Traditional Rice Beer Of The Tiwa Community: An Analytical Exposition

Nandita Goswami

Abstract: The Rice-beer is popular among the tribal people of Assam bearing cultural and religious and traditional significance. It is known as Zu in Tiwa community which is essential part of several tribal communities of Assam. It is a common belief of the Tiwas that Rice-beer has a special property against some ailments of people as well as cattle. Rice cake or Bakhor can be prepared from nineteen plant species which have been identified. The process of manufacturing Rice beer consists of saccharification of the rice starch by fungal enzymes followed by alcoholic fermentation by yeasts supplied by the starters. This process is unique and the product differs from commercial malt beer or wine. With the knowledge of the preparation procedure of the drink being restricted only among certain aged and experienced persons of certain pockets of our study, a documentation of the process was thought necessary. Knowledge of the indigenous culture, traditional faith, and healthcare system cannot be lost due to the absence of a written documentation or scientific study. Therefore, in the present research work the survey was done to study the process of preparation of the Rice beer with the plant species used. In future, for the establishment of social practice medicinal values of the plant should be studied at the molecular level for the efficacy of the indigenous knowledge.

Key words: Rice- Beer, Traditional, Tiwas, Bakhor, Medicinal Value, Community, Herbal, Assam.

1. THE AIM AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY:
The present study plans to introduce the traditional Rice Beer called Zu of the Tiwa community of Assam. The paper further plans to come up with an analytical take on its preparation, cultural & religious importance, and its medicinal values along with its use and present status among the youths of the community.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:
The preparation of Rice beer is one of the most primeval methods for brewing alcoholic drink from cereals by herbal formulation of yeast culture. The Rice-beer is extremely popular among the tribal people of Assam bearing cultural and religious significance. It is an essential part of several tribal communities of Assam and is known as Zu by the Tiwas. The homemade method of preparing rice-beer for the Tiwa community is the most popular beverage irrespective of age and gender. For the Tribe people Zu is an integral part of their traditional rituals from birth, marriage and death ceremonies too. As such a ritualistic reasons the beverage deserves something more than a passing reference to any sociological study. The present study also wishes to have a peep into globalization and to spread the education for the consciousness about the bad effects also about the too much uses of this traditional drink especially among the young generation which has popularized tea as a substitute.

METHODOLOGY:
The present study is based on both primary and secondary data gathered from sources by visiting Tiwa villages, books, magazines and research papers. The researcher has used historical technique of research combining both analytical and descriptive methods. A field study was done in 2019 in the villages Boaropujia, Raha, Kahua-atl, Neeli and Dalang-ghat villages of Morigaon and Nagaon district in Assam, India. Information was gathered from elderly and knowledgeable people living in these villages by interviewing them extensively. It was collected from the producers predominantly involved in the process of making Zu. The women were mostly involved in the preparation of the beer. As such they were asked about their practices: preparation such as making of starter cakes along with plants and their parts added, fermentation procedure, duration and uses of the beverage. Some of the nearby fields and forests were visited along with local help and the available plant samples were collected. The people of Tiwa community believe that the Rice-beer has curative properties against some ailments of human beings as well as cattle. Common ailments like fever and various enteric diseases can be cured by the Tiwa people by consuming Rice-beer. About nineteen plant species have been identified which is used to prepare the rice cake or the Bakhor. Horu bahaka, Parala lata, Bih Dheka, Chenehi, Missimi teeta, Anaras, Malbhog Kal, Kuhiar, Kathal, Bahati, Kothona, Durun, Titabekuri, Baga Bahaka, Bor Bahaka, Haladhi, Kharua, Ghora-Neem, Nangol Bhang. Each of the plant species has medicinal values. Rice-beer is therefore efficient in relieving headache, inflammation of body parts, urinary problems, throat infection, body ache, general pain, nose-bleeding, sinusitis, tonsillitis and gastroenteritis. The Rice-beer is highly effective in cholera.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:
The main objectives of this study are as follow:-
1. To study available literature to find out the menu, preparation methods and utensils used in the preparation of

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the traditional Rice beer.
2. To underscore the importance of the Zu in the cultural/religious life of the Tiwa community.
3. To understand the brewing and preparation of the Rice beer in the social milieu.
4. To understand the medicinal values of the beverage if there is any.
5. To study the shifting behavior of the community, especially the youth, towards the drinking of Zu due to globalization and the spread of education.

Introduction:

Assam's human landscape is as multicolored and diverse as her physiography. The ethnic clusters of Assam including Bodos, Rabhas, Dimasaas, Karbi, Tai-Ahom, Mishing, Rabha, Deori, and Tiwa. Inspite of belonging to the Hindu religion, Tiwa society shows great peculiarities in the social and cultural life and Rice beer preparation and consumption is one of them. The Tiwas (formerly known as the Lalungs) constitute a scheduled tribe of plains of Assam, belonging to the ethnic Mongoloid stock. A subdivision of them, known as the Hill Tiwas, dwells in the foothills and mountainous areas of Karbi-Anglong region. According to scholars, the key difference between the two types is that while the Tiwas residing in the plains are patrilinieal, those residing in the hills are matrilinieal. The Hill Tiwas were made eligible to be certified as a scheduled tribe only in recent times. The Tiwas from hill station do not hesitate to call themselves Lalungs while their counterparts in the plains like better to be called as Tiwas. In the plains, Tiwa communities are mainly found in the districts of Nagaon and Morigaon in Middle Assam. They are spread in Morigaon, Nagaon and Kamrup district. According to their traditional belief system, the Rice-beer was sent to earth by their supreme god Mahadeva, as a blessing to their community. As such a result of their religious believe system they treat it as a God-gifted liquor to be used in their every auspicious occasions.

THE DRINKING HABITS OF THE TIWAS:

Rice is the main food of the Tiwas like most of the tribes of Assam. The Tiwas customarily do not drink milk, as it is thought to clash with those of traditionally made Rice beer called Zu. Tea, earlier, used to be taken without milk though nowadays, many households have incorporated milk in their diet. Zu has traditionally been an essential item for them, without which no religious or social occasion could ever be complete. In our visits to Tiwa villages in the hills we have seen with our own eyes how most of the rice cultivated was converted into Zu.

MATERIALS AND METHODS OF PREPARING ZU:

The entire process of study can be divided into parts:
(a) The collection of materials from the plants,
(b) The material of the plant mixes with the Rice cake in the process of preparation for bakhor and
(c) The way filling and diluting of the fermented product. For the proper identification Herbarium specimens were prepared from the collected plant samples.
All the plant species were used in the process of preparing Rice beer cake and Rice beer through the survey which was conducted in the villages to document the proper material. After the collection of the proper material all the plant parts used to report to have a wide range of medicinal properties as well. Samples of Rice beer and starter cakes were collected from four different parts of Nagaon and Marigaon district of Assam. Samples collected were from people who have been involved in the process of making Zu for many years. Like most tribes Tiwas to prepare rice beer using solid and round mixed dough inoculation or starter. It is produced by crushing allevated rice and mixing with different indigenous plants mentioned in the table. It ends up becoming a paste which is mixed with stored powdered starters and made into dough which looks like cakes of different sizes. After few days of fermentation they are dried and converted to starter cakes. The whole process of fermentation takes about a week or so using earthen pots in room temperature. Thereafter the cake is diluted using water in right proportion and distilled with a clean cloth to get the raw rice beer.

MEDICINAL VALUE OF THE ZU:

Tiwas indigenously use different plants and herbs with medicinal value in the preparation of their Zu rice beer. They are aware of the curative properties of such plants beneficial to both cattle and human beings. Different scholars have reported about nineteen verities of such herbs and plants used with their rice beer. We are lucky enough to cross check the same in our survey of the Tiwa dominated areas of Nagaon and Morigan. The Tiwa people of these areas mainly belong to the sub-tribes Koch and Hukai. This Rice-beer has the benefit of having a glowing skin and even a healthy mineral for good health. However, it is important that the preparation should be aseptic and way of taking or consumption must be controlled. For such a reason it was found in the study of preparation that the rice-beer followed a very significant role in the traditional way of healthcare system. The Tiwa people for their traditional beliefs system consumed the Rice-beer as a medicine in many common ailments such as, flu and various kinds of enteric diseases and got cured also. But for the modernization present generation start to migrate for better education, search of knowledge and livelihood to the cities, this valuable beliefs of traditional knowledge remained confined to such a few aged villagers. It is believed that Juguli is work as a tonic which promotes sleeping tendency and also having better purgative effect. The benefit of rice-beer is also efficient in reliving headache, body pain, inflammation of various body parts, infection of throat, tonsillitis, gastroenteritis along with urinary problems. The rice-beer is also used to cure cholera and it has a highly effective side in expelling worms from the alimentary canal. The Rice-beer cake not only possessed to cure human diseases but also curative for cattle. The Juguli which is given as a tonic to eat to the bulls, promote body strength and also effective for leg swelling of cattle. Therefore having the knowledge of the process of preparing this rice-beer is supposed to have practical importance in the future in the ethno botanical research centers. During our survey we have found that various plants are used in the preparation of Rice beer called Zu. Following table presents eight such plants/herbs.
Table 1 Medicinal Plants used in the preparation of Zu by the Tiwas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Name</th>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Medicinal Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HoruBahaka</td>
<td>Justicia Betonica</td>
<td>Acanthaceae</td>
<td>Used for its antiseptic assets and pain killer</td>
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<tr>
<td>BihDhekia</td>
<td>Polipodiumsp</td>
<td>Polipodiaceae</td>
<td>Used in arthritis as a pain killer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuhiar</td>
<td>Saccharum (L)</td>
<td>Poaceae</td>
<td>Leaves are used as laxative and to deal bleeding during menstruation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titavekhuri</td>
<td>Solanum indicum (L)</td>
<td>Solanaceae</td>
<td>Extracts are used in gastroenteritis, fever etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kothona</td>
<td>Tabernaemontia nacorona (R.Br.)</td>
<td>Apocynaceae</td>
<td>Flower/leaf extracts are used to cure eye infection and jaundice respectively</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharua</td>
<td>Streblus aspera (Lour)</td>
<td>Moraceae</td>
<td>Cure urinary and tooth infection</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BorBahaka</td>
<td>Phlogocanthust hysiflorus (Roxb.)</td>
<td>Acanthaceae</td>
<td>Cure chest cough throat infection and tonsillitis</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durun</td>
<td>Leucus aspera (Spreng.)</td>
<td>Lamiaceae</td>
<td>Used painkiller, nose-bleeding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION:

By having the knowledge of the preparation process of the drink being restricted only among the certain aged and experienced persons for our area of the study to documentation of the process was thought necessary. Otherwise without the knowledge of these aged persons there will be lack of true value of this homely traditional indigenous property which will be incomplete and might be lost with time for forever in the absence of these experienced persons. Because of the beneficiary system of this item it is important to have knowledge of this medicinal plants which are related to indigenous culture, traditional faith and healthcare system no one should be allowed to get lost because of the unaware fact about this medicinal beer which does not bear any written documentation or scientific study. Therefore in the present research work it is trying to explore through study the process of preparation of the rice-beer with the used of plant species. The traditional knowledge of medicinal values of the plant species can be helped in future to study at the molecular level how this indigenous procedures is useful to the efficacy of the social practice which may established to be more rewarding. Today, Zu is fermenting in a restricted manner which is also used during festivals and ceremonies only. Furthermore, with the arrival of the Vaishnavism there has been a steady fall in the preparation and consumption of conventional Rice-beer. With more and more Tiwa people being inculcated in the Vaishnavasam of Sankaradeva there has been a quick fall in this customary practice. In fact, the present researcher could observe such a trend among both the Hill and the Plains Tiwas, especially among the cultured youth, who have realized the ill effects of excess Zu consumption on their economy and have tried to make the other villagers aware of this. Now a day, however consumption of rice beer is restricted and educated people of today’s generations like to prefer tea than a beer, still traditionally most of tribal people of Assam use rice-beer. Though they offer their own choice whether they would like to drink or not. But the refusal of the offering of their traditional drink considered as a disrespect of their hospitality of the host and the community and get offended. Yet there is no hard rule against this and as a result, now a day it seems that this traditional custom is in a trend of fast disappearing and people offer tea instead of it.

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Names of the Informants

- Pompi Deuri (34 years), Baropujia,Nagaon
- Maneswar Lara( 25 years ), Raha, Nagaon
- Padmakana Lalung ( 46 yrs )Belguri, Morigaon
- Raja Gopemai Kakati (52 yrs ), Nellie, Morigaon
- Udipta Radu Kakati (24 yrs ), Nellie, Morigaon
- Tulsi Devi ( 57 yrs ), Jagiroad, Morigaon
- Nadiram Tiwa 45 yrs ), Jagiroad, Morigaon
- Pubali Bordoloi ( 45 yrs ), Jagiroad, Morigaon
- Dhirising Lara(28 yrs ), Topatali, Kamrup
- Ajit Lara (85 yrs ), Raha, Nagaon
- Chikan Chandra Bora ( 83 Yrs ), Bhakat Gaon, Morigaon
- Soneswar Tiwa ( 31 yrs ), Bangthai Gaon, Morigaon
- Bharat Pator ( 65 yrs ), Belguri Gaon