

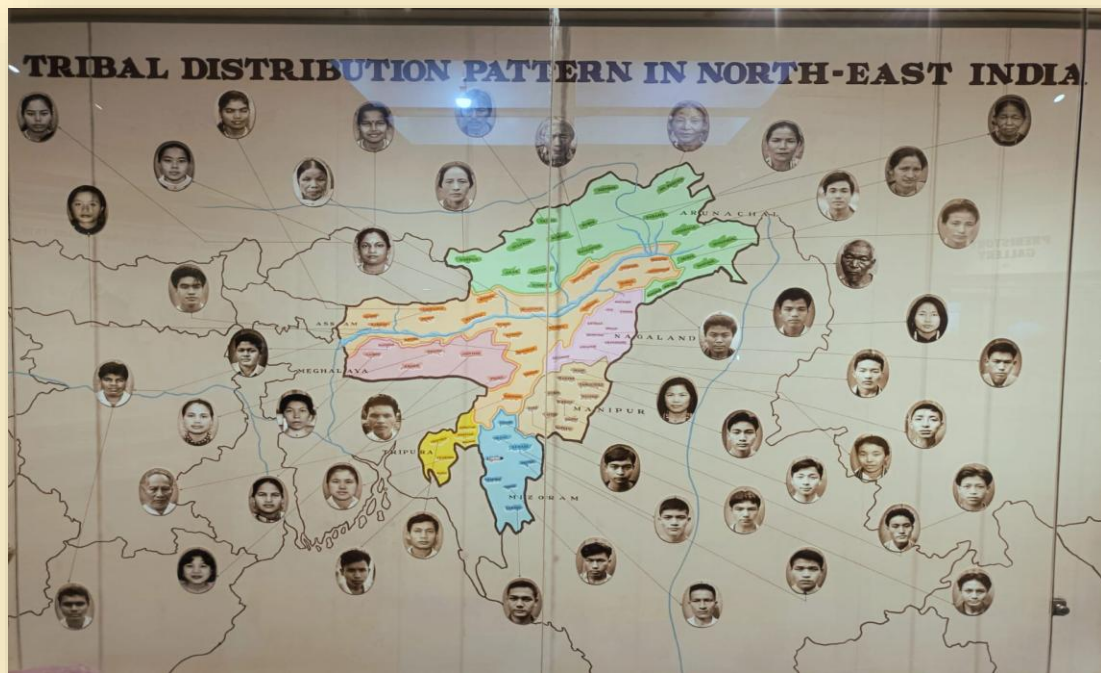
## MEGHALAYA CULTURAL & HERITAGE EXPLORATION

The Meghalaya Cultural and Heritage Exploration, conducted from March 26th to March 28th, 2026 was organized under the aegis of the DPIIT IPR Chair at the National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam (NLUJAA). This three-day academic excursion through the Khasi Hills was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of indigenous history, natural heritage, and the intellectual frameworks that sustain them. By moving beyond the classroom, the delegation sought to examine the practical intersections of traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, and the legal imperatives for their preservation.



As an initiative of the DPIIT IPR Chair, the trip focused on how the Khasi tribe people's unique social structures and environmental ethics constitute a form of living heritage. From the linguistic depth of the Khasi language to the architectural marvels of their traditional palaces and the botanical sanctity of their sacred forests, every site visited offered a case study in communal ownership and indigenous innovation. This report documents the academic engagements and field observations that highlight the importance of protecting the intangible

cultural assets of Meghalaya within the broader discourse of Intellectual Property Rights.



Building upon this academic foundation, the field visit also emphasized the critical role of documentation as a tool for cultural defense. In an era where traditional knowledge is increasingly vulnerable to commercial exploitation, the delegation explored how the "living history" of the Khasi people preserved through oral narratives, communal rituals, and sustainable *bio-engineering* can be formally recognized within modern legal structures. By synthesizing field-based observations from site visits like the *Ever-Living Museum and the Mawphlang Sacred Grove* with IPR theory, this report aims to underscore the necessity of a *sui generis* system of protection. Ultimately, the journey served to reinforce the mission of the DPIIT IPR Chair at NLUJAA in advocating for the rights of indigenous communities to control, protect, and develop their intellectual and cultural property for future generations.

## DAY 1- ACADEMIC FOUNDATIONS & ETHNOGRAPHY

**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY (NEHU):** Department of Khasi-  
The exploration commenced in Shillong with a focus on the intellectual and linguistic foundations of the region. The delegation visited the Department of Khasi at North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), a primary centre for the study of the state's dominant indigenous group. The team engaged in a significant academic discussion with *Dr. Trochyne*, focusing on the nuances of the Khasi language and the vital role of oral traditions in maintaining cultural continuity. This session provided a deep dive into departmental initiatives aimed at documenting Khasi heritage, underscoring how language serves as the primary vessel for traditional knowledge. For the DPIIT IPR Chair, this emphasized the need for legal safeguards surrounding linguistic heritage and the documentation of oral histories



**THE DON BOSCO MUSEUM-** In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Don Bosco Museum, an iconic hexagonal architectural landmark and a premier repository for the indigenous cultures of Northeast India. The museum's extensive galleries offered a systematic ethnographic overview of the "Seven Sister" states. Participants explored a diverse range of exhibits featuring *traditional attire, weaponry, and everyday lifestyles*. This visit served as a critical visual archive, allowing the team to analyze the distinct *Traditional Cultural Expressions* (TCEs) of various tribes. The takeaway from this visit was an enhanced understanding of the sheer diversity of the Northeast and the immense potential for securing *Geographical Indications* (GI) for the region's unique crafts and designs.



The *Ornaments and Jewellery Gallery* at the Don Bosco Museum is a dedicated space that showcases the intricate aesthetic traditions of over 160 tribal communities from across Northeast India. The collection features over 500 individual pieces, highlighting the diverse materials used by indigenous people,

ranging from traditional beads, shells, and silver to more organic elements like cane, bamboo, and animal parts



The statues and dioramas at the Don Bosco Museum are central to its mission of preserving indigenous culture through life-like representation. Scattered across its seven floors, these fiberglass and wax-modelled statues are crafted with meticulous attention to detail to depict the diverse ethnic groups of the *"Seven Sister"* states in their authentic forms. Rather than being static displays, the statues are often arranged in *dynamic dioramas* that recreate traditional domestic settings, communal festivities, or agricultural scenes.

## DAY 2: LIVING HISTORY & BOTANICAL SANCTITY

**EVER LIVING MUSEUM (MAWSHBUIT)-** The second day shifted toward the tangible preservation of artifacts and the spiritual connection between the Khasi people and their environment. The team visited the *Ever-Living Museum* in *Mawshbuit*, a unique private museum curated by *Mr. Kyntiewbor War*. Unlike state-run institutions, this collection offered a personal and profound look at the "ever-living" nature of local traditions. Highlights included rare fossils, a diverse collection of orchids, and traditional Khasi household items. This site highlighted the importance of individual and community-led documentation efforts in preserving rare botanical and historical data that are often overlooked by larger institutions.



**MAWPHLANG SACRED GROVE-** The afternoon featured a guided trek through the *Mawphlang Sacred Grove*, an ancient forest preserved for centuries through traditional religious sanctions. This visit provided firsthand insight into the Khasi belief system, where nature is protected by spiritual taboos. The team examined the ritualistic monoliths within the grove and discussed the ecosystem's role in local culture. From an IPR perspective, the grove serves as a living example of "*Community-Based Natural Resource Management*," where traditional beliefs effectively safeguard biodiversity and genetic resources without the need for modern statutory intervention.



This strict adherence to customary law, where even a fallen twig remains untouched, illustrates a sophisticated indigenous model of *Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)*. By observing these spiritual taboos, the delegation gained critical insight into how the grove functions as a communal *Genetic Resource bank*. Ultimately, this reinforced that for the Khasi people, IPR protection is less about commercial gain and more about the sacred duty of preserving a communal identity rooted in the land.

## KYAT -A LIVING CULTURAL ARTIFACT

Kyat represents a resistance to the "industrialization" of taste. While the rest of the world drinks standardized lagers, every household in a Khasi village might produce a Kyat with a slightly different profile some sweeter, some smokier depending on the specific family recipe for the *Thiat* (the starter cake). It is a "living heritage" because the recipe isn't written in books; it is whispered from mothers to daughters, maintaining a matrilineal link to their ancestors.



Kyat (pronounced *kee-at*) is a traditional fermented rice beer that serves as the social and spiritual heartbeat of the *Khasi people* in Meghalaya. Unlike mass-produced alcohol, Kyat is a living heritage, brewed in home kitchens and served as a symbol of hospitality, community, and ancestral connection

### DAY 3: THE SEAT OF POWER & THE HORIZON

**SMIT VILLAGE: THE CULTURAL HEART-** The final day focused on the traditional governance and architectural genius of the Khasi people at *Smit Village*, the cultural centre of the *Khyrim Syiemship*. The highlight of this visit was the *Ing Sad*, the thatched palace of the High Priestess. The delegation marvelled at this masterpiece of traditional Khasi architecture, which was remarkably constructed without the use of a single metal nail. The *Ing Sad* stands as a testament to indigenous engineering and the preservation of sacred spaces. The visit offered a rare opportunity to discuss the "Sovereignty of Culture" and the role of traditional institutions (*the Syiemships*) in modern Meghalaya, providing a rich context for how customary laws interact with the formal legal system.



Mawlyngnong, often referred to as "*The Cleanest Village in Asia*," is a small hamlet in the East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, India, inhabited primarily by the *Khasi tribe*. This community is globally recognized not just for its impeccable sanitation and matrilineal society, but for its deep-rooted connection to the natural

world. The village serves as a living laboratory for traditional Khasi medicine, which is centered on the "*Law Kyntang*" or Sacred Groves protected forests where harvesting is strictly forbidden except for medicinal purposes.



Many travelers and locals trek to these remote villages specifically to seek the expertise of Khasi herbalists and traditional healers, known as "*Nongthiah*" or "*Kñi*". These healers possess an ancestral understanding of the local flora, using a variety of rare plants, barks, and roots to treat ailments ranging from fractures and skin conditions to internal digestive issues.

**LAITLUM CANYONS: THE END OF HILLS-** The visit concluded at the *Laitlum Canyons*, often referred to as the "*End of Hills*." This site offered a dramatic perspective on the geography that has shaped Khasi history and resilience. The delegation experienced the vast, sweeping views of deep gorges and observed the winding stairways leading to the remote village of *Rasong*. This final stop served as a moment of reflection on the relationship between landscape and identity. As the trip ended, the participants recognized that the cultural and natural heritage of Meghalaya from the academic halls of NEHU to the depths of

the Laitlum Canyons represents a vast and vital intellectual landscape that the DPIIT IPR Chair at NLUJAA is committed to exploring and protecting.



In conclusion, the three-day exploration of the Khasi Hills provided an invaluable practical dimension to the academic mission of the DPIIT IPR Chair at NLUJAA. By moving from the linguistic corridors of NEHU to the architectural marvels of Smit and the botanical sanctuary of Mawphlang, the delegation successfully documented the profound depth of Meghalaya's *Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions*. The journey underscored that for indigenous communities, intellectual property is not merely a legal asset but a living extension of their identity and environment. Moving forward, the insights gathered will serve as a foundational resource for developing legal frameworks that respect customary laws while ensuring that the rich heritage of the Khasi people is shielded from misappropriation and preserved for future generations.