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FROM ORAL TRADITIONS TO DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND EQUITY FOR NAGA COMMUNITIES IN MANIPUR AND NAGALAND IN THE AGE OF AI*

P. Veishonai (PhD Scholar, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi) and Edward Belho (Advocate, Supreme Court of India)

Abstract: This paper examines the transformation of indigenous oral traditions into digital knowledge systems within the evolving interface of artificial intelligence and intellectual property rights. Focusing on Naga communities across Manipur and Nagaland, it explores how historically collective, intergenerational, and orally transmitted knowledge is increasingly subjected to processes of documentation, digitization, and algorithmic incorporation. While these developments create opportunities for preservation and wider visibility, they also raise critical concerns regarding ownership, consent, and equitable benefit-sharing.

The paper highlights variations in levels of documentation and institutional representation among Naga communities, noting that knowledge systems that are more extensively recorded tend to gain greater recognition within legal and policy frameworks. In contrast, less-documented traditions risk marginalization or exclusion from emerging AI-driven knowledge ecosystems. These dynamics are further complicated by the territorial orientation of intellectual property regimes, particularly under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which may localize recognition of cultural expressions that are historically shared across communities and regions, thereby creating gaps in representation and access to associated benefits.

Situating these issues within the broader discourse of digital sovereignty and global equity, the paper argues that existing intellectual property frameworks remain inadequate to address the collective, oral, and transboundary nature of indigenous knowledge systems. It calls for more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches grounded in human rights principles, emphasizing community participation, ethical documentation, and equitable representation in AI-mediated knowledge production.

Keywords: Digital Sovereignty; Indigenous Knowledge; Artificial Intelligence; Intellectual Property; Naga Communities