

## 1. GI Tag Sought for Kumbakonam Vetrilai, Thovalai Manikka Malai

**Prelims Syllabus:** Agriculture, Ignorance, Subsidy, Marketing

**Mains Syllabus:** GS-III Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nano-technology, Bio-Technology and Issues Relating to Intellectual Property Rights.

### Why in News?

- Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai has received applications seeking GI tag for Two Famous products from Tamil Nadu — Kumbakonam Vetrilai and Thovalai Manikka Malai.

### About the News:

- The application for Kumbakonam Vetrilai was filed by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore while the application for Thovalai Manikka Malai was given by the Thovalai Manikkamaalai Kaivinai Kalaingargal Nalasangam, Kanniyakumari.

### About the Kumbakonam Betel Leaves:

- The Kumbakonam betel leaves were heart shaped and grown in the Cauvery delta region by small and marginal farmers. It is particularly grown in Ayyampettai, Rajagiri, Pandaravada and Swamimalai in Thanjavur district.
- On an average, about 60-80 lakh betel leaves were harvested annually from a one-hectare plot. A betel leaf cultivator spends ₹10,000 to ₹50,000 to grow these leaves on a one-acre land.
- Harvested leaves are washed, cleaned, and graded according to their size and quality. They were traditionally packed in bamboo baskets but now there are several options such as Plantain Leaves and Cloth Bags.

### About the Thovalai Manikka Malai:

- Thovalai Manikka Malai is a special type of garland that is made only in Thovalai, a small village in Kanniyakumari. The flowers used in this particular garland are positioned in a way that when folded they look like a gem.
- The flowers are generally arranged in five rows, but at times for other decorations, 20 rows are used. The height ranges from one foot to 24 feet and above.



- Chamba fibre, nochi leaves, oleander and rose flowers are the key materials used for making this garland. Thovalai is famous for its abundance of flowers and most of flowers are procured locally.

### What is GI Tag?

- A GI or Geographical Indication is a name or a sign given to certain products that relate to a specific geographical location or origins like a region, town or country.
- Using Geographical Indications may be regarded as a certification that the particular product is produced as per Traditional Methods, has certain specific qualities, or has a particular reputation because of its geographical origin.
- Geographical indications are typically used for wine and spirit drinks, foodstuffs, agricultural products, handicrafts, and industrial products.
- GI Tag ensures that none other than those registered as authorized users are allowed to use the popular product name. In order to function as a GI, a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place.



### Who Accords and Regulates Geographical Indications?

- Geographical Indications are covered as a component of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.
- At the International level, GI is governed by the World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
- In India, Geographical Indications registration is administered by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 which came into force with effect from September 2003.
- The first product in India to be accorded with GI tag was Darjeeling tea in the year 2004-05.

### What are the Benefits of GI Tags?

- The Geographical Indication registration confers the following benefits:
  - ✓ Legal protection to the products
  - ✓ Prevents unauthorised use of GI tag products by others
  - ✓ It helps consumers to get quality products of desired traits and is assured of Authenticity.
  - ✓ Promotes the economic prosperity of producers of GI tag goods by enhancing their demand in national and International Markets.

### **What are the Significances of GI Tags?**

- A geographical indication right facilitates those who have the right to use the indication to prohibit its usage by a third party whose product does not conform to the applicable standards.
- For example, in the purview in which the Darjeeling geographical indication is protected, Producers of Darjeeling tea can omit the term “Darjeeling” for tea not grown in their tea Gardens or not produced according to the norms set out in the code of practice for the Geographical Indication.
- However, a protected GI does not permit the holder to forbid someone from making a product using the same approaches as those set out in the standards for that indication. Protection for a GI tag is usually procured by acquiring a right over the sign that constitutes the Indication.

### **Challenges in GI Tags:**

- The special treatment to wines and spirits in TRIPS Agreement appears to be developed Country Centric.
- Developing countries, including India, seek the same higher level of protection for all GIs as was given under TRIPS for wines and spirits.
- The battle for GI tag between states.
- False use of geographical indications by unauthorized parties is detrimental to consumers and Legitimate Producers.
- Cheap Power loom saris are sold as reputed Banarsi handloom saris, harming both the producers and consumers.
- Such unfair business practices result in loss of revenue for the genuine right-holders of the GI and also misleads consumers.
- Protection of GI has, over the years, emerged as one of the most contentious IPR issues.

### **Way Forward:**

- The benefits of GI tag are realised only when these products are effectively marketed and protected against illegal copying.
- Effective marketing and protection require quality assurance, brand creation, post-sale consumer feedback and support, prosecuting Unauthorised Copiers, etc.
- For internationally recognised products like Darjeeling tea, international protection is of Crucial Importance.

- Legal protection to GIs also extends to protection of traditional knowledge and traditional Cultural Expression contained in the products.
- Hence Intellectual Property is a power tool for economic development and wealth creation particularly in the Developing World.
- GIs have the potential to be our growth engine. Policy-makers must pay a heed to this and give Indian GI products their true Reward.

