

FIELD REPORT ON MAYONG VILLAGE

On March 24, 2026, the LLM (IPR Specialization) Batch of the National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam, along with the DPIIT IPR-Chair Interns undertook an academic field visit to the historic village of Mayong. This academic endeavor was organized under the guidance of Research Assistant Dolly Kumar and Office Assistant Priyanko Mahanta at the DPIIT-IPR Chair, with the continued support of the IPR Chair at the university, Dr. Nalanda Bala Murugan. The primary purpose of the visit was to expose students to the unique cultural heritage, traditional knowledge systems, and historical narratives associated with Mayong, which is widely known across the globe as the “*Black Magic Capital*” of India.



Located on the banks of the Brahmaputra River, approximately 40 kilometers from Guwahati, Mayong has long been associated with folklore, tantric practices, and indigenous healing traditions. The village consistently attracts scholars, tourists, and researchers due to its reputation for mystical traditions, which have been preserved through generations via oral transmission as well as handwritten manuscripts. This report details the specific observations made during this visit, placing the traditional knowledge and cultural expressions found in Mayong within the contemporary discourse of intellectual property law, documentation challenges, and emerging international treaties.

Historical Trajectories and Folklore Heritage of Mayong

Historical references and folklore describing Mayong illustrate its long-standing position as a center of magical knowledge and occult practices, where rituals, spells, and healing traditions were passed down through generations. Mayong is deeply embedded in Assamese folklore and ancient Hindu mythology. References to its mystical powers can be found in the Mahabharata, where it is believed that Hidimba, the second wife of the Pandava warrior Bheema, belonged to the Kachari Kingdom. British East India Company records mention that the Kachari king was referred to as Hidimbavar, linking the kingdom's history to Bheema and Hidimba's son, Ghatotkacha. Historical manuscripts like the Bongsawali Goid chronicle how Sunyat Singha from Maibong founded the Mayong kingdom in 1624 CE, claiming descent from Ghatotkacha. It is locally believed that Ghatotkacha inherited his magical prowess directly from Mayong itself.



Today, the 40th king of Mayong, a nominal head, still asserts his lineage from this legendary warrior. The legends of Mayong's dark arts are not confined to mythology but extend to documented historical events. In 1337 CE, Emperor Muhammad Shah's army of 100,000 horsemen, sent to conquer the Ahom kingdom, is said to have mysteriously disappeared within the forests of Mayong and was never seen again. Even the mighty Mughal Empire feared this land. The Alamgir Nama records that when Aurangzeb ordered General Raja Ram Singh to invade Assam, the general hesitated, but because of the infamous witchcraft practiced in Mayong. As history tells it, Ram Singh's forces suffered a crushing defeat, with few escaping alive.



During the academic visit, narratives and legends illustrating the mystical folklore were studied at the museum exhibits. One exhibit recounts the story of a practitioner named Mohiram Nath, popularly known as “Sura Bez,” who was believed to possess magical powers capable of capturing wild tigers through mantras and ritual techniques. According to the story, Sura Bez would use a special incantation called the “Bagh Bandhan Mantra” to confine a tiger within a specific location and then guide it into a trap using another mantra. These stories demonstrate how magical beliefs were historically intertwined with practical concerns such as protecting villages from wild animals.

Another concept discussed during the visit was “Lukiban,” which refers to the mystical ability to hide oneself or remain unseen from others or even from wild animals such as tigers. Although these ideas exist primarily within folklore, they illustrate the imaginative and symbolic worldview embedded within the local traditions. Furthermore, an interesting aspect of Mayong’s traditional knowledge system is the process through which students are selected and trained. One such test mentioned by local practitioners involves the “Madhufal” test. According to this belief, a prospective learner is asked to cut a specific tree. If the person proceeds to cut the tree immediately, they are considered unworthy of learning spiritual knowledge. However, if the person refrains from cutting it, demonstrating restraint and respect for nature, they may be accepted as a disciple. Certain villages around Mayong, such as “Jamaibastu Gaon” (Son-in-law Village), have historically served as places where learners stayed for extended periods while studying tantric practices and healing techniques. The term “jamai” refers to the son-in-law, since most learners came from faraway places and the process of learning Mayong’s traditional practices and rituals was a long and eventful one, resulting in researchers and scholars settling and raising a family in the village itself, giving it the iconic name of “Son-In-Law Village”.

Dynamics of Contemporary Knowledge and Transmission

Observations of localized traditions, such as those practiced by Karuna Nath and Bez Phanidhar Nath in the Ramayoni Mayong lineage, reveal a complex picture of transmission and practice in modern-day Mayong. Rituals remain a vital component of daily life for the inhabitants, with some specific practices deliberately restricted from outsiders to maintain internal control over esoteric systems. This knowledge is predominantly transmitted through oral means, and practitioners emphasize that generations actively practicing these traditions still live in almost every household.



A significant shift has been noted in the nature of these practices over time. Today, the focus has largely transitioned toward what practitioners term 'white magic' or therapeutic applications, moving away from the feared black magic historically associated with the region. Traditional medicine continues to see active use. Methods include spiritual diagnosis through hand lines (*Hatho ki lakeeron*) and specific treatments for conditions like jaundice using Bug Sarso oil and Bahi Paam.

While manuscripts are preserved within the community and access to them is not entirely barred, community members are only partially comfortable with sharing their knowledge with outside researchers. The hesitation to fully disclose these practices points to deep-seated concerns regarding documentation and the risk of misappropriation, reflecting a view that their traditional systems are sacred community assets rather than public commodities.

The Mayong Village Museum: Materiality of the Occult



The Mayong Village Museum and Research Centre preserves numerous artifacts, ritual objects, manuscripts, and tools related to traditional tantric practices. Established by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, the Garde Henkel Stiftung of Germany, and the Nath Yogi Development Council, the museum preserves the village's rich heritage of magic and sorcery. The museum houses rare "mantra puthis" or manuscripts containing magical incantations dating from the 13th to the 19th centuries, providing insight into the historical continuity of these traditions.

These artifacts reflect how the knowledge systems of Mayong were historically intertwined with religion, spirituality, medicine, and everyday life. Many of the manuscripts contain instructions relating to healing practices, protective rituals, and methods believed to control or influence natural forces.



The materiality of the artifacts indicates a high degree of integration between local ecology and cultural expressions. The museum staff and local storytellers share tales of healers who cured snake bites with a whisper and warriors who vanished into forests using invisibility mantras. The museum houses specific artifacts used in magic and boxes collected from tantric practitioners containing rhino horn, animal skins, and the barks and leaves of old trees.



A highly specific section of the museum is dedicated to magico-medical artifacts. To assist in the understanding of the vast array of items displayed, the following table synthesizes the specific artifacts, tools, and organic elements found in the Mayong Village Museum and Research Centre.



The manuscripts on display are particularly important for legal analysis. Written mostly on Sanchi bark or palm leaves, these texts preserve formulas like the Nar Singh Mantra and the Jwara Jara Mantra. These texts are not simply cultural relics; they serve as a physical fixation of knowledge that was previously passed down only in oral formats. The use of the old Assamese Kaitheli script has posed challenges for modern researchers attempting to decipher the exact contents of the mantras, which effectively operates as a natural barrier to the unauthorized dissemination of this knowledge.

Traditional Healing Practices and Ethnomedicine

A particularly significant cultural aspect of Mayong is the presence of traditional healers known locally as Bez or Oja. These practitioners are believed to inherit knowledge of mantras, herbal remedies, and spiritual practices from their ancestors. In local belief systems, the Bez or Oja use both “Su Mantra,” which are positive or healing spells, and “Ku Mantra,” which are harmful spells, to address various problems. The practices of these healers represent an intersection between traditional medicine, spirituality, and community-based knowledge systems.



During the field visit, students learned through the museum guide about various diagnostic and healing practices that have been traditionally used by the Bez and Oja. According to local accounts, certain ailments such as jaundice, piles, and tonsil-related problems are diagnosed through ritualistic methods that combine herbal elements and mantra recitation. One such diagnostic technique involves the use of mustard oil, water, a leaf of “kala kochupata” (Black Taro Leaves), and a set

hooks. This herbal medicine represents a highly practical application of indigenous pharmacology that warrants further research to better understand its active ingredients and potential application in modern clinical settings.

Moreover, historically, certain accounts also suggest that human sacrifice, or “*Narabali*”, may have existed in the region during earlier periods involving religious ceremonies and tantric practices intended to attain spiritual enlightenment or fulfil personal wishes. Archaeological discoveries of sacrificial swords and ritual tools in the area have contributed to these claims, although definitive historical evidence remains limited.



Another unique cultural event associated with the village is a *three-day annual fair connected with the symbolic king of Mayong* called the “*Rajar Mela at Mayong*”. During this festival, the king traditionally emerges publicly, and the event becomes a significant gathering for the local community.

The Mismatch Between Traditional Knowledge and Conventional Intellectual Property

For students of law and intellectual property, the field visit to Mayong highlighted the profound difficulties that arise at the intersection of indigenous traditional knowledge and conventional intellectual property law. Traditional knowledge typically refers to the know-how, skills, innovations, and practices developed by indigenous peoples and local communities, while traditional cultural expressions comprise the tangible and intangible forms in which such knowledge and cultures are manifested.

IP law is largely European in derivation and promotes particular cultural interpretations of knowledge, ownership, authorship, private property, and monopoly privilege. These paradigms do not necessarily correspond to or complement indigenous peoples’ understandings about the role and function of knowledge and knowledge practices. This fundamental mismatch manifests across several dimensions of conventional intellectual property law.

To understand these gaps concisely, the following table maps the core points of friction between standard intellectual property mechanisms and the localized knowledge systems of Mayong.

Parameter of IP Protection	Conventional Intellectual Property Frameworks	Mayong's Traditional Knowledge Systems
Concept of Authorship	Strictly requires a definable individual or corporate author to grant monopolistic rights.	Collectively shared and nurtured over centuries by the community, defying singular attribution.
Temporal Duration	Limited term of protection (e.g., life plus 60 years for copyright or 20 years for patents).	Perpetual, handed down intergenerationally, needing continuous and permanent safeguards.
Modality of Transmission	Requires fixation in a tangible medium to ensure enforceability and legal certainty.	Predominantly transmitted via oral history and direct experiential learning between generations.
Secrecy and Protection	Governed by non-disclosure agreements, contracts, and breach of trust actions.	Kept as closely guarded community secrets, often passed strictly within families or to chosen disciples.

The Limitations of Copyright and Patent Law

The Indian Copyright Act of 1957 offers statutory protection for literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works. However, its application to the cultural expressions found in Mayong is restricted by its core legal tenets. Traditional folklore is often anonymous and resists neat attribution. While Section 31A of the Copyright Act allows the government to publish unpublished Indian works in certain cases, it does not offer robust remedies for the misappropriation of living traditions that are still actively in use by communities. Where traditional forms are fixed in recordings or transcriptions, those recordings may be protected, but the underlying knowledge, such as a healing chant or ancestral weaving technique, remains vulnerable if not formally recorded or recognized.

Similar structural gaps exist within the patent system. Patents are designed to reward a specific,

identifiable inventor for a creation that is novel, involves an inventive step, and has industrial applicability. Traditional knowledge is often collaborative and incremental, relying on a community's insights built up over generations. Because traditional medical knowledge often lacks the formal documentation accessible to patent examiners, there have been historical instances where external entities claimed patents on practices that indigenous communities had used for centuries. This phenomenon, known as biopiracy, is usually associated with non-local commercial actors seeking to capitalize on biological substances that have been used by local people for generations.

For traditional practitioners like the Bez, who do not operate on contractual agreements or formal employee non-disclosure pacts, safeguarding their specific, secret combinations of mantras and medicinal herbs becomes highly difficult. Once a secret remedy is shared with an outsider or a researcher, the community lacks the robust statutory tools required to prevent that outsider from using or commercializing the knowledge. This patchy framework leaves custodians highly vulnerable to bad-faith commercial exploitation.

Conclusion

The field visit to Mayong provided students of law and intellectual property with a profound understanding of the complex cultural landscape of Assam's mystical traditions. While the village remains infamous across the globe for its historical association with black magic and the supernatural, the actual experience demonstrated that these traditions are deeply embedded within broader systems of spirituality, localized healing, and indigenous knowledge.

The Mayong Village Museum serves as a crucial sanctuary for the documentation and preservation of artifacts and fragile manuscripts that might otherwise disappear with time. However, physical preservation is only the first step in a holistic safeguarding process. The unregulated exploitation of folklore and traditional knowledge poses both an economic threat and a risk of cultural loss to indigenous communities.

Conventional intellectual property systems, built on the foundations of individual ownership, fixed time limits, and commercial utility, are fundamentally ill-equipped to protect the collective and perpetual heritage of communities like Mayong. Moving forward, legal protection in India must shift from purely defensive mechanisms like the digital library toward positive rights that empower indigenous groups legally and economically.

To bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern intellectual property law effectively, several steps are recommended. There is a need to establish a dedicated, non-codified database within the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library infrastructure that accommodates oral traditions, such as the healing spells of the Bez, without stripping them of their cultural context. Legislative efforts must also prioritize the enactment of a dedicated *Sui generis* framework, like the Protection of Traditional Knowledge Bill, to grant perpetual, collective ownership rights to communities. By taking these progressive steps, the legal framework can ensure that the

ancestral knowledge of Mayong is respected, compensated, and sustained for future generations.

