

**SPEECH OF THE HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF ASSAM FOR A
'BOOK RELEASE PROGRAMME' TO BE HELD ON MAY 25,
2022 AT THE PREMISES OF NATIONAL LAW
UNIVERSITY AND JUDICIAL ACADEMY, ASSAM**

Namaskar,

Respected Acting Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court and
Chancellor of National Law University and Judicial Academy

Hon'ble Justice N. Kotiswar Singh,

Vice- Chancellor of the University Prof. V. K. Ahuja ji,

Faculty members, administrative staff and my dear students.

It gives me immense pleasure to be here in the midst of the budding lawyers and future legal luminaries. I am also happy to release the Handbook on the Geographical Indications With special focus on North-East Region, published under the auspices of the DPIIT- CIPAM IPR Chair of National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam. It is a laudable efforts for the practical insight it offers on the mechanism of GI registration of traditional artistry, natural and manufactured products endemic to the region.

North-East India, comprising eight States viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura is a veritable repository of rare flora -

fauna and distinctive cultural bequest. GI registration of the natural and cultural abundance of the region, has the potential to establish the physiographical authenticity of the same and also map regional exclusivity on a global platform. In this context, the Handbook published by National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam is an opportunity that could guide regional stakeholders towards securing the sanctity of their bio-cultural heritage and also safeguarding their livelihood.

The North-East Region of India which is home to a large number of ethnic communities such as Adi, Bodo, Deori, Angami, Garo, Dafla, Khasi, Kuki, Mising, Rabha, Apatani, and others. The regional repository of natural and cultural riches has reflected the traditional art, craft, cultural expressions, medicinal practices and many other forms of regional ingenuity, of the ethnic communities of the region. Despite being a rich reservoir of traditional knowledge, there is a significant lack of entries in the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) from the North-East; which is a sad reflection of the fact that the grass root level producers of the region are not advertent to the creative and commercial sanctity of their intellectual acreage. The much-needed intervention at this juncture, is the generation of awareness among the grass-root producers about preservation of their valuable knowledge, protection of their

ownership over their intellectual and creative resources, profitable commercialization of the same and sustainability of traditional knowledge and practices.

Traditional knowledge, particularly in the context of the North-East, include knowledge and practices of the indigenous communities, which emanates out of their deep understanding of personal engagement with their natural environment and their cultural bequest. These customary knowledge and practices of the ethnic communities referred to as Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) are organically linked to their heritage; the same shapes their social identity and determines their means of livelihood. The gamut of Traditional Cultural Expressions of the NE Region encompasses diverse forms of *music, art, craft, dance, performances, folklore, designs, motifs, symbols, etc.*, of the various communities of the North-East Region; which are the subject matter of protection under the regime of Copyright, Geographical Indications, and Industrial Designs under the over-arching frame of Intellectual Property Rights. The rich biodiversity, plant varieties as well as genetic resources of the region are protectable by several legislations enacted under the expansive ambit of Intellectual Property Right Laws, eg. *the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Act,*

2001 and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 etc. Protecting traditional knowledge along with traditional cultural expressions of the indigenous committees of the region from misuse and exploitation is therefore, imperative for conservation of their cultural distinctiveness as well as for economic sustenance of the communities.

Traditional knowledge especially Traditional Medicinal Practices is often put in peril by Bio-piracy; whereby, corporations or private individuals, driven by a motive for unscrupulous profiteering, misappropriate the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities. Abounding number of instances bring forth the fact that developed countries exploit the traditional medicinal practices of the indigenous communities of the developing nations in the name of patents. In order to impede reprobate exploitation of indigenous communities and their traditional knowledge base, knowledge repositories have been established by various governments around the world. India too has set up the TKDL database, where traditional knowledge can be documented to prevent their misappropriation by unauthorized agents.

The handbook is pertinent in the context of North East India, which, in spite of the rich biodiversity it is endowed with, is lagging behind in terms of optimizing GI tagging to its benefit. Owing to the geographical distinctiveness of the NE

region and the archetypal knowledge of the regional indigenous communities, the natural resource of the region is endowed with attributes that makes it unique. GI registration would not only accredit the geographical origin of a product but also enhance its market value by branding its singular differentia.

However, it is imperative to promulgate awareness about GI tagging among the grass root stakeholders, who are the curator of traditional knowledge and predominantly engage in agrarian activities. Bereft of the knowledge related to safeguarding and promoting regional ingenuity of products, the grass root stakeholders would remain ineffectual in protecting their regional bio-heritage and sustaining their livelihood. Knowledge is not to be the preserve of the educated elite alone, rather ought to percolate equally among all members of the society, in order that equitable development of the nation can be realized. In this regard, educational institutes are expected to expand their purview and reach out to the community with the vision to empowering them with knowledge.

I hope that NLUJA, Assam strives to disseminate the knowledge documented in the handbook among the mass, particularly those based in rural and peri-urban locales of the region where natural bounty thrives in abundance.

I extend my sincere congratulations to National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam IPR Chair for its efforts towards protection of the natural and cultural abundance of the North-East region vis-à-vis Geographical Indications in the form of the publication of the book. I render my compliments to the University for making efforts towards empowering stakeholders in protecting, preserving and profitably harnessing their bio-cultural resources. I wish the very best and hope that they continue to persevere in their mission to develop a sustainable eco-system for administration of regional Intellectual Property resource.

Thank you all,

Jai Hind