



GI TAGGED INDIGENOUS RICE BEER OF ASSAM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.

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Abstract

Rice beer production is an essential socio-economic culture of all the ethnic communities of Assam as well as North-east India. This culture is purely connected to their traditional knowledge which orally passed generation to generation. Generally, the tribal women preserve the technique for their community and produced mainly for household consumption and for cultural rituals. It is also a prime drink offered to guest. After giving recognition by Geographical Indication Tag now the products are opened for global market. The skills and reputation of those women's, producing the indigenous products get recognised globally. Judima is the first rice beer of North-East India achieving Geographical Indication Tag in 2021. This paper attempted to discuss the role of Geographical indication product Judima of Dimasa community in socio-economic empowerment of rural tribal women of this community.

Keywords: Rice beer, Judima, Geographical Indication Tag, Socio-economic empowerment.

Introduction

Rice beer, one of the fermented alcoholic beverages, has been treated as an integral part of socio-cultural life of almost all tribal community of Northeast India. It is a long-standing tradition of all the communities. Any social rituals and cultural is incomplete without offering their traditional rice wine to their spiritual connection (God or Goddess) by these ethnic communities. The preparation of traditional wine occupied a dominant place in tribal culture and social life for generation. Rice beer is purely the result of each community's knowledge of specific medicinal plants and local natural ingredients.

Different communities of Assam have their own fermented alcoholic beverages with different names and brewed using different methods. Every community has their own recipe often involving locally sourced plants, herbs and specific traditional cuisine system. Xaj and Rohi for Ahom community, Jou of Bodo community, Judima of Dimasa community, Hor Alank of Karbi community, Apong of Mising community, Sujen of Deuri Community, Jonga of Rabha community are some of the popular rice beers of different communities of Assam. In each of the rice beer for every stage of preparation women plays a significant role. Near about 80% of total workforce needed for the preparation of these drinks are women workforce. The traditional knowledge required for preparation are preserved successfully by the womenfolk and passed generation to generation of their own communities i.e. women are the primary inheritors and transmitters of the traditional knowledge of making rice beers. The brewing



process has been considered as household activities by the women like other activities since it requires for their family, guests and for other ceremonial purposes.

Judima of Dimasa community is the first traditional brew in all of Northeast to bag a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in September 2021. Youth Association for Development and Empowerment in collaboration with Assam agricultural University played the crucial part in obtaining the Tag. Through this paper it is attempted to discuss the role of Geographical indication product Judima of Dimasa community in socio-economic empowerment of tribal women of this community.

Preparation Process

Judima is a kind of manifestation of traditional knowledge of culture of Dimasa tribe. 'The traditional knowledge of beverages making practice in NE region has been transformed from one generation to another through ages'. (Tanti et al 2010, Das et al 2012).

"The life style of tribal, indigenous communities plays a key role in the development of traditional knowledge. Cloths, songs, dance forms and also food and cuisine form an integral part of the cultural life of a community. Tribal communities share an intimate relationship with the nature and hence their cuisines have a direct link to the place and habitat where they live. (J Gogoi).

Judima is purely homemade, ethnic rice beer. It is part and parcel of Dimasa tribe's cultural and social life. Fully traditional brewing process is used to make this prestigious beer by Dimasa community. Like any other tribal communities Dimasa also use different genuine natural products in most food recipes as ingredients. In case of Judima, the most preferred rice used is Bora (Biron) or waxy rice which is indigenous to this region. The Maiju variety of Biron rice however is considered as best for premium quality of Judima. The whole process for preparation of Judima is completed in two stages. (i) Making of rice starter cakes and (ii) preparation of rice beer. In the whole brewing process women plays the pivotal role.

Alcoholic content and Taste

The alcoholic content of Judima varies depending on whether it is fresh or old and preserved. Fresh Judima has an alcohol percentage of 20+- 2% (v/v). In case of old preserved Judima alcohol percentage increases slightly to 21.5+- 2%(v/v). Indigenous people often prefer old preserved Judima due to its smoother taste and more blended flavours.

Social Empowerment of Judima

Generally, Dimasa women plays a pivotal role in discission making process in family as well as in society. The women with high skill in making Judima is kept in high esteemed. They are given high respect for their contribution to their culture. "Judima is an integral part of the culture and social life of the Dimasa community. Celebrations of important rituals including birth, death and worship are incomplete without Judima. During marriages it is extremely important, as carrying rice-beer to the bride's house symbolizes the fixing of marriage". (Uttam Bathari, 2014). GI Tag to their rice beer actually gives recognition to those



skills and expertise in producing indigenous skill based products. It really fosters a sense of pride to their work and contribution to communities with international recognition. GI Tag provides the required protection to these traditional practices and indigenous knowledge of the tribal womenfolk and ensure that this valuable skill will be proudly learned and passed down to new generations.

Dimasa women took the high responsibility of preparing the item which is most valuable to their culture and rituals. Dimasa newborn gets a taste of judima before he/she is introduced to the outside world. Drinking is an intrinsic part of festivities, aimed at bringing tribes together. "Rice beer holds an important place in esteem of all the tribes. It is an essential element in the tradition of hospitality which is one of the most admired of tribal virtues. No tribal conference, rituals can succeed without it. It is the pledge that binds together those who make a pact of peace". (Elwin.V.A,1964). After receiving Geographical Indication tag as the product commercialised in national or international level the reputation of these women producing the product raised and praised at all levels. They are now receiving the encouragement for their traditional knowledge that preserved by them for generations. Their skills are now recognised at global level.

Economic Importance of Judima

After achieving GI to this product, the cultural identity to this product is now protected as well as product reputation is ascertained. Consumer interest is also protected by offering the genuine product. With this changing scenario the relevance of Judima in economic life of the Dimasa people greatly increased. As Dimasa people can now prestigiously adopted commercialization of Judima at both national and international level. In this situation Judima can go a long way in maintaining the cultural identity of Dimasa as well as bringing economic prosperity to the people since the community is waiting for economic upliftment due to non-availability of sufficient industry or commercial sector, "Development of small scale or major industry in this region is not attractive for profit oriented industrialist. Wait for emergence of other industry by tribal people is not possible all time. Hence planned efforts are required to develop tribal indigenous industrial possibility for their economic development which is admired by all" (Bordoloi B.N,1990).

GI tag can greatly improve the economic condition of the rural women. In India there are examples where GI recognition to product of a community has alleviated the economic conditions of the communities who were living in acute poverty. One apt example is that of 'Pochampally Ikat' of Telengana. "In various studies conducted, it was projected that before the Cluster Development Programme of Ikat was launched by the Textile committee, most weavers of Ikat were extremely poor. After the GI registration took place, it was observed that the income of these weavers increased to quite an extent. Moreover, with the registration of Ikat as GI it got a lot of publicity which gave it more customers". (Das.K, 2016)

Due to the high premium of GI tagged Judima rice beer and extension of the market the women are now able to get higher income. "A consumer survey done by the European



Union revealed that 40% of consumers surveyed were willing to pay a premium as high as 10% for origin guaranteed products” (WTO, 2004).

Some scientific research also highlights the nutritional and therapeutic value of Judima which also support to huge boost to trade of this GI product. “Studies have indicated that Judima have tremendous health benefit and can prevent or treat different diseases and psychological disorders. The plant barks/leaves which are used in the starter cake contain different phytochemicals and these phytochemicals either in alone or in combination may have therapeutic potential in curing various ailments”.(Prakash D. Gupta C & Sharma G , 2012).

Many researchers emphasising the role of rural women in performing family’s economic responsibility and empowering themselves. The brewing of traditional beer is an important activity for rural women to diversify their household livelihood portfolio. The micro enterprises are generally profitable, providing jobs and income to many rural women. The traditional product is gaining interest and the brewing activity has expanded beyond its area of origin. “Collecting and preparation of ingredients brewing of rice beer based on division of labour, where women being responsible for a major part of activity. Tribal women transform it to beer and sell it. Men drink it, while women gain money to sustain their household’s livelihood. This clearly demonstrate the prominent role of women in the economic cycle of this product”. (Polycarpe Keyode A.P. 2007)

Many researchers have shown that when women play an important role in the local economy, they also have a strong social position and decision-making power beyond the domestic domain.

Conclusion

Geographical indication product like rice beer from Northeast India has huge importance in improving socio-economic status of rural tribal women. Geographical indication tag for this product is an opportunity to come out these rural women as economically and socially strong. Now they are not treated as only house wife but as eligible income earner. Judima exhibit indigenous communities’ deep knowledge about the nature. Their traditional cultural knowledge to collect, making and preserving food from nature have to be acknowledge with high respect. After achieving GI Tag the principal duties of the authorities to be convert it to as a regular economic activity producing high quality beer, creating more employment and generating substantial income that contribute sufficient livelihood to communities.

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