geographic distribution was investigated through the association of GI handicrafts with their respective craft-producing centres and presented in Table 4 below. The identified centres were classified based on the number of GI crafts associated with them into centres producing multiple, double, or single crafts.

Craft Representation Pattern	Principal District / Craft Hub	GI-Tagged Handicrafts	No. of Associated GI Handicrafts	Nature of Craft Representation
Multiple-craft representation	Bankura	Bankura Panchmura Terracotta Craft; Bengal Dokra; Baluchari Saree	3	Terracotta, metal and textile
Two-craft representation	Birbhum	Nakshi Kantha; Santiniketan Leather Goods	2	Textile and leather
	Nadia	Santipore Saree; Banglar Muslin	2	Textile

	Paschim Medinipur	Bengal Patachitra; Madurkathi	2	Folk painting and natural fibre
	Murshidabad	Garad Saree; Korial Saree	2	Textile
Single-craft representation	Hooghly	Dhaniakhali Saree	1	Textile
	Purulia	Purulia Chau Mask	1	Mask-making
	Dakshin Dinajpur	Wooden Mask of Kushmandi	1	Mask-making
	Purba Bardhaman	Tangail Saree of Bengal	1	Textile
	Malda	Malda Nistari Silk Yarn	1	Silk-related craft

Note: These associations among the geographical areas represent the main regions or the primary hubs of production of the handicrafts. The categorisation is done depending on the number of GI crafts found in the principal hubs. As some crafts may have been extended to cover more than one district, the geographical affiliations should not be seen as exclusive boundaries of the GIs.

Interpretation: The table shows a diverse geographical distribution of GI recognition in West Bengal. In the case of Bankura, there is a presence of multiple-craft representations, and the district has three handicrafts carrying the GI tag that belong to more than one craft tradition. In the case of Birbhum, Nadia, Paschim Medinipur and Murshidabad, there is representation of two handicrafts carrying the GI tag for each of the districts. However, Hooghly, Purulia, Dakshin Dinajpur, Purba Bardhaman and Malda have only one such representation each.

6.1 Summary of Major Findings

Analysis of the GI Registry Data gives an overview of the representation, diversity, chronology, and spatial distribution of the GI-tagged handicrafts in West Bengal. The key observations from the analysis are mentioned below:

a) The handicrafts hold the largest place in West Bengal's GI portfolio. Out of the 35 GI products identified, 16 (45.71%) belong to the handicrafts category, forming the largest basket among all other GI products.

b) Among West Bengal's GI handicrafts, textile-based crafts occupy the highest share. Eight out of 16 handicrafts (50.00%) are associated with Textiles, weaving, and embroidery. Mask-making ranks second with two products (12.50%), whereas terracotta craft, metal craft, folk painting craft, leather craft, natural fibre craft, and silk craft each have one item (6.25%).

c) The recognition of Geographical Indication to the products has taken place in different phases, not uniformly. The years between 2013 and 2018 witnessed the maximum number of registrations, with six handicrafts (37.50%) being awarded GI protection. There were five registrations (31.25%) in both the 2008 to 2012 and 2019 to 2025 periods.

d) In different regions of West Bengal, the GI-tagged handicrafts are distributed. Bankura District has the highest proportion of GIs, with three handicrafts tagged with GI, whereas Birbhum, Nadia, Paschim Medinipur, and Murshidabad are associated with two handicrafts each, while Hooghly, Purulia, Dakshin Dinajpur, and Purba Bardhaman have one associated handicraft each.

e) The spatial distribution highlights a mix of craft clusters and regional diversity. Though some districts are considered to be hubs for multiple craft traditions, GI-tagged handicrafts have also been found in other districts as well. This means that while there is extensive geographical distribution of GI certification, it is uneven across the state.

7. DISCUSSION

The present study provides a good example of the strong relationship between place, craft practices, and culture through GI recognition in West Bengal. The prevalence of the tradition of weaving is similar to the study conducted by Basole (2015), which examined the Banarasi sari and its relationship between place, authenticity, and traditional artisanal craft knowledge.

The diversity of handicrafts recognised in West Bengal is also consistent with the international case studies. According to Gilmar et al. (2024), who mapped handicraft GIs in Brazil, the registered craft GIs reflected unique traditions and techniques tied to a specific territory. The study, much like the current study, shows the importance of mapping handicrafts registered under GIs to study the craft diversity and territoriality of handicrafts. Similarly, Asri et al. (2022) demonstrated in the case of Kasongan pottery in Indonesia that handicrafts are closely connected with local history, cultural heritage, geographical characteristics, and community livelihoods.

The skewed geographical spread in West Bengal also indicates the territorial aspect of the GI protection mechanism. Nevertheless, the higher number of GI marks found in certain districts does not necessarily mean that other districts do not have handicraft traditions. It is rather an indication of the disparity in the extent to which the specific practices have been formally recognised through the GI process. The difference is significant in that, as Shafi (2022) states, GI protection in itself does not lead to sustainable development, but its effectiveness relies on institutional support and participation of the community.

The temporal trend identified in this study is also crucial. Instead of viewing GI registration as a one-time legal process, this study shows the evolution of recognition of the handicrafts of West Bengal at different time periods. The combination of the temporal, spatial, and craft diversification dimensions gives a broader view of the GI situation in the state. The novelty of this current study is that it attempts to link these dimensions within the context of the state. This research is a source of documentary data that can be used to understand the formal representation of the traditional handicraft heritage of West Bengal within the GI framework.

This research could also be used as a reference tool for researchers and other interested individuals when trying to find areas that require documentation within the GI process.

8. CONCLUSION

The study offers an overview of how the traditional craft heritage of West Bengal is being institutionalised through the Geographical Indication (GI) route. Instead of considering the process of Geographical Indication registration simply as a legal process, the research considers the process as that of institutional recognition of place-specific craft knowledge and culture. The documentation of GI mapping reveals the significance of combining craft diversity, geography, and registration history for comprehending the GI map.

The findings of the study provide a structured foundation that will be useful for any future studies in terms of GI management in West Bengal. This would assist decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders in identifying issues where more documentation, institutionalisation, consciousness, and community participation are required. However, the research acknowledges that official registration of GIs is merely one side of the craft heritage since it may not be able to cover all the traditional skills present in the state.

Future studies could therefore transcend documentary mapping and analyse the experiential aspect of GI recognition, especially in terms of awareness, participation, economic prospects, marketing and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems. In this regard, the present study is an introduction to the understanding of what has already been identified within the scope of GIs and what still needs to be discovered.

Declaration of AI Use

AI-based tools were used only for language editing, grammar correction, and improving readability. The research idea, methodology, analysis, interpretation, findings, and conclusions are entirely the authors' own. The authors take full responsibility for the content and integrity of the manuscript.

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