Bengal’s Chau mask acquires GI fame

Five rural crafts from the State secure Geographical Indication protection

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The Chau mask of Purulia, the wooden mask of Kushmandi, the Patachitra, the Dokras of Bengal, and Madhurkathi (a kind of mat) have been presented with the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indication Registry and Intellectual Property India.

A GI tag connects the quality and authenticity of a given product to a particular geographical origin, thereby ensuring that no one other than the authorised user can use the popular product’s name.

Chinnaraja G. Naidu, Deputy Registrar of Geographical Indications, told The Hindu that GI tags for these five rural crafts would not only help the artisans create their own brand but would also provide legal protection to artisans practising the crafts against attempts to duplicate them in other regions.

Bengal scores
According to Mr. Naidu, during 2017-18, his office awarded GI tags to 25 products, of which nine were from West Bengal.

GI tags are given on the basis of the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. The first product to be included in the list was Darjeeling Tea. “What is unique about these is that they are made by marginalised communities that, until a few years ago, found it hard to sustain themselves by producing these crafts,” said Niloy Basu, general manager of Banglanatak.com, a social enterprise working with artisans. “The GI status for five rural products will have a direct impact on the occupation of 5,000-6,000 families in the State,” he added. While 500 families were involved in the making of large and colourful Chau masks used in the Chau dance, also known as Chhau, in Baghmundi block of Purulia, around 200 families in Kushmandi make the wooden masks used for the Mukha dance.

In Paschim Medinipur, a few hundred families in Pingla village make the beautifully painted scrolls called Patachitra, and 3,000 families in two districts were into making Madhurkathi.