

## **Report on a Field Visit on Janajati Samellan, 2026**

A field visit has been undertaken by the interns (Ms. Snigdha Mili and Ms. Darshana Chetry) of the DPIIT-IPR Chair, National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam to the Janajati Samellan, 2026, organised by Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture (VKIC) at Royal Global University on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2026. The event brought together various tribes from all over Northeast India to showcase their culture and heritage. Different tribes put their own stalls, where they showcased handcrafted textiles, traditional medicines, traditional food and beverages, etc. The diversity and beauty of each tribe's culture stood out the most. The interns interacted with people from all the tribes that had put up their stalls there and they learned that only a small number of people from the tribe knew about Geographical Indications or other Intellectual Property protection. The purpose of the field visit was to collect primary data regarding traditional products produced by tribal communities and assess their awareness of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), particularly Geographical Indication (GI) protection. Through direct interaction with artisans and representatives of different tribes, the report aims to understand:

- a) The cultural and historical significance of traditional products;
- b) The nature of production and community involvement;
- c) The level of awareness regarding GI protection; and
- d) The challenges faced in obtaining legal protection.

The field study attempts to provide insights into the need for documentation, sensitization and institutional support for protecting indigenous cultural heritage.

### **Methodology:**

The field visit involved primary data collection through direct interaction with artisans and community representatives participating in the Janajati Samellan 2026.

The following methods were used during the study:

- Informal interviews and conversations with artisans and community representatives;
- Observation and documentation of traditional products displayed at the stalls;
- Collection of information regarding production methods, cultural significance and community involvement; and
- Assessment of awareness regarding Geographical Indication protection.

The respondents were primarily artisans, small-scale producers and members of community groups or self-help groups representing their respective tribes.

## TRIPURA

The sample size taken for conducting the primary data collection regarding the tribes of Tripura were mainly three tribes, which were the Debbarma, Tripura tribe and the Koloï or Kalao tribes of Tripura.

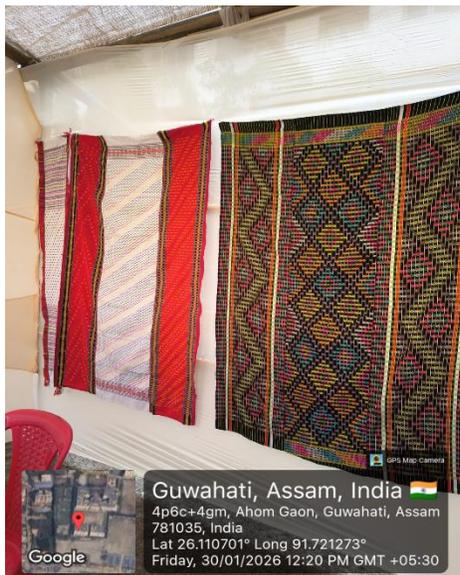
### Debbarma Tribe:

The Debbarma tribe is a tribe residing in the Western part of Tripura of Khowai district, as well as the Dhalai district and some parts of North Tripura. The respondent in this case is an artisan and a small-scale producer belonging to the Debbarma tribe, participating in the given Janjati Sanmela as a representative of the community and displaying various traditional products.



### Traditional products displayed by the tribe:

The pictures above represent certain products displayed by the tribe, these include **Roketto** (Dhoti in Hindi), **Rangsak** (earring), **Risa** (Bothai design) etc., for most of these products and textiles the community mainly uses cotton yarn, for comfortability and lightness of the products. All of these products are deeply rooted in the cultural identity of the tribe, and this practice of handwoven textiles has been continuing for more than 100 years. Different textiles presented by the representatives hold different cultural importance to the community, some textiles have more elaborate designs which are used for special occasions, festivals and marriage ceremonies.



The products displayed are primarily produced by individuals and family units, mainly for personal use and cultural purposes rather than for commercial exploitation. The representatives expressed that they would appreciate assistance in documenting their traditional knowledge, in order to preserve their cultural practices, and obtain legal protection through mechanisms such as GI registration. Along

with this, they have also addressed the need for financial and institutional support to ensure preservation and promotion of their culture.

### **Koloi/Kalai Tribe:**

The Koloi or also known as Kalai, are a community residing in the West of Tripura, majorly in the Khowai and Gomati district of Tripura. The respondents in this case are artisan and small scale producers belonging to the Koloi community, and are also members of a self-help group comprising a total of 10 people.

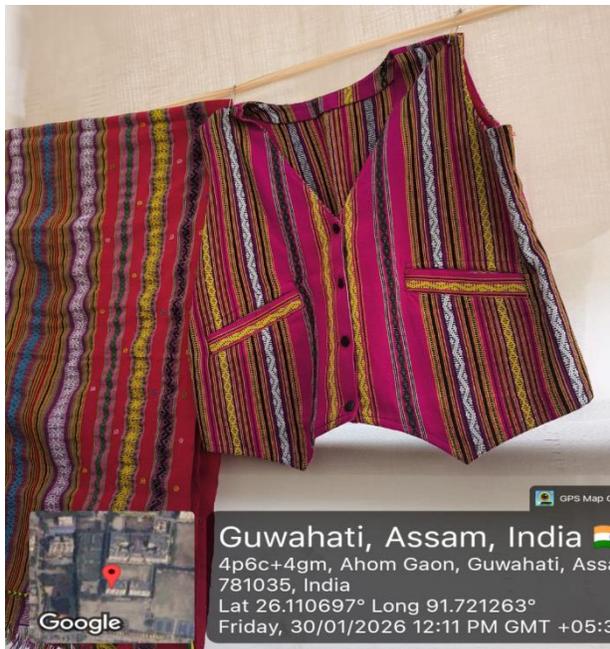


### **Traditional Products displayed:**

The representatives displayed a plethora of clothing items with colourful stripes and patterns, *Gamcha Borok*, *Gamli Borok*, *Gamli Kufur*, *Pagri* etc. are certain types of dresses and clothes that are worn by the male members of the community, however the *Cheethan*, *Ri-Borok* has more traditional significance for men as it is adorned by them during important festivities. Along with these, *Abroni Risa*, *Risa kufur* (a piece of cloth used a blouse), *Basek* (a piece of cloth typically used to carry child by crossing it over one shoulder and under the other), *Risa Achol* (which is used as a chadar), the traditional attire of



Koloi women are the *Rignai*, *Risa*, *Ri-Borok*, and the jewellery consists of the *Chandra Haar* and many others. These textiles are woven using cotton yarn, sometimes referred to locally as *Muslai* thread. The products displayed by the representatives hold great traditional and cultural significance



in their community as different textiles have different purposes and they have been producing these for centuries. These products are produced by individual artisans and family units, mostly produced for personal use and not for commercial purposes. The representatives stated that they receive certain economic benefits from the government of their states for being a part of NGOs, however, these benefits are not specifically for producing the textiles.

It is to be noted that, since these products are produced by family units and individual artisans

there has not been any instance of counterfeiting or imitation goods being produced or sold by others.

### **Tripuri Community:**

The Tripura community also known as Tripuri, Tipra, Twipra, residing in the Sipahijala, Belonia, and Gomati districts of Tripura. The community is of Indo-Burman origin and practices Jhum cultivation for survival.

### **Traditional products displayed:**

The respondents are artisan and producers of textiles, some of the traditional textiles displayed were *Risa* which is a wrapper used to cover chest by the women, and has recently received GI tag. This particular piece of cloth forms a set with the *Rignai* (skirt) and *Rikutu* (shawl) to cover the body. These garments have a unique geometrical design with different colours including yellow, green, red and blue colours.



These products are traditionally and culturally associated with the community and have been in practice since centuries. According to the respondents there has not been any instances of production of imitation goods, and they were eager to achieve economic benefits and protect their cultural heritage and identity through the implementation of protection of GI.



## Observations

Through the survey conducted, it was observed that there was a lack of awareness among the representatives of the tribe regarding the concept of Geographical Indication protection for goods which possess certain qualities such as, uniqueness, historical origin and distinct quality. On a positive note, it was observed that there are currently no counterfeit or imitation products of these traditional textiles being produced within the state, this indicates that the products are authentic and the nature of production is controlled by the community.

Despite the lack of awareness amongst the representatives, it was interesting to note that the representatives expressed eagerness for providing additional information and available documents for registration of their products and assisting in securing protection for their traditional products.

## MEGHALAYA

### Hajong Community

The Hajong community are primarily settled in the South-west Garo Hills of the state of Meghalaya and also certain areas of Assam. The respondents in this particular case are artisans and small scale producers, with family units and individuals producing the textiles for personal and family use and not for commercial purpose.

Traditional products displayed:

The pictures above represent certain products displayed by the tribe, these are *Phoola Agn* (shawl with flower patterns), *Ranga Patin* (a brightly striped lower garment), and *Vija Kapod* (a lower garment for male).



These textiles have been produced by the weavers of the community since centuries and have traditional and cultural significance to their community. These items are mainly produced by individual artisans, family units and community groups consisting around 10 members. These are produced for the purpose of personal, family use, including sale on a small scale.

The respondents stated that there is an availability of written and recorded documentation of the crafts and textiles represented, and for the purpose of producing these goods, the weavers are supported by the Hajong Women Organisation, a government body.

### **Observation:**

The study revealed that members of the community were aware of the significance of Geographical Indication (GI) protection and were eager to provide further information regarding their traditional products in order to facilitate their registration. However, several challenges were identified in securing legal protection. The respondents highlighted the absence of adequate institutional support for GI registration and noted that navigating the legal procedures involved in the registration process is complex and difficult. Consequently, the members expressed the need for assistance from academic institutions and government bodies to help protect and preserve their cultural identity and traditional knowledge. The registration of these textiles and related products has become increasingly important in recent times, particularly due to the emergence of imitation and counterfeit versions of the community's traditional products being sold in the market at lower prices. In response, the community is seeking legal protection not only to safeguard the authenticity of their products but also to enhance the demand and recognition of the original goods.

## **ASSAM (DIMA HASAO)**

### **Dimasa Community:**

The Dimasa community is an indigenous community in Assam's Dima Hasao district, having vibrant culture, and traditional practices. The people of the community are traditionally skilled weavers, and their textiles have vibrant motifs including flowers and geometrical designs in different colours.

### **Traditional products displayed:**

Certain traditional textiles and products displayed includes, a three-piece attire with intricate designs inspired by the nature, these key garments include the *Rigu* (skirt), *Rijamphain* (a cloth which is warped around the chest), and *Rikhaosa* (a scarf), which is woven by the weavers in their traditional looms



known as *Daophang* using cotton yarns or Eri Silk. The different jewellery include the *Phowal* (a necklace) made of red coral and silver beads, *Jongsama* (a necklace) which is made of black micro-beads with coral and silver beads in between, *Chandrawal* (a necklace) made of three silver chains and many more.



The products are primarily produced by individual artisans, family



units and community groups, where women form groups and earn income by weaving and selling these goods in the local market. The respondents are also involved with a self-help group which provides them with economic benefits to promote more production of their traditional textiles. According to the respondents, there are records and documents available for the crafts and products displayed that attest to the authenticity of the goods.

### Observation:

The respondents demonstrated a clear understanding about the concept of Geographical indication, having previously received GI protection on their traditional rice beer also known as Judima produced by the community. It was refreshing to note that the members of the community expressed strong willingness to provide more information regarding the products to facilitate its registration. The main challenges posed by the community for attaining legal protection were no institutional support received by them for GI registration and navigating the process of registration in the legal field is difficult in nature, therefore the members wish for support from institutions and government to protect their cultural identity and tradition. The urgency of registering their textiles and related produce has intensified in light of the sale of imitations and counterfeit versions of their traditional products, which are being sold at lower prices in the market. In response, the community seeks legal protection not only to preserve the authenticity of their cultural heritage but also to enhance the market demand and value of their original products.

## ARUNACHAL PRADESH

### Tagin Tribe:

The tagin tribe, is an indigenous community of the Tani clan, their community inhabits the Subansiri basin within the Upper Subansiri, West Siang, districts of Arunachal Pradesh. They are of mongoloid origins, and migrated from Tibet originally and settled in the Subansiri valley. In terms of religious and spiritual frameworks, the majority of the Tagin population follows the *Donyi-Polo*, an indigenous belief system centered on worshiping the sun and moon god.



### Traditional products displayed:

It was observed that, most of the textiles of the tribe were primarily of different shades of red and maroon colours with different motifs. *Gale* is a wrap skirt worn by women, and men wear a red coat, along with a beaded necklace and a sword hanging around their waist. The women wear a belt around their waist over their Gale known as the *Dingse*.



The textiles and traditional attire of the Tagin



community reflect their cultural identity and social customs. These garments are traditionally produced using locally available materials and are often worn during festivals, ceremonies and community gatherings. The respondents indicated that these textiles are primarily produced by individual artisans and family units for cultural and personal use, although some products are occasionally sold in local markets. The community expressed interest in receiving

institutional support for documentation and preservation of their traditional crafts, particularly to ensure that their cultural heritage is protected from imitation and misrepresentation.

### Tangsa Tribe:

The tangsa tribe are a Tiveto-Burman ethnic group primarily residing in the Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh, India, and also some parts of India-Myanmar border area. The word “Tangsa” comprises of two words “tang” which means hills and “sa” which means children or people. The tribe is distinguished by its internal diversity as it has 70 sub-tribes viz. Jugli, Kimsing, Lunchang, etc. and each of these sub-tribes have separate dialect which belong to the Tibeto-burman family of languages.



### Traditional products displayed:

A plethora of handmade products and textiles of different colours were being displayed by the members, some of which were *Nayi Gale* a wrap skirt or mekhela worn by women, *Pepadung* a waist coat for women, along with coin chains, and *Laksing* which is a mala or a locket. *Kharai* is a lungi worn by male members of the society. The textiles of this tribe depict geometric patterns, vibrant colour schemes, with motifs such as zig zag lines, diamonds, and shapes consisting of symbolic meanings for the tribes.



Every woman in the household of the tangsa tribe have a backstrap loom called *Pantang* in their local language, with the help of which these beautiful textiles are created. The products displayed plays an important role in their day to day life and traditional practices. These are primarily produced

by individual artisans, family units and community groups, and which are later sold in the local market by these women to earn an income. The respondents are involved with a self-help group which provides them with economic benefits to promote more production of their traditional textiles.



### **Observation:**

The respondents demonstrated a general awareness of the concept of Geographical Indication protection. It was notable that the members of the community expressed willingness to share detailed information regarding their traditional textiles in order to facilitate potential GI registration. However, several challenges were identified, including lack of proper documentation, limited awareness regarding legal procedures, and absence of institutional support for initiating the GI registration process. The respondents emphasised the need for assistance from academic institutions and government bodies to help document their traditional knowledge and secure legal protection for their products.

### **CONCLUSION**

The field visit to the Janajati Samellan 2026 provided valuable insights into the rich cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship of some of the tribal communities in Northeast India. The textiles, jewellery and handicrafts displayed by various communities reflect centuries-old traditions that continue to play an important role in their cultural identity.

However, the study also highlighted significant gaps in awareness regarding intellectual property protection, particularly among smaller tribal communities. While some communities have benefited from GI protection, many others lack the necessary knowledge and institutional support required to secure such protection.

Therefore, there is a pressing need for:

- a. Awareness programmes on IPR and GI protection;
- b. Institutional support for documentation and registration; and
- c. Collaboration between academic institutions, government agencies, and tribal communities

Such initiatives would not only help preserve traditional knowledge but also enhance the economic opportunities and cultural recognition of tribal communities across Northeast India. Thus, protecting these traditional products through mechanisms such as Geographical Indication registration would not only safeguard cultural heritage but also empower indigenous communities by strengthening their economic sustainability and cultural recognition in broader markets.

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