

# Jhabua Doll Craft of Central India: Cultural Heritage, Socio-Economic Significance, and the Case for Geographical Indication Protection

Mala Pradhan<sup>1</sup>, Sapna<sup>2</sup>, Shivangi Senthia<sup>3</sup>, Vaishnavi Mishra<sup>4</sup>, Neelam Choubey<sup>5</sup>,  
Mandavi Srivastava<sup>6</sup>, Naveen Kumar Chauhan<sup>7</sup>, Pratigya Darpe<sup>8</sup>, Girish Kumar Khare<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>School of Humanities and Culture, Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P, (Bharat)

<sup>3&8</sup>School of Legal Studies, Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P, (Bharat)

<sup>4</sup>School of Management and Commerce, Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P, (Bharat)

<sup>5</sup>School of Pharmacy, Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P, (Bharat)

<sup>6</sup>School of Agriculture Science, Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P, (Bharat)

<sup>7</sup>School of Natural and Applied Science, Vikrant University, Gwalior, M.P, (Bharat)

<sup>9</sup>Department of Design, Oriental Institute of Science & Technology, Bhopal, M.P, (Bharat)

## Abstract

Jhabua doll-making is one of the most vital aspects of the cultural background of both the Bhil and Bhilala tribes of Central India. Through the use of local materials, recycled fabrics, and culturally significant ornamentation, this form of native art expresses tribal identity, social organization, and belief systems. Jhabua dolls are not only ethnographic artefacts that chronicle folklore, rituals, work habits, and social life, but also carry profound aesthetic value. The present research examines the historical growth, socio-economic significance, and contemporary challenges of Jhabua doll-making within the Indian handicrafts sector. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study assesses conservation measures, market forces, and policy frameworks, with specific focus on the necessity of Geographical Indication (GI) registration. The paper further discusses dimensions of sustainability including design innovation, upcycling, and institutional support to propose a holistic model for the protection and regeneration of this endangered craft. Comparisons are drawn between traditional practices and present-day market dynamics to contextualize the urgency of preservation.

**Keywords:** Jhabua Dollcraft, Tribal Handicrafts, Cultural Heritage, Geographical Indication, Sustainability, Upcycling, Bhil Tribe, Intangible Cultural Heritage

## 1. Introduction:

India is a country of extraordinary cultural plurality, and its tribal communities are among the most prolific custodians of intangible heritage in the world. Madhya Pradesh, one of India's most tribally diverse states, is home to a vast and intricate network of folk-art traditions, among which the Jhabua doll craft locally known as Adivasi Gudiya stands out for its ethnographic depth, aesthetic finesse, and community-rooted significance.

Published: 28 March 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i2.30951>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

Located in the western corner of Madhya Pradesh near the borders of Gujarat and Rajasthan, the Jhabua district is predominantly inhabited by the Bhil and Bhilala communities, who constitute approximately 85–90% of the district's population. These tribes possess one of the richest artistic traditions in the Indian subcontinent, expressed through dance, music, body adornment, mural painting, and, most notably, doll-making. The Jhabua doll emerged not merely as a decorative artefact, but as a living representation of tribal cosmology, social structure, gendered labour practices, and ritual life.

In recent decades, however, this heritage craft has faced a convergence of threats: rapid urbanization, migration of skilled artisans to cities, declining interest among younger generations, market competition from mass-produced imitations, and insufficient policy support. Despite recognition by government bodies and cultural institutions, the craft remains at risk of gradual obsolescence unless systematic and inclusive conservation efforts are undertaken(1).



Fig. 1: A representative Jhabua Doll

This manuscript presents a comprehensive investigation of the Jhabua doll craft tracing its historical evolution, documenting its materials and processes, analyzing its cultural symbolism, quantifying its socio-economic dimensions, and evaluating pathways for its sustainable revival. A central argument developed in this paper is that Geographical Indication (GI) registration, if combined with capacity-building, digital outreach, and design innovation, can provide a robust framework for this craft's long-term viability (15).

## **2. Historical Background and Evolution of Jhabua Doll Craft:**

### **2.1 Ancient Origins and Ritual Roots:**

The origins of the Jhabua doll craft are deeply entangled with the ritual and ceremonial practices of the Bhil and Bhilala communities. Oral traditions and early ethnographic records indicate that the craft evolved from larger ceremonial mask-making and figurine creation associated with tribal festivals such as Gavari a month-long ritual drama performed to appease

the deity Mahadev (Sharma, 2015). These masks and figurines served as sacred intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Over generations, as Bhil communities began interacting more intensively with markets and neighboring communities, the large-scale ritual objects gradually transitioned into portable doll-sized figures. This transformation was both strategic and pragmatic smaller dolls were easier to produce, transport, and sell, while retaining the symbolic grammar of the original ritual objects. By the early 20th century, the Jhabua doll had established itself as a distinct craft form representing daily tribal life(2).

### 2.2 The Colonial and Post-Colonial Period:

During the colonial era, tribal crafts across India were variously collected, exhibited, and commodified by colonial administrators and ethnographers. The Jhabua doll was among the crafts documented in ethnographic surveys, and examples found their way into museums in Bhopal, Delhi, and London. However, the colonial economy offered little financial incentive for artisans, and the craft remained largely subsistence-based.

In the post-independence period, under the framework of Nehruvian planned development, tribal arts received some institutional attention through bodies such as the All-India Handicrafts Board and state-level craft development corporations. Yet systematic support for the Jhabua doll specifically was slow to materialize, and the craft continued on the margins of formal economic recognition(3).

### 2.3 Revitalization in the Late 20th Century

The pivotal turning point for the Jhabua doll came in 1980, when a small group of local women, guided by the late Mr. Uddhav Gidwani, began organizing doll-making as a collective economic activity. This grassroots initiative marked the beginning of the craft's formal entry into commercial circuits. Under the subsequent leadership of Mr. Subhash Gidwani and the NGO 'Gudia Ghar,' the craft found new audiences at state-level exhibitions, national craft fairs, and eventually international platforms.

The nomination of artisan Mr. Ramesh Parmar and his wife for the Padma Shri award drew national attention to the craft, and in 2023, the Government of India commemorated the Jhabua doll through a dedicated postal stamp and envelope series a recognition that cemented its status as a nationally significant heritage craft.

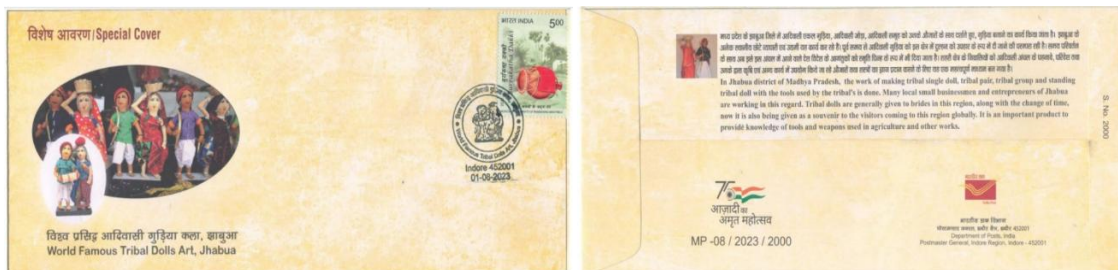


Figure 2: Postal stamp and envelope issued by Govt. of India

Figure-2 shows a 2023 Indian postal stamp honoring Jhabua tribal dolls. Table-1 traces evolution from ritual origins to market craft, NGO support, and national recognition.

Table 1: Historical Timeline of Jhabua Doll Craft Development

Period	Key Development	Significance
Pre-1900	Ritual mask and figurine-making in Gavari ceremonies	Sacred origins, spiritual role
Early 20th C.	Transition to portable doll forms	Commodification and market adaptation
1947–1980	Post-independence documentation	Institutional recognition begins
1980	Gidwani family grassroots initiative	Organized collective production
2000s	NGO support, craft fairs, exhibitions	Market expansion
2023	Govt. of India postal stamp issued	National heritage recognition

### 3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design that integrates primary fieldwork with systematic review of secondary literature. The methodological approach is grounded in material culture theory, which treats arte facts as active agents in the construction and transmission of social meaning (Miller, 2010; Woodward, 2007). This framework is particularly appropriate for studying indigenous handicrafts, where objects embody not only technical skill but entire worldviews, belief systems, and social relations.

#### 3.1 Primary Data Collection

Primary data were gathered through extended field observations in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with three key stakeholder groups: artisans engaged in doll-making, vendors and traders dealing in tribal crafts, and consumers including domestic buyers and international tourists. Interviews were conducted in Hindi and local dialects and subsequently translated and thematically coded.

#### 3.2 Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data were drawn from academic peer-reviewed literature, government policy reports (Ministry of Textiles, Government of Madhya Pradesh), UNESCO convention documents, NGO reports from Gudia Ghar, and national craft databases. These sources provided historical, statistical, and comparative context for the primary findings.

#### 3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework synthesizes three theoretical lenses: material culture theory (artefacts as meaning-laden objects - (Miller, 2010; Woodward, 2007).), intangible cultural heritage frameworks (UNESCO, 2003), and sustainable livelihood analysis. This triangulated approach allows for a holistic understanding of the craft that spans cultural, economic, environmental, and political dimensions.

Data Type	Method	Source
Primary – Artisan Perspectives	Semi-structured interviews	20 artisans, Jhabua district
Primary – Market Insights	Vendor interviews, observation	Local markets, craft fairs
Primary – Consumer Feedback	Interviews, observation	Tourists, urban buyers
Secondary – Policy Context	Document analysis	Govt. of MP, Ministry of Textiles
Secondary – Cultural Context	Literature review	Academic journals, UNESCO docs
Secondary – GI Comparisons	Case study analysis	GI registry, published reports

#### 4. Tools, Materials, and the Production Process

##### 4.1 Raw Materials and Their Significance

The material composition of Jhabua dolls is a microcosm of the ecological knowledge and resource efficiency characteristic of tribal communities. The choice of materials is neither arbitrary nor purely utilitarian each element carries cultural resonance and reflects an intimate relationship between the artisan and the natural environment.

Teak wood (Sagwan), sourced from the dense forests of the Vindhya and Satpura ranges that border Jhabua, forms the structural armature of the doll. Prized for its density, pest resistance, and ease of carving, Sagwan is a material the Bhil community has worked with for centuries. Recycled cloth scraps (Katran) from local tailoring units are repurposed for costuming and body stuffing an indigenous model of circular economy thinking that predates contemporary sustainability frameworks. Natural mineral pigments, plant-based dyes, and synthetic paints are used for facial expression and decorative detailing(4).

Table 3: Materials and Tools Used in Jhabua Doll Manufacturing

Material / Tool	Source	Purpose	Cultural Significance
Teak Wood (Sagwan)	Local forests	Structural framework and base	Represents durability; connection to forest ecology
Cloth Scraps (Katran)	Tailoring units	Stuffing and costume creation	Upcycling; reflects tribal resourcefulness
Cotton / Wool	Local markets	Body filling	Softness; maternal symbolism
Iron Wire	Local hardware	Internal support and joints	Structural integrity; flexibility
Natural Pigments	Mineral/plant sources	Facial features and attire	Sacred colour symbolism in tribal art
Glass Beads / Metal	Local craft suppliers	Jewellery and adornment	Indicators of social status and gender
Needle, Thread, Scissors	Artisan toolkit	Assembly and embroidery	Passed down through generations

#### 4.2 The Production Process: A Step-by-Step Overview:

The manufacturing of a Jhabua doll is a multi-stage, labor-intensive process that typically spans three to five days for a single doll of moderate complexity. The process demands both technical precision and artistic sensibility, and is typically performed by women artisans in a collaborative domestic setting. Figure 3 depicts some of the stages of doll making while all the detailed stages, activities, timeframe and required skills are tabulated in table 4.



*Figure 3: Doll making steps*

Table 4: Step-by-Step Jhabua Doll Production Process

Stage	Activity	Duration	Skill Required
1. Wood Carving	Teak wood shaped into head, torso, limbs using chisels and knives	4–6 hours	Carpentry, anatomical proportion
2. Assembly	Wooden parts joined with iron wire; cotton wrapped to create body volume	2–3 hours	Fine motor skill, structural sense
3. Base Costume	Katran fabric cut, stitched, and wrapped around the body frame	3–5 hours	Tailoring, knowledge of tribal dress
4. Painting	Natural/synthetic pigments applied for facial features and skin tone	2–4 hours	Artistic expression, colour knowledge
5. Embellishment	Glass beads, metal ornaments, fabric borders added for adornment	3–6 hours	Jewellery knowledge, tribal aesthetics
6. Finishing	Final inspection, dressing adjustments, base stabilization	1–2 hours	Quality control, presentation

### 4.3 Circular Economy and Environmental Sustainability

One of the most remarkable attributes of Jhabua doll craft is its inherent alignment with contemporary principles of the circular economy. The extensive use of recycled Katran (cloth scraps) not only reduces production costs but also diverts textile waste from landfills. Similarly, the use of locally sourced teak and plant-based pigments minimizes the carbon footprint of production. This indigenous model of upcycling is increasingly relevant in the global context of sustainable development and can serve as a powerful marketing narrative for eco-conscious consumers(5).

## 5. Cultural and Symbolic Dimensions:

### 5.1 Dolls as Ethnographic Documents:

Each Jhabua doll is, in essence, a three-dimensional ethnographic document a tangible archive of tribal knowledge, custom, and cosmology. The scenes depicted in doll compositions encompass the full range of Bhil and Bhilala social life: agricultural cycles (ploughing, harvesting, threshing), community celebrations (Bhagoria, Holi, marriage ceremonies), daily

domestic activities (cooking, water-carrying, childcare), and ritualistic practices (healing ceremonies, hunting, worship).

The meticulous attention to material detail in these dolls is striking. The specific type of jewellery worn Hasli necklace, Bor nose ring, Paunchi bracelet communicates the social status, marital condition, and community affiliation of the figure represented. Similarly, the tools carried by male figures (plough, axe, bow-and-arrow) or the vessels balanced by female figures (clay pot, broom, grain basket) encode gendered labour roles and subsistence practices with ethnographic precision(6).

## **5.2 The Bhagoria Festival in Doll Iconography**

Among all the cultural events represented in Jhabua doll art, the Bhagoria festival occupies the most prominent place. Bhagoria held annually during the Holi season is a unique Bhil tradition in which young men court potential brides at weekly markets (haats), with the consent of the community. Couples who 'elope' ceremonially during Bhagoria are considered legitimately married. This festival, suffused with music, dance, and vibrant clothing, is a recurring motif in doll compositions.

Bhagoria-themed doll sets typically depict couples in festive attire, musicians playing the dhol and mandar, women in bright odhani and ornaments, and scenes of communal feasting. These compositions serve not only an aesthetic purpose but also a pedagogical one introducing younger generations to the cultural significance of the festival and its social protocols(7, 8).

## **5.3 Gender, Identity, and Material Culture:**

From an anthropological perspective, the Jhabua doll embodies a complex matrix of gender, identity, and material culture. The majority of doll-makers are women, and the craft is transmitted matrilineally from mothers to daughters (Kumar & Patel, 2017), often alongside oral narratives and songs. This gendered mode of transmission embeds not only technical skills but also cultural memory and social values.

The representation of women in Jhabua dolls is particularly nuanced. Female figures are depicted in positions of labour, celebration, and religious practice reflecting the multifaceted roles of Bhil women in community life. Scholars of material culture argue that such representations function as 'mnemonic devices' through which societies reinforce and communicate their normative frameworks across (9, 10).

## **6. Socio-Economic Significance:**

### **6.1 Livelihoods and Women's Economic Empowerment:**

The Jhabua doll craft is a critical livelihood source for hundreds of tribal households in the Jhabua district, with women constituting the primary workforce. In a region characterized by high poverty rates, seasonal agricultural employment, and limited formal sector jobs, craft-based income provides a vital economic buffer. Studies on rural handicrafts in India consistently demonstrate that income-generating craft activities positively impact women's agency, household decision-making power, and self-esteem(11).

Artisan households engaged in doll-making typically earn between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 15,000 per month from craft sales during peak seasons (October through March, coinciding with craft fairs, festival shopping, and tourist season). This supplementary income, while modest, can constitute 20–40% of household earnings and substantially improves food security and children's education outcomes.

Table 5: Comparative Socio-Economic Profile Traditional vs. Contemporary Era

Indicator	Traditional Era (Pre-1990)	Current Era (2020s)
Primary market	Local festivals and brides' families	Craft fairs, tourist shops, e-commerce
Monthly artisan income (peak)	Rs. 500–1,500 (nominal)	Rs. 5,000–15,000
Doll price range	Rs. 10–50 (small dolls)	Rs. 150–2,500+
Export presence	Negligible	Growing (USA, Europe, Japan)
Active artisan households	~50 (estimated)	~300–500 (NGO-connected)
Women's share in production	~80%	~85–90%
Formal organizational support	None	NGO, SHGs, TRIFED

### 6.2 Market Channels: Then and Now

In the traditional economy, Jhabua dolls circulated primarily within the community itself gifted at marriages, used in ritual contexts, or traded at local weekly markets (haats). Their economic value was limited, and the craft was practised alongside agriculture rather than as a primary occupation.

The contemporary market for Jhabua dolls has transformed significantly. The craft is now sold through multiple channels including state-run emporiums (Mrignaini, Gram Shilp), NGO retail outlets, craft exhibitions (Dilli Haat, Surajkund Mela, Tribal Utsav), tourism-linked retail in Bhopal and Indore, and increasingly through e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, and specialized craft portals like Craftsvilla and Jaypore.

International markets have emerged as a significant growth avenue. Indian tribal crafts particularly those with a strong ethnographic narrative appeal strongly to collectors, anthropology enthusiasts, and eco-conscious consumers in Western countries. Diaspora communities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada have also emerged as important buyers, particularly around cultural festivals(12).

### **6.3 Institutional Support Ecosystem**

The institutional ecosystem supporting the Jhabua doll craft has grown considerably since the 1980s. Key actors include the Gudia Ghar NGO led by the Gidwani family; the Madhya Pradesh Tribal Affairs Department; the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED); the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) under the Ministry of Textiles; and various Self-Help Groups (SHGs) supported by NABARD and state rural development departments.

Despite this multi-actor ecosystem, coordination remains a persistent challenge. Programmes are often implemented in isolation, with limited sharing of data, beneficiary lists, or monitoring frameworks. A more integrated governance model possibly organized around a dedicated Jhabua Doll Craft Cluster with a nodal development agency would substantially improve outcomes(13).

## **7. Traditional Era vs. Contemporary Era: A Comparative Analysis:**

### **7.1 Raw Material Access:**

In the traditional era, all materials were locally sourced without cost teak wood from community forests, cotton from fields, natural dyes from plants and minerals. The contemporary scenario is more complex. While Katran recycling continues, commercial teak is now purchased due to forest conservation restrictions. Synthetic dyes, though cheaper and more vibrant, have largely replaced natural pigments, raising concerns about cultural authenticity and environmental impact.

### **7.2 Design and Aesthetics:**

Traditional Jhabua dolls adhered to a strict iconographic grammar specific pose, tribal dress codes, and scene compositions were maintained across generations with minimal variation. Contemporary production has diversified: artisans' experiment with new themes (urban life, national symbols, contemporary festivals), new scale (miniature souvenir dolls to large display pieces), and hybrid aesthetics that blend tribal motifs with contemporary design sensibility to appeal to urban consumers.

This design evolution is double-edged. On one hand, it broadens market appeal and financial viability. On the other, there is a risk of cultural dilution that the distinctive iconographic grammar of the original craft is gradually eroded in the pursuit of commercial palatability. Maintaining a documented 'canon' of traditional designs alongside contemporary innovations is therefore essential.

**Table 6: Traditional vs. Contemporary Era Comparison across Key Dimensions**

Dimension	Traditional Era	Contemporary Era	Risk / Opportunity
Raw materials	All locally/freely sourced	Mix of local and purchased	Cost pressure; authenticity concern
Pigments	Natural mineral and plant dyes	Mostly synthetic paints	Loss of authentic finish; lower eco-value
Themes depicted	Fixed tribal scenes only	Expanded to contemporary motifs	Dilution of iconography vs. wider market
Doll types	Single, pair, group (ritual)	Souvenir, décor, themed sets	Diversification aids viability
Production scale	Individual/family units	Collective through SHGs/NGO	Quality consistency challenges
Knowledge transfer	Oral, matrilineal	Partially documented	Risk of knowledge loss accelerating
Price realization	Low / subsistence	Improving but unequal	Middlemen capture value

### 7.3 Case Comparisons: GI-Registered Craft Parallels

To understand the potential impact of GI registration on the Jhabua doll craft, it is instructive to examine comparable tribal and folk craft traditions that have undergone GI recognition in India.

**Table 7: GI-Registered Craft Comparisons and Post-GI Outcomes**

Craft	Location	GI Year	Post-GI Outcome
Channapatna Toys	Karnataka	2005	300% increase in artisan income; strong export growth
Kondapalli Dolls	Andhra Pradesh	2005	Enhanced brand value; museum and global exhibition reach

Craft	Location	GI Year	Post-GI Outcome
Dhokra Metal Craft	Chhattisgarh	2013	UNESCO listing support; artisan collective formation
Bastar Dhokra	Chhattisgarh	2013	International market penetration; TRIFED partnership
Chanderi Fabric	Madhya Pradesh	2005	Premium pricing; dedicated online marketplace
Pipli Applique	Odisha	2007	Export to 40+ countries; design school collaborations
Jhabua Doll Craft	Madhya Pradesh	Pending	GI application under consideration (potential candidate)

The Channapatna toy case is particularly instructive. Prior to GI registration, this Karnataka craft faced severe competition from cheaper Chinese imitations. Post-GI registration, combined with marketing support from the Karnataka government and craft development corporations, artisan incomes tripled over a decade, export volumes increased substantially, and the craft attracted design school partnerships that helped innovate product lines without compromising traditional techniques. A similar trajectory is both feasible and desirable for the Jhabua doll craft.

## 8. Challenges Facing the Jhabua Doll Craft:

### 8.1 Market Competition from Mass-Produced Imitations:

Among the most immediate threats to the Jhabua doll craft is the proliferation of machine-made and cheap imitation dolls often produced in cities like Jaipur, Moradabad, and Surat that visually resemble tribal dolls but are manufactured at a fraction of the cost using synthetic materials and industrial processes. These imitations undercut authentic artisan products in tourist shops and online marketplaces, eroding both the market share and the perceived value of the genuine craft.

### 8.2 Artisan Ageing and Skill Migration:

Field surveys reveal a concerning demographic pattern: the majority of active Jhabua doll artisans are above 40 years of age, with limited uptake among the younger generation. Young people in Jhabua increasingly aspire to formal sector employment or migrate to cities in search of better economic opportunities. The resulting skill drain threatens to create an irreplaceable knowledge vacuum within a single generation.

### 8.3 Digital Divide and Market Access Limitations:

While e-commerce offers enormous potential for tribal crafts, the majority of Jhabua artisans remain digitally excluded. Limited smartphone penetration, poor internet connectivity, lack of digital literacy, and inability to manage online storefronts collectively constitute a significant barrier to direct market access. Artisans remain dependent on intermediaries who capture a disproportionate share of the value.

#### **8.4 Absence of GI Protection:**

Without formal GI registration, the Jhabua doll craft has no legal mechanism to prevent copying, misrepresentation, or unauthorized use of its identity. Any producer anywhere in India or the world can legally manufacture and sell dolls as 'Jhabua-style' without meeting quality standards, using authentic materials, or ensuring that profits benefit the originating artisan community. This absence of intellectual property protection is perhaps the single greatest systemic vulnerability of the craft.

#### **8.5 Climate Change and Resource Availability**

The long-term viability of teak-based craft production is also threatened by climate-driven forest degradation and tightening forest conservation regulations. As access to local Sagwan timber becomes increasingly restricted, artisans are forced to purchase commercial teak at market rates, increasing production costs and reducing margins. Developing alternative material strategies including bamboo, recycled wood composites, or bio-based substitutes is an important area for applied research.

### **9. Geographical Indication (GI) Protection: The Case for Jhabua Dolls**

#### **9.1 Understanding GI Registration in India:**

Geographical Indication (GI) is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities, reputation, or characteristics essentially attributable to that origin. In India, GI registration is governed by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, administered by the Geographical Indications Registry under the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks.

As of 2024, India has registered over 500 GI tags, covering products from agriculture, handicrafts, food products, and manufactured goods. Among these, tribal and folk craft registrations include Channapatna Toys, Kondapalli Dolls, Bastar Dhokra, Kutch Embroidery, Pipli Applique, and many others providing a robust body of precedent for a potential Jhabua Doll GI application.

#### **9.2 Benefits of GI Registration for Jhabua Doll Craft:**

The economic, legal, and cultural benefits of GI registration are well-documented in the scholarly literature and supported by empirical evidence from comparable craft registrations. For the Jhabua doll craft, these benefits may be categorized across four dimensions:

Table 8: Benefits of GI Registration for Jhabua Doll Craft

Benefit Dimension	Specific Benefit	Mechanism
Legal Protection	Prevents unauthorized copying and misrepresentation	GI tag provides legal basis for action against infringers
Economic	Premium pricing for authentic products	GI label signals quality and origin to consumers
Economic	Increased export opportunities	International GI recognition facilitates market access
Cultural	Safeguards authenticity and traditional techniques	GI specifications document and enforce traditional methods
Community	Equitable benefit distribution to artisans	Authorized user framework ensures benefits flow to producers
Reputational	Enhanced brand visibility nationally and globally	GI listing confers prestige and media attention

### 9.3 GI Registration Process and Requirements:

The GI registration process requires the filing of an application by a producers' association, legal entity, or organization representing producers. The application must include: a detailed description of the goods and their characteristics; a statement of the geographical area of production; a description of the quality, reputation, or other characteristic attributable to the geographical origin; and details of the production methods and standards.

For the Jhabua doll craft, the most appropriate applicant body would be a registered producers' collective or cooperative, potentially formalized with the support of the Gudia Ghar NGO, the Jhabua district administration, and TRIFED. The Madhya Pradesh government has already demonstrated capacity in this area, having facilitated GI registration for Chanderi fabric and Maheshwari saree processes that can serve as administrative templates.

### 9.4 Conditions for GI Success: Lessons from Comparable Crafts:

Academic research on GI outcomes for tribal crafts in India consistently highlights that GI registration is a necessary but insufficient condition for craft revival. The evidence suggests that GI registration is most effective when accompanied by: a structured marketing and branding strategy; capacity building and quality training for artisans; development of craft cluster infrastructure; digital platform integration; and robust monitoring and benefit-distribution mechanisms.

Conversely, GI registrations that lacked accompanying support programmes as was initially the case with several crafts showed limited impact on artisan livelihoods despite legal protection. This underscores the need for a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder 'GI Plus' strategy for the Jhabua doll craft.

## **10. Conservation Efforts and Future Prospects:**

### **10.1 Current Conservation Initiatives**

Multiple stakeholders are currently engaged in conservation efforts for the Jhabua doll craft, each operating with distinct mandates, resources, and approaches. The Gudia Ghar NGO remains the most active ground-level actor, providing artisans with raw material access, market linkages, training, and exhibition opportunities. Government programmes under the Tribal Sub-Plan and the Scheme for Promotion and Development of Handicrafts (SPDH) have provided financial support to individual artisans and SHGs. TRIFED's Tribes India platform has enabled some digital market access for verified artisan products.

### **10.2 Design Innovation and the Role of Art Institutions**

One underexplored avenue for craft revitalization is collaboration between traditional artisans and contemporary design institutions. Design schools such as the National Institute of Design (NID), National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), and state-level design colleges have increasingly engaged with tribal craft communities through collaborative design workshops, residency programmes, and product development projects.

Such collaborations can help Jhabua artisans develop new product lines interior décor items, fashion accessories, institutional gifting products that retain the tribal aesthetic grammar while meeting the functional and aesthetic requirements of urban and international markets. The critical challenge in such collaborations is ensuring that design innovation remains artisan-led and community-owned, rather than being appropriated by external commercial interests.

### **10.3 Digital Platforms and the Future of Tribal Craft Markets**

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021) served as an accelerator for digital adoption across Indian handicraft communities, as physical craft fairs and exhibitions were cancelled. Artisan groups that had previously been reluctant to engage with e-commerce were pushed to explore digital channels. For the Jhabua doll craft, this period saw increased visibility on platforms such as TRIFED's Tribes India, Amazon Karigar, and Google Arts and Culture.

Looking ahead, the integration of social media storytelling short videos on Instagram and YouTube showing the doll-making process, the lives of artisans, and the cultural meaning of each design represents a powerful and cost-effective marketing strategy. Consumer research consistently shows that 'craft narrative' and 'artisan story' are among the top purchasing motivators for premium tribal craft buyers, both in India and internationally.

Table 9: Digital Platform Opportunities for Jhabua Doll Craft Market Expansion

Digital Platform	Potential Role	Current Engagement Level
Instagram / YouTube	Visual storytelling, artisan profiles, process videos	Low potential for rapid growth
Tribes India (TRIFED)	Verified tribal craft e-commerce	Moderate growing
Amazon Karigar	Mass market online retail	Low
Google Arts & Culture	Cultural documentation, global visibility	Minimal
WhatsApp Business	Direct buyer communication and B2B orders	Low but growing organically
Etsy (International)	Premium handcraft export market	Very Low high growth potential

**10.4 Curriculum Integration and Intergenerational Transfer**

One of the most sustainable long-term conservation strategies is the integration of Jhabua doll craft into formal and non-formal education curricula. Several state governments including Rajasthan, Gujarat, and West Bengal have successfully introduced local craft traditions into school curricula as part of art education, generating interest and pride among younger generations while ensuring knowledge transfer beyond the domestic sphere.

For Jhabua specifically, curriculum integration at the district school level, combined with after-school craft clubs supported by NGOs, could create a pipeline of young artisans who are both skilled in traditional techniques and literate in contemporary market and digital tools a combination that is currently rare and much needed.

**11. A Holistic Model for Jhabua Doll Craft Revitalization:**

Based on the analysis presented in preceding sections, this paper proposes a holistic, multi-tier revitalization model for the Jhabua doll craft. The model is organized around five interconnected pillars:

Table 10: Five-Pillar Holistic Revitalization Model for Jhabua Doll Craft

Pillar	Key Actions	Responsible Actors
1. Legal Protection	GI registration; trademark protection for Gudia Ghar brand; anti-counterfeiting enforcement	Govt. of MP, Ministry of Textiles, GI Registry
2. Capacity Building	Technical training; quality standardization; natural pigment revival workshops; record-keeping skills	NGOs, Design schools, TRIFED, NABARD SHGs
3. Market Development	Craft cluster establishment; dedicated e-commerce portal; export facilitation; packaging design	TRIFED, district trade bodies, private sector
4. Documentation	Digital archive of traditional designs; oral history recording; craft process video library	Universities, UNESCO, cultural depts.
5. Policy Integration	Inclusion in tribal welfare schemes; micro-finance access; social security for artisans; school curricula	Tribal Affairs Ministry, NABARD, Education Dept.

This five-pillar model draws on lessons from successful craft revival programmes in India and internationally. Its distinguishing feature is the insistence on community centrality every action is designed to place artisans, particularly women, at the centre of decision-making, value creation, and benefit capture, rather than as passive recipients of external intervention.

## 12. Conclusion

The Jhabua doll craft stands at a critical inflection point. On one hand, it carries the weight of centuries of cultural knowledge, aesthetic refinement, and social meaning a living heritage that documents the worldview of one of India's most vibrant tribal communities. On the other, it faces a confluence of threats that, if unaddressed, could render it effectively extinct within the next two decades.

This manuscript has presented a comprehensive analysis of the craft's historical trajectory, material culture, cultural symbolism, socio-economic significance, and conservation landscape. The comparative analysis with GI-registered crafts such as Channapatna Toys and Kondapalli Dolls demonstrates that formal intellectual property protection, when combined with capacity building and market development, can significantly improve artisan livelihoods and craft sustainability.

The contrast between the traditional and contemporary eras of the craft reveals both the remarkable adaptive resilience of Jhabua artisans and the structural vulnerabilities that persist.

The shift from ritual objects to market commodities has brought new economic opportunities but also introduced risks of cultural dilution and commodification that require careful management.

The five-pillar revitalization model proposed in this paper encompassing legal protection, capacity building, market development, documentation, and policy integration provides a practical and evidence-based roadmap for stakeholders at all levels. The model's emphasis on artisan-centricity, women's empowerment, and circular economy principles ensures that conservation is not merely preservationist in character but actively contributes to the socio-economic development of the Jhabua district.

The 2023 Government of India postal stamp commemorating the Jhabua doll is a heartening signal that national recognition is growing. The task now is to convert symbolic recognition into substantive, sustained support. The Jhabua doll is not simply an artefact of the past it is a living, evolving expression of tribal identity and creativity that, with the right support, can thrive in the 21st century.

### **13. Scope for Future Research**

The present study, while comprehensive in its qualitative scope, opens several avenues for further investigation. Future research could usefully address the following dimensions:

1. **Consumer Perception Studies:** Systematic survey research on domestic and international consumer attitudes toward Jhabua dolls, including willingness to pay for GI-authenticated products, would provide robust market intelligence for artisan pricing and positioning strategies.
2. **Digital Marketing Effectiveness:** Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of social media storytelling and e-commerce platform engagement on artisan income levels would help optimize digital investment strategies.
3. **Design Education Integration:** Action research examining the impact of formal design school collaborations on craft innovation, cultural authenticity, and artisan empowerment would contribute to best-practice frameworks for craft-design partnerships.
4. **Comparative Tribal Craft Ethnography:** A systematic comparative study of doll-making traditions across Madhya Pradesh's tribal communities (Gondi, Korku, Baiga) would enrich understanding of material culture diversity and enable more nuanced cultural heritage policies.
5. **Post-GI Impact Assessment:** Should GI registration be achieved, a longitudinal mixed-methods study tracking changes in artisan income, doll production volumes, market channels, and cultural practices would provide invaluable evidence for national handicraft policy.
6. **Climate and Material Sustainability:** Research into alternative sustainable materials that can replace commercially sourced teak including bamboo composites, recycled wood, and bio-based materials while preserving the craft's aesthetic and structural integrity.

### **Acknowledgement:**

All the authors gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support of the Research & Development Cell, Vikrant University, Gwalior for their sustained encouragement and scholarly guidance throughout the course of this research. Their timely suggestions, academic oversight, and institutional facilitation were instrumental in shaping the study and bringing it to successful completion.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors affirm that there are no competing interests or conflicts that could have influenced the publication of this manuscript.

**Funding Source:** The present study was conducted with full academic independence and impartiality. No external funding, commercial interests, or personal relationships were involved that could be interpreted as having any influence on the design, execution, analysis, or outcomes of the research.

### **References:**

- Ghose A, Ali S. Protection and preservation of traditional cultural expression & traditional knowledge in handicraft industry: Advocating the need for a global cultural policy framework. *Braz J Int'l L.* 2023;20:473.
- Mishra SK, Roy S, editors. *A story of languishing doll: Revival of cloth dolls of India.* International Conference on Research into Design; 2017: Springer.
- Unnikrishnan G. *Craft Report: St. Teresa's College (autonomous) Ernakulam;* 2024.
- Thakker AM, Sun D. Sustainable plant-based bioactive materials for functional printed textiles. *The Journal of the Textile Institute.* 2021;112(8):1324-58.
- Wijekoon A, Ranaweera A, Martin BA. Upcycling: a systematic review and research agenda. *Journal of Management History.* 2025.
- Dwivedi J. Indian tribal ornaments; a hidden treasure. *IOSR Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology.* 2016;10(3):01-16.
- Gadsden VL. The arts and education: Knowledge generation, pedagogy, and the discourse of learning. *Review of research in education.* 2008;32(1):29-61.
- Li J, Moore D. (Inter) cultural production as public pedagogy: weaving art, interculturality and civic learning in a community festival context. *Language and Intercultural communication.* 2020;20(4):375-87.
- Assmann J. Communicative and cultural memory. *Cultural memories: The geographical point of view:* Springer; 2011. p. 15-27.
- Van Dijck J. Mediated memories: personal cultural memory as object of cultural analysis. *Continuum.* 2004;18(2):261-77.
- Josephine D, Nisha Jr, Reena Sa. The effect of an upcycling wood training program on creativity, skills, and psychological empowerment of rural women.

- McClinchey KA. Urban ethnic festivals, neighborhoods, and the multiple realities of marketing place. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing*. 2008;25(3-4):251-64.
- Rai S. *Innovative Governance: A Study of Bureaucratic Initiatives for Sustenance of Blue Pottery Industry Trough Harmonious Living*.
- Appadurai, A. (1986). *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Das, K. (2016). Geographical indications and rural development in India. *Journal of Intellectual Property Rights*, 21(3), 170–178.
- Government of India. (2019). *Handicrafts of India: Policy framework and development strategies*. Ministry of Textiles.
- Government of Madhya Pradesh. (2020). *Tribal handicrafts and livelihood promotion report*. Bhopal.
- Kumar, R., & Patel, S. (2017). Tribal art and material culture of Central India. *Indian Anthropologist*, 47(2), 45–60.
- Miller, D. (2010). *Stuff*. Polity Press.
- Mishra, P. (2021). Sustainability challenges in Indian handicrafts. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(1), 88–102.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Sharma, A. (2015). Masks, rituals, and material transformations among the Bhils. *South Asian Folklore Studies*, 9(1), 33–49.
- Singh, N. (2018). *Indigenous crafts and identity in Madhya Pradesh*. Routledge.
- Singh, R., & Nath, P. (2019). Handicrafts, heritage, and sustainable livelihoods in India. *Journal of Rural Development*, 38(4), 567–585.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*. Paris.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Traditional craftsmanship and sustainable development*. Paris.
- Woodward, I. (2007). *Understanding material culture*. Sage Publications.
- Various reference figures and materials from “Gudia Ghar” NGO of Mr. Subhash Gidwani.