



GI Tag and the Revival of Braj Region's Handicraft Culture: A Study

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(This research paper is based on the survey questions asked about the importance of GI Tag in the revival of Braj Regions Handicraft, Culture and Traditions under a project sponsored by ICSSR titles " Historical and Sociological Study of Art, Craft, Culture and Folk Traditions of Braj Region")

Abstract:

Brajbhumi, which means "Brij Bhoomi is a reflection of the divine form of Lord Krishn. This holy land has long been praised in the country and the world for its rich art, craft and cultural heritage. The traditional crafts of Braj are deeply rooted in local identity, historical significance and cultural values. However, the impact of modernization and industrialization has affected the existence of these crafts, which raises the question whether they need protection today. The primary objective of this research paper is to identify which traditional products of the Braj region may be considered worthy of Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the community in the location and to understand how it can help in the development of local

artisans. This research paper takes an important step towards the preservation and revival of folk art, handicrafts and traditional products of Braj by promoting the GI tag. When the researchers asked the participants about the most effective medium to promote the folk traditions and handicrafts of Braj, most of them considered social media to be the most effective medium. the researcher also discussed about projects like Usttad, through which it was found that such schemes play an important role in encouraging the craftsmen.

Keywords:

Braj region, GI tag, traditional crafts, cultural heritage, Pichwai paintings, wooden toys, Brass ornaments, Lord Krishn, handicraft revival, folk art, social media promotion, USTTAD scheme.

INTRODUCTION

Braj is a place that has made the history of India extremely glorious. Braj has a unique contribution in the music, literature, architecture, craftsmanship, handicrafts, painting and various genres of the nation.

The term 'Braj-Bhumi' does not refer to any region with clearly defined political and/or administrative boundaries. It is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vraja', which is used in the earliest accounts of Krishn's childhood pastimes or pastimes to mean 'the enclosure of cowherds' and 'the place where cows roam'. Hence, the term 'Braj-Bhumi' is identified as the name of the region or land covered with hills, forests, ponds and groves, and of course also of the river Yamuna, where Krishn grazed his cattle and performed pastimes with his foster parents and cowherd boys, and where all the sacred places associated with his childhood are located.{1}

Geographical Indication (GI) tags have become an important tool in protecting India's traditional products. These tags recognise and protect the authenticity of goods by certifying their connection to a specific place of origin. The basis of Geographical Indication (GI) protection is that certain products get their distinctive qualities from the particular region where they are produced. The purpose of this protection is to ensure that only goods produced in a specific place are allowed to use the GI tag and to discourage illegal use of these geographical identifiers. GI tag is helpful for economic development and social development of the particular area and their local residents .{2}

In the ever-increasing effect of commercialization, GI tagging has provided an important market to the products. The success of GI tagged products depends on the way they are being accepted in the market. For the products to remain profitable, their availability in the market and interest in their real identity has to be generated. In India, products get an identity in the market and awareness about them spreads among consumers, which is accepted as a symbol of their authenticity. GI tag sets the standard of authenticity of purity of any product along with its regional identity. According to a survey, a large number of consumers still do not distinguish between GI and non-GI goods, thereby reducing the potential commercial impact of the GI tag. But this perception is slowly evolving, especially among wealthy and urban consumers, who are willing to spend more money for genuine, locally produced goods. For example, Darjeeling tea has become synonymous with high-quality tea globally, and its GI status has helped strengthen its identity in

India and abroad. In India, the market for GI tagged goods is changing dramatically. The market for these products is being shaped by the growing middle class in India, the influence of online marketplaces, and the growing recognition of traditional products.{2}

The GI tag increased the value and prominence of Kashmiri saffron in the markets. Before the GI tag, the product was priced at Rs 180 per gram; now it is priced at Rs 227 per gram. The total production of the product is set to increase from 16.54 metric tonnes per hectare in 2020-21 to 22.45 metric tonnes per hectare in 2023-24. The GI tag has significantly increased the visibility of Kashmiri saffron in both domestic and international markets. GI products are now more widely available, thanks to e-commerce websites like Amazon and Flipkart as well as specialized handicraft websites like Craftsvilla.{2}

GI tag can make it economically important as the number of tourists visiting this region is very high, they come from nowhere else but from all over the world. In the survey we found that Braj is not only famous in India but all over the world and most of the respondents believe that the reason for this is Shri Krishn. In a government scheme the government says that, "*This small geographical area of about 5400 sq km receives more than 5 crore pilgrims/tourists every year. The area covers Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh, parts of Bharatpur district of Rajasthan and Palwal district of Haryana. The area lies exactly within the Golden Triangle of Delhi-Jaipur-Agra and is strategically located between three World Heritage Sites - Taj Mahal, Keoladeo National Park and Sariska Tiger Reserve.*" {3}

Most tourists visiting Braj remain confined to the popular settlements of Vrindavan, Mathura, Govardhan, Gokul, Mahavan, Baldev. Large parts of the Braj region have remained untouched and unused due to lack of awareness and development. It is important to understand that "Braj" is spread 5,400 sq km, with over 600 villages with abundant cultural, ecological and architectural heritage (In the Srimad Bhagavatam, advocating the worship of Govardhan, the 7 year old Krishn argues with the 70 year old Nanda Baba "Nor cities, cultured lands nor villages, their homes are ours, we are forest dwellers dear father, we always live in forests and hills.{3}

It is noteworthy that Saajhi Kala in the field of handicrafts has already been given GI tagging status in 2024 and Peda, a traditional sweet, in 2023. The participants believe that giving GI tag to such regionally identified items will not only encourage local artisans but will also strengthen the cultural social identity of Braj at the global level.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To find out the best GI tag item from Art, Craft of the Braj Region.
- To study the impact of SOCIAL MEDIA to revive the Art, Craft Culture, and Folk Traditions of the Braj Region.
- To explore the traditional Art, Craft, and Cultural heritage of the Braj region and its historical and cultural significance.

METHODOLOGY

This study of “*Historical and Sociological Study of Art, Craft, Culture, and Folk Traditions of the Braj Region*” utilizes a qualitative approach to find out which items are has the potential to be the GI tags from the Braj and find out practical solutions for reviving the handicraft culture of Braj, from the respective of art craft culture and folk traditions because of this research paper has the focus on GI tags and the medium of communication social media potential for the advertise the local craft and culture to national and international level in the area . Primary data were collected from 1530 respondents randomly selected from the 6 prime locations on the basis of the importance in Braj region, selected location Mathura Vrindavan, Barsana, Agra and Rajasthan (Bharatpur and Deeng), Haryana (Palwal).

Study Area

The Braj region of India is known globally for its rich cultural and environmental heritage which is closely linked to its sacred traditions. The Braj region is located near the Yamuna River, an important tributary of the sacred Ganges River. The region is spread over 5,400 square kilometres. It is historically divided into 84 districts with a perimeter of about 252 kilometres which extends to cover Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh, Bharatpur district of Rajasthan and Palwal district of Haryana. In this study, we have used six major locations related to the Braj region and the locations which have been the focus of this study are Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, Agra and Bharatpur and Deeng areas of Rajasthan and Palwal area of Haryana. The appropriate area has been selected based on the study as per the need.

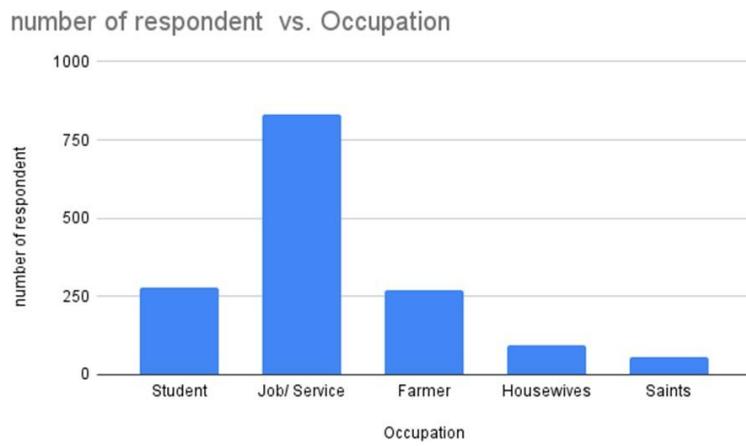


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Location

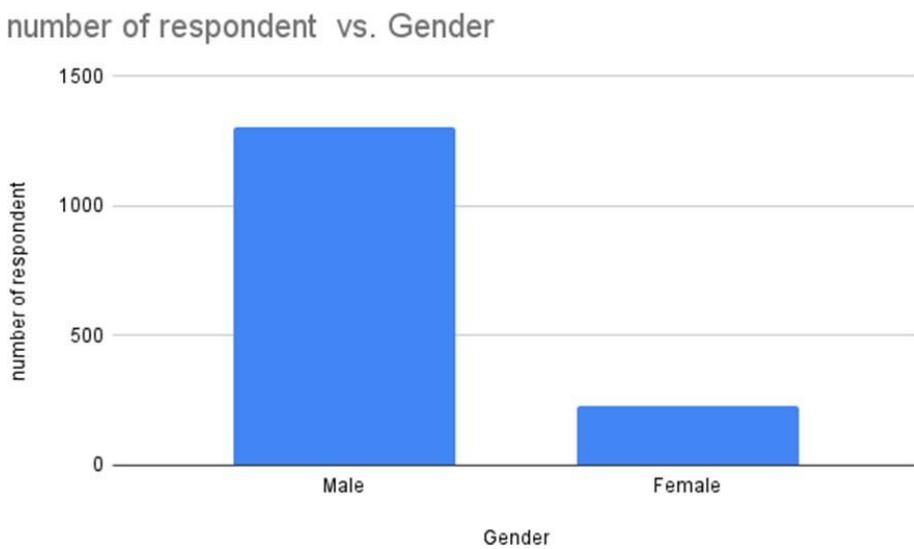
Primary data were collected from 1530 respondents randomly selected from the 6 prime locations on the basis of the importance in Braj region, selected location Mathura Vrindavan, Barsana, Agra and Rajasthan (Bharatpur and Deeng), Haryana (Palwal).

Location	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Mathura	378	24.71%
Vrindavan	201	13.14%
Agra	308	20.13%
Rajasthan	207	13.53%
Haryana	207	13.53%
Barsana	229	14.97%
Total	1530	100%



In conclusion, on the basis of the results obtained, we have included the respondents in the following areas of major work in the region, which included students, people who engaged in jobs or service related work, farmers, housewives, saints etc.

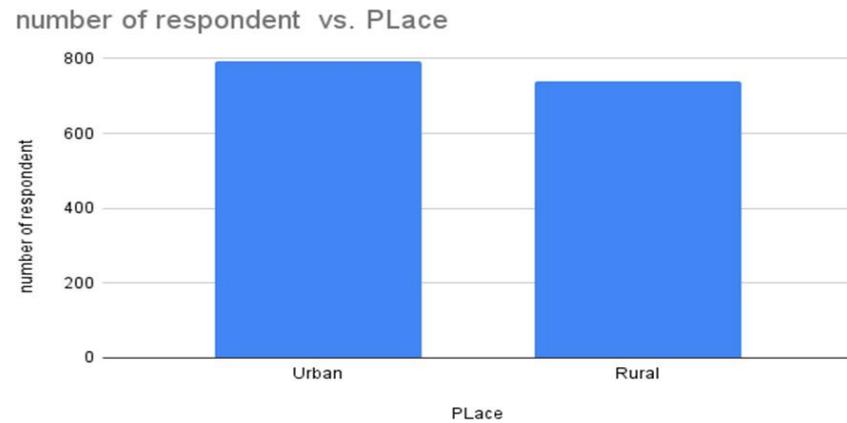
Gender



Gender	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	1303	85.23%
Female	227	14.84%
Total	1530	100%

After classifying the respondents into male and female, we got the result that the number of Males is 1303 and the number of Females is 227.

Place



Place	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Urban	792	51.76%
Rural	738	48.24%
Total	1530	100%

After classifying the respondents on rural and urban basis, the number obtained includes 792 respondents at urban level and 738 respondents at rural level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are few questions which are selected for the study on the purposive way from the questionnaire which covers topics which are relatable to our research paper.

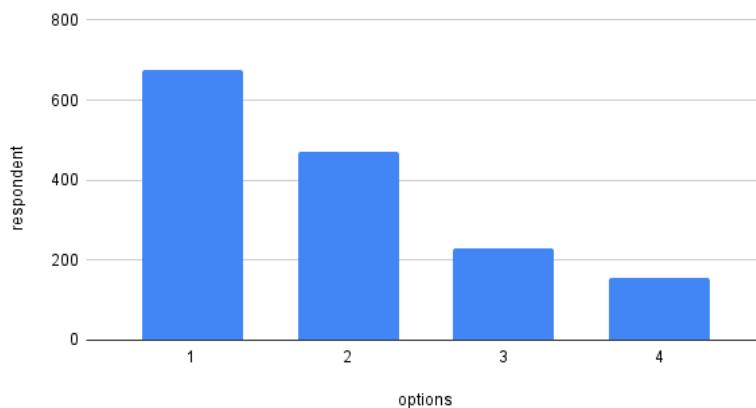
These are the questions with their analysis and result

Q. To what extent has the Upgrading Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development (USTTAD) scheme, a program launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India, helped in the upliftment of Braj craftsmen?

- 1) A lot
- 2) To some extent
- 3) Not at all
- 4) Can't say

Option	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	675	44.12%
2	470	30.72%
3	228	14.90%
4	157	10.26%
Total	1530	100%

respondent vs. options



Analysis:

Based on the respondents the result and table are prepared; the result is as follows

- **The results obtained on the basis of the respondents and the method prepared were as follows, in which 44.12% of the respondents** believed that the USTTAD scheme has helped the craftsmen of the Braj region a lot. This shows that this scheme has proved to be very important and beneficial for the regional craftsmen of Braj. The respondents also believe that this scheme has proved to be helpful for them in social development.
- **30.72% Respondents** believed that the Usttad Yojana will help the craftsmen of the Braj region. It has helped to some extent, which makes it clear that some artisans have benefited from this scheme while others have benefited to a limited extent. They believe that it has helped them but not as much as they want. If the implementation of the scheme is better, they will get more benefits.
- **14.90% The** respondents felt that the Usttad Yojana would have absolutely no effect on the craftsmen of the Braj region. **No**, the data on the number of artisans helped shows that some artisans did not receive the benefits of the scheme. There could be several reasons behind this: lack of awareness among them and by the authorities and lack of collection of relevant information.
- **10.26% Respondents** believed that they did not aware about the USTTAD yojana .Possibly due to lack of information and awareness they were not aware about the scheme and related information.

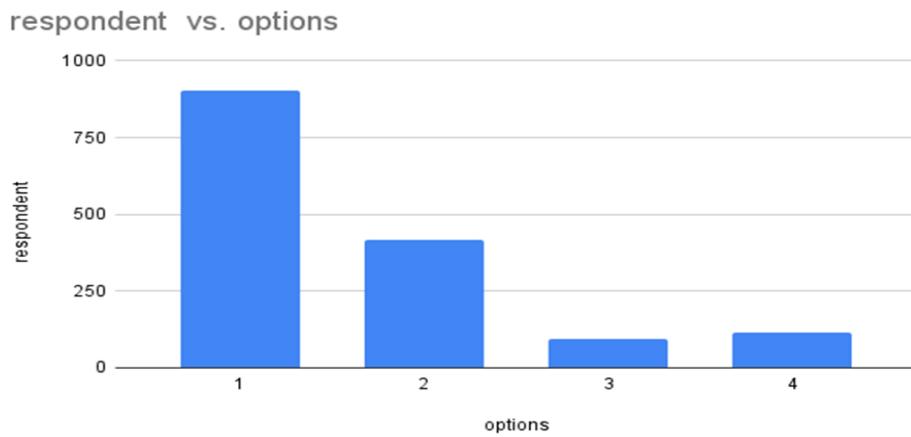
Conclusion:

According to the results of the survey study, most of the respondents believe that the USTTAD scheme has played an important role in the lives of Braj artisans and regional artists, however, some artist feel that it has been left out only for some craftsmen, some of whom have not received any benefit, which shows the variation in the effectiveness of the scheme. This issue indicates that the government needs to focus more on awareness and information sharing methods.

Q To what extent are platforms like social media effective in taking the folk art of Braj to its audience?

- 1) A lot
- 2) To some extent
- 3) Not at all
- 4) Can't say

Option	Respondent	Percentage (%)
1	902	58.98%
2	415	27.12%
3	96	6.28%
4	117	7.65%
Total	1530	100%



Analysis:

- The survey study also shows that the **58.98%** respondents believe that social media plays a very important role in effectively making the folk art of Braj reach the masses. Digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Real have played a vital role in popularizing the regional folk art of Braj at the national and international level, which acts as a strong medium of communication.
- The survey study also shows that the **27.12%** respondents believe that social media is some extents are effective. This shows that the reach of social media can sometimes be limiting, especially when it comes to technology or language-related activities.
- Survey studies also show that respondents believe that social media. **28%According to people, social media is absolutely also not effective.** This can happen when folk artists lack digital literacy or resources.
- **7. 65% Respondents could not give clear opinions**, which shows that some people are still not fully aware of the role of social media.

Conclusion

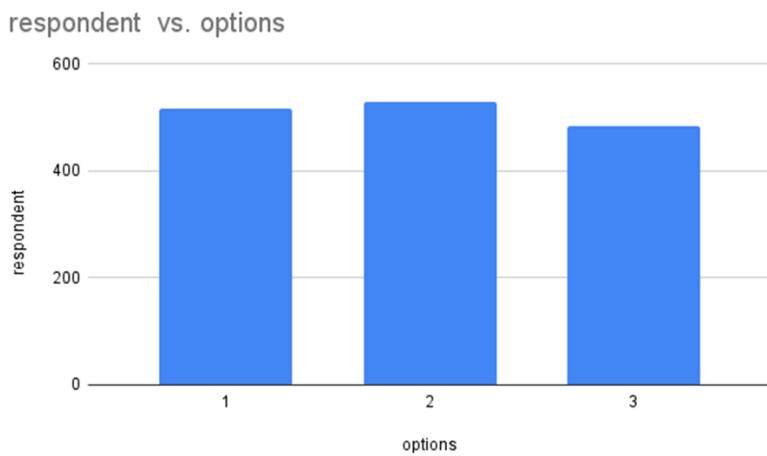
It is clear from the study of the survey that social media has become an important and effective medium

in promoting the folk art of Braj. As per the above results, the traditional folk arts of Braj like Raasleela, Matki breaking, dance art, folk art, painting etc. are getting recognition on the global platform. However, its full benefit is possible only when artists have access to digital training tools and proper programs are arranged on the platform, so that programs like digital teachers of regional artists can make a significant contribution.

Q. In your opinion, which handicrafts/crafts of Braj should be promoted through GI tag?

- 1) Pichwai panting
- 2) wooden toys
- 3) Brass ornaments
- 4) All of the above (divided the same all above during analysis)

Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	517	33.79%
2	529	34.56%
3	484	31.65%
Total	1530	100%



Analysis:

- The survey study shows that **34.56% of the respondents believe that wooden toys deserve GI tag** which will give a great boost to handicrafts and can help in the development of artisans of that region. It can give an identity to the traditional craft culture and art of Braj Region .
- The survey study shows that **33.79 percent people feel that Pichwai painting art should be given GI tagging**. It is a regional painting style prevalent in Braj based on the devotion of Lord Shree Nath Ji and Krishn in which the images of Lord Shree Nath Ji are painted on the clothes and it represents the religious and cultural heritage of Braj region .
- The results of the survey show that **31.65 percent of people believe that Brass ornaments should be given the GI tag**. It comes out as a kind of identity of handmade metal crafts in which idols of Lord Shri Krishn can be included and other gods and goddesses also come in this form. That can give an identity to the traditional craft of Braj Region .

Conclusion

In a possible form of a suitable survey, it can be said that the respondents tend to have a commonality among all three Handmade Pichwai painting, wooden toys and Brass ornaments are among the distinctive and traditional arts of the Braj region and have been considered worthy of being given the GI tag because all the three arts are almost similar and the respondents have accepted almost all of them equally. This makes it clear that in the opinion of the respondents, no art is inferior to the other and all are considered equally worthy of preservation and propagation.

CONCLUSION

In the Research paper , the overall conclusion is based on the study's focused area and the result we find out this that the Braj area is really a land of culture, traditions and values. The findings of this study conducted with the aim of preserving the traditional handicrafts and traditional arts of the Braj region and reviving them in the contemporary social and economic context make it clear that government schemes,

digital media and public interest – all three together have played a positive role in this direction, although the comprehensiveness and impact of these efforts still need improvement. On the basis of the survey, it was revealed that most people believe that the 'USTTAD' scheme has played a helpful role in the social and economic upliftment of the artisans of the Braj region. More than half of the respondents believed that the scheme clearly benefited, while a little less than one-third of the people described it as partially helpful. However, there was also a class which could not get the benefit of the scheme or was not even aware of the scheme, which indicates that the reach of this scheme is still limited to some extent and more publicity and execution is required. which makes it more beneficial for society.

Similarly, when people were asked about the role of social media in promoting the folk arts of Braj, it was clear that digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Reels etc. have provided a new platform to the traditional arts of Braj. Genres like Raasleela, Matki foad Charkula Nritya, folk painting, which were earlier limited to local fairs or festivals, are now reaching a global audience. Most of the respondents considered social media to be an extremely influential medium, while some described its effectiveness as limited due to technical inefficiency, language limitations or lack of digital literacy. This shows that while on the one hand the digital age has provided a world-class platform to the arts of Braj, on the other hand, organized efforts are necessary to connect all the artists to this benefit by providing them digital training, equipment facilities and recognition on online platforms.

In addition, the study also analysed which traditional art or handicraft of the Braj region is most suitable for the GI tag. According to the survey, traditional wooden toys received the highest number of votes, which not only symbolize the local cultural tradition but are also associated with child culture. After that, Pichwai painting also received a lot of support, which is a unique painting style based on the devotion of Shrinathji and reflects the religious and cultural heritage of Braj. The third place was placed on Brass ornaments, which is an important example of metal art of the Braj region and is completely handmade. It was special that these three traditional arts received almost equal support from the public, which proves that it is not right to consider any one art more important or less important. Therefore, all the arts need to be equally protected, trained and linked to the market so that these not only remain cultural identity, but can also become a means of employment and self-reliance.

The overall conclusion of this study is that the traditional arts and crafts of Braj are not just cultural

heritage, but they also have immense potential for socio-economic development. Effective implementation of schemes, proper use of digital platforms and legal and institutional protection of traditional arts are essential for their continuity and prosperity. If all these aspects are worked upon in a balanced manner, then the artists of the Braj region can not only get recognition at the global level, but it can also become a source of inspiration for the coming generations. Such efforts will also prove helpful in keeping India's multi-layered cultural diversity alive.

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