

Geographical Indication and Tourism: A Study on the Awareness, Factors Influence, and the Scope of GI Tagging in Kerala as a Rural Tourism Development Tool

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Abstract *A geographical indication (GI), one of the intellectual property rights, is a sign applied to products with a particular geographical origin that fundamentally bears attributes, reputations, or features unique to that origin (WIPO, 2012). This study inspects the Geographical Indications as a new opportunity for rural areas to develop and to raise awareness of its importance for rural tourism development. The study was conducted in Kerala, India, popular in the realm of tourism as God's Own Country. The research findings demonstrate that the GI-tagged products in Kerala provide more socio-economic benefits in the rural areas as they offer differentiated and high-value-added products, and the consumers' willingness to purchase these kinds of products is high. These results are useful in understanding how geographical indications can be used and developed as a means of attracting tourists to visit rural areas of Kerala due to their unique characteristics and also to promote these products at an international scale.*

Keywords: *Geographical Indication, Authenticity, Rural Tourism, Rural Development, Kerala*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary globalized economy, the location of the origin of products is also an important factor, especially in purchase decisions (Adina et al., 2015). The area-specific talents of human resources and the diversity in agro-climatic conditions in the production area greatly impact product quality (Krupka & Arežina, 2017). In this context, Kerala, and India at large, has secured for itself the reputation of being a land rich in art, culture, and tradition from where numerous products originate each with its specialty and distinctive traits, owing to their origin and/or the creative skills of the local artisans. A geographic indication refers to anything that identifies a good as originating from a specific location and in which a particular good's quality, reputation, or other characteristics can be largely attributed

to its geographic origin (IP Australian Government-www.ipaustralia.gov.au).

In the context of tourism, local products are correlated with authenticity, and it is reported that authenticity is often treated as a prerequisite for tourists while making the decision to purchase souvenir items from the place visited whilst having the perception that the higher the authenticity, more the value of the product (Deng et al., 2020). When a tourist purchases goods that can be carried back home, it involves selecting and acquiring an object to store memories and feelings (Hu & Yu, 2007). The significance of Geographical indication (GI) arises in this context, and GI products can certainly of interest to tourists. Kerala is a popular international tourist destination that encompasses a wide range of products and cultural features unique to the region. Rural tourism has a

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role in developing rural areas, and GI products are mostly from non-urban regions (Divya & Anoop, 2018). At this outset, there arises a need for exploring the scope of using Geographical Indications in the parlance of tourism, as the consumers of it the tourists have the tendency to prefer authentic products as well (Fu et al., 2018). More specifically, this study examines the awareness level of the geographical indications among tourists, the factors that influence tourist buying behaviour with regard to GI products, and the scope of GIs as a tool for rural tourism development. A questionnaire-based survey and a Delphi study have been undertaken, and the study's outcome contributes towards the area of authentic souvenirs that are GIs in tourism and their role in rural tourism and corresponding local development.

GEOGRAPHIC INDICATION AND TOURISM

A product originating from a certain region/country and having the characteristics of the origin and/or country is remarked as "Geographical Indications GI" (Dogana & Gokovalib, 2012). As per TRIPS Agreement, Sections 22 and 23 of Intellectual Property Rights, Geographical Indication is the tag given to local products having a specific geographical origin and protected under the GI acts (Lukose, 2022). A geographical indication (GI), one of the intellectual property rights, is a sign applied to products with a particular geographical origin that fundamentally bears attributes, reputations, or features unique to that origin (WIPO, 2012). The concept of Geographical Indication originated in nineteenth-century Europe, where there was a tradition of connecting specific products with specific locations. The geographical Indication tag (GI Tag) came into effect in India on September 15th, 2003. Darjeeling Tea was the first item made in India to be given a GI tag in 2004 (Kumar et al., 2017).

GIs may be connected to industrial, agricultural, or manufacturing goods. Handicrafts, jewelry, and textiles are the other non-agricultural products that are often eligible for GI protection (WTO, 2004). These products have a strong regional significance and are connected to rural areas (Bowen, 2010). Rovamo (2006) states that the primary purposes of GIs include the identification of the country of origin and the unique characteristics of GI products, and it is generally accepted that these signs ought to be protected for this reason. GIs identify sources by informing the consumers about the origin of the goods to which they are affixed. According to Teuber (2010), geographically-distinct products might provide economic value if the consumer value the origin of the product. Geographical Indication is an assurance of authenticity as well and is based on a unique tradition passed down through generations from a specific geographical area, region, or location.

Geographical Indications help promote growth in underdeveloped regions by attracting the best prices and by enabling local employment generation. This finally goes on to reduce rural migration to metropolitan areas (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 1999). Protection through GIs can contribute to making localization of economic control possible, promote socio-economic development in rural areas, and assure higher economic returns (Rangnekar, 2004). As a result, protecting GIs becomes a means of rewarding traditions as GIs enable continual evaluation, thereby leading to prosperity in the GI-designated regions. The most crucial aspect of GIs is that GI products cannot be deliberately created. This is because they can only develop and be recognized if and when they are linked to a specific geographical area or location.

The geographical indications generally bring attention to the products, especially agricultural produce, fisheries, handicrafts, and artisanal products. GI brand products are mostly produced in villages or small areas of the state (Divya & Anoop, 2018). The producers or manufacturers of such GI products are primarily pro-poor. These products need protection, and equipping them with the necessary protection of GI tags proves very helpful. Better protection and marketing of GIs help in the reduction of absolute poverty through the increased local inflow of income and generation of employment opportunities (Pradyot & Ulrike, 2010). Geographical indications thus contribute to qualitatively and quantitatively better employment prospects and poverty reduction. Higher-income, when offered to the producers from original locations or regions, empowers them with the potential to transform the rural economy for the better. The assured market too contributes in attracting investments. The study by Callois (2004) surfaces strong evidence concerning the contribution of GIs to rural development through quality indicators. The Gandhian ideology in India mainly focuses on Gram Swaraj, which encourages rural development through village self-rule. Thus, the geographical indications can make a village opt for self-rule and make a substantial contribution to human growth and rural development.

One of the most critical aspects that the UNWTO (2020) has stressed is the aspect of rural development. Rural development was introduced to the subject of Development as well as Tourism during the 1970s and 1980s. Any form of tourism showcasing rural life, art, culture, and heritage at a rural location is called Rural Tourism. It benefits the local community economically and socially and further establishes a relationship between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourist experience. Dogan (2012) points out that traditional products act as representations of the local character of a region through the harmonization of natural resources and cultural methods, which leads them to be perceived as nostalgic and interesting products. Consumer preferences and willingness to buy these regionally produced GI products are high (Dhamotharan & Selvaraj, 2013). Customers prefer to spend more money on

GI-labelled products than on non-GI products (Menapace et al., 2009).

The authenticity of souvenir items bought from tourist destinations has the ability to enhance the perceived value and behavior intention of tourists from the perspective of experiential consumption (Fu et al., 2018). The products of the locality, sold as authentic products, possess the integrity of heritage, history and geographical identity, product origins, handicraft value proposition, skilled craftsmanship, and authentic patterns and presentation (Soukhathammavong & Park, 2019). The local products purchased from the destinations as souvenirs are portable items representing the society's cultural heritage while reflecting the predominant characteristics of a location and possessing a publicity function (Qi & Hong, 2011). Buying items/objects of interest from the destinations are considered a significant tourist activity, an essential aspect of a travel experience, and represents a significant component of customer spending (Li et al., 2021). More specifically, the act of purchase of locally produced souvenir items can assist residents in increasing their income, generating jobs, and playing a significant role in contributing a source of revenue for many tourism destinations (Wong, 2013). The purchase of souvenirs certainly contributes to the economic progress of the local community and stimulates local employment and diversification of local entrepreneurship (Love & Sheldon, 1998). GI products can be the unique souvenirs of the destination as well.

Another strand of literature that is tangentially relevant to this study is the role of GI products in aiding tourism development at a destination. Tourism is one of the most important industries in the growth of any developed or developing country's economy (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). As a traditional product group, GIs highlight the geographical name of the product as an effective tool for attracting tourists' attention to the local identity of the locale. This further leads to an increase in tourism activities in rural areas. In addition, the cultivation or manufacturing process of these products itself can attract tourists. Handicrafts and handlooms with special characteristics unique to the place always attract tourists. Specific geographical locations can go on to provide tourists with specific GI foods or drinks or boost sales of unique products by offering them discounts. A hike in tourism activities due to recognized GI benefits the producer and creates income and employment opportunities for other sectors such as hotel services for accommodation, gift shops, and restaurants (Bilge Dogana & Gokovalib, 2012).

Kerala is considered a treasure trove of unique GIs that protects their indigenous, agricultural, culinary, industrial, and handicraft products. All in all, there is around 370 registered GIs in India, out of which, up to this date, Kerala state owns 33 + 3 (logo) Geographical Indication (GI) Tags for its products (Tanya, 2020). Kerala is one of the few

states that have successfully marketed its natural beauty, art, traditions, and artisanal products to the leisure tourism markets. Tourists worldwide have been drawn to the state because of its unique heritage and cultural diversity. The GI-tagged products that Kerala showcases are primarily agricultural, handicrafts, and artisanal products. GI tags make it easy for tourists to get quality products of desired traits, and they're assured of the authenticity of the purchased products. According to the Geographical Registry, the state comprises 13 handicrafts and 15 agricultural products from April 2004 to 2021. Only Kerala and Karnataka are rich in agricultural and handicraft products, offering tremendous potential for the export market as well as for the development of both the state and central governments (www.ipindia.nic.in).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study makes an attempt to examine the awareness level of the tourist for geographical indications, identify the factors influencing tourist buying behaviour associated with GI products of Kerala, and examine the scope of GI tagging as a tool for rural tourism development in Kerala. Envisaged as a descriptive study, both primary data and secondary data are used for the study. The study is undertaken through two phases. In the first phase, as part of examining the level of awareness among the tourists on GI-tagged products, and identifying the buying behaviour factors that influence the purchase GI products, the study utilizes primary data that had been collected through a questionnaire based survey on a sample consisting of local and foreign tourists. The variables are identified with the help of the literature review, and the reliability of the variables was tested through Cronbach's alpha value. Using the questionnaire, these variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The responses were collected from 210 tourists who visited three destinations located at different regions in the state.

Out of 210 surveyed, 207 responses for tourists were coded and used for the preliminary data analysis after eliminating the unusable responses. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26 was used for analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics, Chi-square, and factor analysis (principal component analysis) were the main statistical tools employed in the data analysis. Chi-square goodness-of-fit test is used for analyzing the awareness level of tourists for GI products. It is followed by a factor analysis, and descriptive statistics were used to analyze tourists' buying behaviour associated with GI products in Kerala.

The second phase was undertaken using a Delphi study in order to ascertain the scope, significance, and different dimensions of GI products in the parlance of rural tourism. Delphi technique is applied in the circumstances of

vagueness, to conclude, for forecasting, etc., and it uses the collective opinion of the panel of experts. It enables the formulation of an expert-based judgment about an epistemic question based on the postulation that the reliability of the opinion from a group of experts and the multitude of associated perspectives can be better compared to a judgment by an individual expert (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Twenty experts were chosen, and a questionnaire consisting of eighteen statements carefully drawn based on the literature review and unstructured interviews with five experts was developed for data collection. Five-point Likert scale was used to drag the degree of consent or dissent of the experts. Through two rounds of the survey, all the statements got consent. Mean and interquartile range values were calculated, and the interquartile value ranging from 0 to 1 are considered for consensus on the statements provided.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the first phase of the data collection, the sample consists of 207 tourists. Among the tourists, the proportion of male

and female tourists was 59% and 42%, respectively. Sixty-two per cent of them were domestic tourists, and the rest were from outside the country. Most of the samples (44%) were from the age group above 45, 34% of respondents were in the age group between 35-45, the age group between 25 and 35 consisted of 17%, and 5% of samples were aged below 25. About 45% of respondents were employees, more than one-fifth (27%) were students, and only 10% and 18% of respondents' occupations were entrepreneurs and civil servants. Among the respondents, 98% were graduates, and 2% were non-graduates.

Geographical Indications and Awareness Level of Tourists

The result of the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test is furnished in Table 1.

H0: Level of Awareness on Geographical Indications of tourists are equally distributed.

Table 1: Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Test of Equality of Awareness Level of Tourist for GIs

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-Square Value	P-Value
Respondents think that they know about GIs	127	61.4	157.271	<0.001
Respondents think that they do not know anything about GIs	11	5.3		
Respondents think that they do not know much about GIs	45	21.7		
Respondents think that they have only heard the word 'Geographical Indications'	24	11.6		
Total	207	100		

Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 5% level of significance. Hence concluded that the Awareness Level for Geographical Indications of tourists is not equally distributed. Table 1 reveals that the majority of tourists (61%) are aware of Geographical Indications. It is well understood from the above table that there are different levels of awareness among tourists. It is indicated that 24 respondents have only heard about the word 'Geographical Indications' (a total of 12%). The number of tourists who agreed that they do not know much about Geographical Indications is 22%. Five per cent of them are completely unaware of Geographical Indications. The analysis reveals that there is a need to increase the awareness level among tourists about GI-tagged products.

GI Products and Factors of Influence on the Buying Decision of Tourists

A factor analysis (exploratory factor analysis) is employed to identify the factors that influence the buying decision

of tourists concerning GI products. Factor analysis is a technique used when the researcher wants to reduce the variables to a smaller number of factors from a large number of variables. In simple, factor analysis is a data reduction technique. To examine the underlying dimensions of tourists' buying behaviour with regard to GI-tagged products, 33 variables were chosen. A factor Analysis is performed to cluster these 33 variables into small groups. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a statistical technique used to reduce data to a smaller set of summary variables and determine the number of factors that influence variables. In this study, EFA using Principal Component Factor Extraction along with Varimax Rotation was performed to extract the factors after the data were collected from the respondents. The suitability of the data for the factor analysis was confirmed by KMO and Bartlett's test.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sample Adequacy

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.941
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	12847.019
	Df	528
	Sig.	<0.001

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure is an index that determines the sampling adequacy of data that are to be used for Factor Analysis. The KMO test value is 0.941, which indicates that all variables are highly adequate for the analysis. Bartlett's test of Sphericity helps a researcher to decide whether the results of factor analysis are worth considering and whether we should continue analyzing the research work. Bartlett's test of Sphericity is significant to a level of significance <0.001, which shows a high correlation between variables, making it adequate to apply factor analysis.

Table 3: Overall Reliability of the Coefficient

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.972	33

Reliability is the degree and extent of obtaining the same result by using a measurement repeatedly. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is an indicator of the internal consistency of the scales. The result of Cronbach's Alpha 0.972 from 33 items explains that good internal consistency exists among the indicators. Usually, the value of Cronbach's Alpha above 0.7 is considered reliable.

Table 4 shows the Factor loadings, Eigenvalues, Variance, and Descriptive statistics. Factor loadings are the weights and correlations between each variable. Variables with factor loading less than 0.2 are excluded. To reduce the number of factors and enhance better interpretability, factors are rotated. Varimax rotation is used for this factor reloading. The eigenvalue is the extent of variance explained by one more factor or the relative importance of each factor for a particular set of variables. Kaiser's rule of retaining factors with eigenvalues larger than 1.00 was used in this analysis to reduce the number of factors. In this case, there were five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. Variance is measured as the percentage of Eigenvalues. The table also shows the items' mean and standard deviation scores under each of the five factors.

Table 4: Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues, Variance and Descriptive Statistics

Rotated Component Matrix							
Factors	Components	Item Description	Rotated Loading	Mean	SD	% of Variance	Eigen Value
1	Demand Factor	Desire to buy the original product.	.867	4.04	1.259	58.385	19.267
		Quest for authenticity.	.847	3.86	1.231		
		Desire to support the local community.	.758	3.84	1.136		
		Value for money.	.866	3.87	1.224		
		Status and prestige value.	.854	3.84	1.243		
		Product uniqueness.	.851	3.89	1.204		
		Cultural/heritage/antique value.	.865	3.85	1.252		
		Encouragement of local products.	.858	3.86	1.236		
		Curiosity satisfaction.	.805	3.80	1.253		
		Value as a gift article, to give to the close ones.	.816	3.80	1.257		
Spiritual/religious value of the product .	.851	3.80	1.261				
2	Supply Factor	Availability of raw materials/resources .	.704	3.74	1.306	11.103	3.664
		Product making process and its attraction.	.777	3.73	1.316		
		Support product distribution without geographical barriers.	.814	3.47	1.403		
		Display and use of unique skills and mastery of the product making.	.776	3.32	1.450		
		Empowerment of cultural and traditional features.	.775	3.72	1.321		
		Preserves cultural varieties.	.779	3.74	1.314		
		The benefit of economy of scale.	.761	3.66	1.341		
		Local entrepreneurship and employment potential.	.707	3.84	1.218		
		Indication of the locality and traditional values.	.693	3.84	1.212		
		Prevent the extinction of traditional knowledge.	.567	2.75	1.466		

Rotated Component Matrix							
Factors	Components	Item Description	Rotated Loading	Mean	SD	% of Variance	Eigen Value
3	GI Product Characteristics	Authentic and unique products.	.878	3.25	1.473	5.765	1.902
		Association with culture and tradition.	.637	3.32	1.444		
		Complement the equitable distribution of socio-economic benefits.	.688	3.26	1.454		
		Protection of indigenous knowledge and skill.	.645	2.98	1.478		
		Legal assurance in terms of quality.	.898	3.36	1.431		
		Guarantee of location and method of production.	.901	3.41	1.417		
		GIs as a guarantee of origin.	.819	3.53	1.389		
		Guarantee of quality.	.775	3.43	1.436		
4	Sustainability Values of GI Products	Social Sustainability contribution.	.931	3.79	1.215	5.337	1.761
		Promote economic sustainability.	.926	3.56	1.306		
5	Ecological and Health Benefits of GI	Contribute to ecological conservation.	.910	2.14	1.217	4.062	1.341
		Health benefits of the GI products.	.921	1.98	1.063		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. ^a

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Factor 1 – Demand Factor

The Eigenvalue of factor 1 is 19.267, with 58.385% of the variance. A relatively large proportion of variance explained by the factors suggests that Factor 1 is a dominant factor or core factor in the factors that account for buying behaviour of GI products. 11 variables that are related to the demand for GI products are clubbed into this factor. Specifically, the variables that accounted for this loaded between 0.7 and 0.8. Factor 1 has a very high significant loading on the variables such as Desire to buy the original product (.867), Value for money (.866), Cultural/heritage/antique value (.865), Encouragement for local products (.858), Status and prestige value (.854), Product uniqueness (.851), Spiritual/religious value of the product (.851), Quest for authenticity (.847) and moderately high loading on the variables such as Value as a gift article, to give to the close ones (.816), Curiosity satisfaction (.805) and Desire to support local community (.758).

Based on the descriptive statistics and the score of each item in factor 1, it is evident that the tourists noted that the demand for purchasing GI products was influenced by the desire to buy the original product (M 4.04, SD 1.259), which happens to be the highest score in these items. As GI is a tool that can give assurance to find out original products, demand value for GI products increases as tourists prefers to purchase originally registered GI products from a particular location. The unique characteristics (M 3.89, SD 1.204) of products that are exhibited through GIs are an important driving force behind the rising demand. The respondents (tourists) believe purchasing GI products renders Value for money (M 3.87, SD 1.224). Encouragement for the production and

purchase of local products (M 3.86, SD 1.236) and Quest for Authenticity (M 3.86, SD 1.231) share the same mean. Tourists strongly believe that purchasing GI products will be a source of Encouragement for local products in the rural area. Further, it also indicates that GI products satisfy the quest for authenticity among tourists. The product's cultural/heritage/antique value (M 3.85, SD 1.252) creates demand. Respondents opined that the desire to support the local community (M 3.84 SD 1.136) is another reason behind the tourists' preference for purchasing GI products.

It is understood that most tourists remain conscious of the status and prestige value (M 3.84 SD 1.243) while purchasing local products. The respondents (tourists) were of the view that the demand for GI products can also be raised as a Curiosity satisfier (M 3.80, SD 1.253), Value as a gift article, to give to the close ones (M 3.80, SD 1.257) and also as a Spiritual/religious value of the product (M 3.80, SD 1.261).

Factor 2 – Supply Factor

This factor is a combination of ten variables, namely, availability of raw materials/ resources (.704), product-making process and its attraction (.777), support of product distribution without geographical barriers (.814), display and use of unique skill and mastery of the product making (.776), empowerment of cultural and traditional features (.775), local entrepreneurship and employment potentials (.779), benefit of the economy of scale (.761), an indication of the locality and traditional values (.707), preserves cultural varieties (.693), prevent the extinction of traditional knowledge (.567). With an Eigenvalue of 3.664, Factor 2 accounts for a variance of 11.103 per cent. A relatively moderate proportion of variance explained by factor 2

proposes that these items are of supportive nature to the supply of GI products in Kerala.

On the basis of the descriptive statistics presented above, respondents seem to be in high agreement with the supply-related benefits of GI products in rural areas. A high and equal rating has been given to all the statements, as demonstrated in factor 2. The respondents (tourists) clearly indicate that Geographical Indications have the ability to bring growth and economic prosperity (income & employment) in rural areas. GI products have the ability to generate increased and better-quality local entrepreneurship and employment potentials (M 3.84, SD 1.218). Respondents also seem to agree that GIs act as markers of the locality and traditional values (M 3.84 SD 1.212) as unique characteristics of the GI products. These products are intimately connected to the tradition, culture, and heritage of all geographical locations individually, regardless of which particular community/region/locality the GIs happen to be the markers of. These unique cultural varieties can be preserved through the promotion of the GIs (M 3.74 SD 1.314).

It can also be observed from the table that the respondents agree with the fact that GIs empower the traditional community by protecting, promoting, and preserving their cultural values (M 3.72 SD 1.321). Tourists think that the production of GIs can make utilization of available raw materials/ resources (M 3.74 SD 1.306) in a particular locality possible. Tourists believe that the cultivation or manufacturing process of these products is a source of attraction (M 3.73 SD 1.316). GI products give the benefit of economy of scale (M 3.66 SD 1.341) and good profit as compared to investment. The respondents accept that the products, after GI registration, become widely accessible through export in national and/or international markets, and it supports product distribution without geographical barriers (M 3.47 SD 1.403). GIs offer the pleasure of creation, the feeling of pride and satisfaction to the local artisans, farmers, traders, manufacturers, and also manage to display and make use of these unique skills and enhance their mastery in product making (M 3.32 SD 1.450). GIs help to prevent traditional knowledge extinction (M 2.75 SD 1.466).

Factor 3 – GI Product Characteristics

For the Factor 3, the Eigenvalue is 1.902 with 5.765% of the variance. Eight variables related to GI product characteristics are clubbed together in this factor. Factor 3 has a very high significant loading on the variables such as Guarantee of location and method of production (.901), Authentic and unique products (.878), Legal assurance in terms of quality (.898), GIs as a guarantee of origin (.819) and moderately high loading on the variables such as Guarantee of quality (.775), Complement the equitable

distribution of socio-economic benefits (.688), Protection of indigenous knowledge and skill (.645) and Association with culture and tradition (.637).

Based on descriptive statistics given above, factor 3 indicates towards the responses of the respondents (tourists) which offers us an idea about the importance of understanding how the respondents (tourists) acknowledge the characteristics of Geographical Indications. It can be observed that the majority of tourists acknowledge GIs as something which gives them legal assurance (M 3.36, SD 1.431) about the origin (M 3.53, SD 1.389) and quality of the product (M 3.43, SD 1.436), method of production (M 3.41, SD 1.417) and about its association with the culture and traditional aspects of the products with respect to the locale it belongs to (M 3.32, SD 1.444). Respondents also acknowledged that the GI products are authentic and have characteristics unique to a particular location (M 3.25, SD 1.473). They seem to strongly believe that developing GIs can add to and enhance the practice of equitable distribution of socio-economic benefits (M 3.26, SD 1.454) among the locality. They also happen to offer protection to the knowledge and skills of the indigenous community (M 2.98, SD 1.478).

Factor 4 – Sustainability Values of GI Products

The Eigenvalue of factor 4 is 1.761 with a 5.337% variance. The two variables related to sustainability values of GI product characteristics are clubbed together in this factor. Respondents happen to be in high agreement with the sustainability value of GI products. A high mean score has been given to the two statements pertaining to the Social Sustainability contribution (M 3.79, SD 1.215) and Economic Sustainability (M 3.56, SD 1.306). The promotion of GI products will help contribute to the social well-being of the rural community and also support local entrepreneurship.

Factor 5 – Ecological and Health Benefits of GI

The Eigenvalue of factor 5 is 1.341 with a 4.062% variance. The ecological and Health benefits of GIs are clubbed together to form this factor. A low mean score has been given to the two statements. Contribute to ecological conservation scored (M 2.14, SD 1.217) and Health benefits of the GI products scored (M 1.98, SD 1.063).

GI Tagging as a Tool for Rural Tourism Development in Kerala

The scope of using GI tagging as a tool for rural tourism development is discussed with the help of a Delphi study among twenty selected experts. All the variables got acceptance, though at varying levels, and the variables, mean, and inter-quartile range values are given in Table 5.

Table 5: GI as a Tool for Rural Tourism Development

Sr. No.	Statements	Mean	Inter-Quartile Range
1	Kerala has immense potential for rural tourism and it is growing.	4.02	1
2	GI products are mainly from rural areas.	3.84	1
3	The raw materials are available mainly in the rural areas.	3.91	0.5
4	The entrepreneurs of GI products are mostly from these rural areas.	3.87	0.5
5	Sustainable and equitable socio-economic benefits are possible.	3.93	1
6	The promotion of GI products through tourism complements the economic prosperity of the producers as well.	3.84	1
7	Tourists can get quality products of desired traits.	3.88	0.5
8	Authenticity can be ensured.	3.86	00
9	The local characteristics of GI products can also attract tourists.	3.84	0.5
10	The Cultivation or manufacturing process of these products itself attracts tourists.	3.86	1
11	Kerala GI tagged Handicrafts and handlooms with special characteristics attract tourists.	3.78	00
12	Geographical location can provide tourists with specific GI foods or drinks.	3.78	0.5
13	Geographic significance can attract tourists to buy these unique products.	3.62	0.5
14	GI-tagged products can be considered value-added souvenirs.	3.88	1
15	The GI products give the tourists, memories of a location.	3.92	1
16	GI products can also be used for rural tourism development.	3.74	1
17	Awareness on GI products among tourists is to be increased.	4.02	1
18	GI product: A tool and strategy for rural tourism development as well.	3.86	00

The Delhi study results, as shown in Table 5, reveal that experts are of the opinion that the use of GI products and their promotion can have immense scope for rural tourism promotion while having multiple dimensions about rural tourism. The potential for rural tourism is high, and it is in a growing phase. Furthermore, the vast majority of GI products are from rural areas of the State, especially since the raw materials are mainly available in the countryside. Moreover, GI products are made by small and medium-scale businesses that are located primarily in non-urban areas. It helps in having better entrepreneurial opportunities in the semi-urban and rural areas of Kerala. By having GI product manufacturing, and the corresponding transaction of the products, a range of socio-economic benefits are generated in the local societies. GI products transaction through tourism leads to a multiplier effect and generates socio-economic benefits throughout the economy. Eventually, GI product-based businesses and their integration with tourism help in more sustainable and equitable socio-economic benefits.

A GI product is certainly an indication of the geographic locations, and that itself is an attraction for tourists. The uniqueness and geographic indication can provide everlasting memories of the visit. When GI products are transacted in tourist destinations, tourists get the opportunity to buy quality products of desired traits. Usually, many of the souvenir items that are sold in many destinations in the State may not have the quality expected from such products. Moreover, some of them are mass-produced using cheaper

raw materials. While the products are bought from their original place and made using the right raw materials, the GI-tagged products of the State can ensure authenticity as well. The products process of GI products can also be made used to attract tourists. A sort of industrial tourism, thus, can be promoted in the possible cases. As far as tourists are concerned, GI-tagged Handicrafts and handlooms with special characteristics are more attractive. The majority of the GI-tagged products are a sort of value-added souvenirs. In addition, tourist destinations can make use of the scope of selling GI food items. Authentic food and culinary items are in high demand in the parlance of tourism nowadays.

Certainly, the promotion of GI products will be ideal for rural tourism development in Kerala. Therefore, as part of the efforts to revive the rural regions of the State and to develop tourism further in the rural areas, efforts should be made by the authorities to spread awareness of GI products among tourists.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the course of this study, it can be well concluded that tourists are always attracted to GI products. Instituting products that provide tourists with assurance about the products' quality and origin further helps build trust. Geographical indication serves as a means of quality assurance and also acts as an authentic link between a product and its area of origin. It is evident from the study

that demand for GI products in the State has increased with time, and tourists rely on the qualities and uniqueness of such products due to the GI tag. When the quality of the products is ensured to be top-notch, tourists benefit a great deal from the transaction. GI protection and promotion are critical in this context, as GI products are essential to our national heritage and tradition. It is also understood that creating awareness among tourists is essential for promoting and growing GI-qualified products since it directly influences the development of tourism in the State.

The GI tag assures that the products are from a specific region and their place of origin has a role to play in influencing the qualities/characteristics of the product. Such quality assurance further attracts tourists, who are willing to pay a premium price. According to the response from the tourists, they are also willing to pay a premium price for GI-qualified products, and in return, they get value for the money they spend on these products.

Local or indigenous communities are often involved in the manufacture of origin-specific quality products in rural areas. Therefore, the increase in demand for GI products among tourists can generate better job and/or entrepreneurial opportunities among the socio-economically backward communities. Eventually, the protection of GI-tagged products can greatly help sustain economic activities and settlement in rural areas and improve residents' living standards. Furthermore, increasing demand for GI products in tourism and their promotion can contribute to rural tourism development in Kerala.

GIs greatly contribute to conserving traditional knowledge and their local know-how. This has been proved through registering various Traditional Knowledge-based products by GIs. This unique cultural knowledge of a particular community can get protected through GI and also pass on the development skills to the next generations. This study reveals that tourists are attracted to these products and act as an element and source of curiosity and satisfaction for them, making them eager to know the unique tradition and knowledge of the cultivation or manufacturing process of these products. GI-tagged products can be considered value-added souvenirs and give the tourists locale-specific authentic memories of a location. Moreover, Geographical Indication has the ability to protect, promote and preserve cultural values from being extinct, support local entrepreneurship, and contribute to the social well-being of the rural community.

The following recommendations are generated based on the study findings. Effective measures and efforts should be taken by the Government to spread awareness among tourists about Geographical Indications. There is a strong need to develop special or dedicated web portals/websites in the State to connect tourists to GI-qualified products. Short

training courses and capacity-building programs will have to be organized at the local level to impart marketing skills and knowledge to them. Women's participation should be encouraged for better results in developing rural tourism. Eventually, considering the socio-economic potential and scope for increased tourist attractiveness, GI products can be considered as a tool and strategy for rural tourism development in Kerala.

The results of the study are limited to the sample as the sample size is comparatively lesser. Yet, proper representation has been ensured while designing the sample. Understanding the Geographical Indication and its future scope, a further in-depth study from different perspectives as well as from multiple approaches may be required. Thus, the research opens up the possibility for other scientific studies related to GIs and tourism, which is a less explored topic and has promising potential in the future.

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