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**MAKING OF TRADITIONAL RICE BEER AMONG
TRIBAL COMMUNALITIES OF NORTHEAST
INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO 'HOR-ALANG'
OF THE KARBI COMMUNITY**

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Abstract

In northeast India all tribal communities has their traditional beverages, either made from rice or from alternatives like fruits and using it traditionally for consumption as well as for worshiping of their deities and ancestors. Among these tribal communities Karbis of Assam, who occupied second largest community, traditionally makes a fermented rice beer, used as beverages and in worshiping, knows as Hor-Alang. The making process involves customary practices and used various medicinal herbs, which is enlighten in this paper.

Keyword : *Tribal, Tradition, Rice beer, Karbi, Hor-Alang,*

Introduction

India's Northeast, which comprises the eight states Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh (located between latitude 20° and 22° North and longitude 89°46' and 97°5' East) is a hotspot of diversity. Various ethnic groups (Appox. 225) live here with distinct cultural entities and bears rich traditional knowledge. The peoples' dietary habits are very interesting and a subject of study. People basically used natural products in most cases while they prepared their diet. Apart from food, one of their important beverages is fermented rice beer, which is traditionally prepared and almost all tribal communities of the Northeast consume it. The beverages are named differently by different ethnic groups.

Among these fermented rice beers *Aapong* is used by Mishing of Assam and Adis of Arunachal, *Bitchi* is brewed in the Garo tribes of Meghalaya *Lau Pani* and *Xaj* brewed by the Ahom tribe in Assam, *Yu* is prepared by Meitei community of Manipur, *Zu* is brewed by the Rabha tribe in Assam, *Suje* is brewed by Deori tribe of Assam, *Judima* by Dimasas of Assam, *Hor-Alang* is brewed by Karbi people of Assam, etc. The fermented rice beers traditionally prepared using locally available raw materials and other biological resources have been prepared for generations and is practiced even today by the descendants

Karbi- The Tribe

The Karbi tribes (in the colonial document they are known as *Mikir*) living in Karbi Anglong besides Dima Hasao, Kamrup, Kachar, Nagaon, Morigaon, Sonitpur District of Assam, and neighbouring states like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland. Karbis are the second largest tribal community of Assam after the Bodos. The Karbi Anglong within the vicinity of a 10,434 sq km geographical area in the middle of the state of Assam is blessed with rich natural resources, flora and fauna, art and culture which is unique in its nature and is incomparable.

Hor-Alang- the fermented rice beverage of the Karbis

Making of *Hor-Alang* is an antique tradition of the Karbis, which is prepared by fermenting boiled rice with yeast, the *Thap*, prepared locally, and

distilling the alcohol called *Hor A-rak* from the beer. The *Thap* contains leaves of Croton Joufra Roxb and raw rice. Some substitutes for C.Joufra are leaves of the Amomum Corynostachyum wall and bark of Acacia pennata. Adulterants such as Clerodendrum viscosum Vent, Zingiber Officinale rocs, Ricinus Communis L, Ananas Comosus [L] Merr, Artocarpus Heterophyllus Lam, Solanum Indicum L, Cymbopogon Citratus [DC] Stapf, jaggery, urea, charcoal and soot are used either to increase production of alcohol or to give strong taste. For historical reasons, a woman belonging to the section Bey-Ronghang of the sub-clan Bey and clan Hanjang, preparation of *Thap* is taboo.

Generally, rice of inferior quality is cooked and spread on an especially prepares bamboo mat called *an-tar* [*an*-cooked rice, *tar*-mat]. Cooked rice is then broken into fine grains and allowed to cool. An adequate quantity of powdered *thap* is thoroughly mixed with rice and the mixture is stored in pot [*tebuk*] or cooking utensil [*phole*] for 3 days during summer and up to 4 days during winter, for fermentation. For the collection of beer, a pit is usually made at the center where a cylindrical sieve made from bamboo splits called *hang-ru* is placed and *hor-lank* is retrieved with gourd shell called *lank jok*. The fermented rice excluding the beer before distillation is called *bechurang*. After the allotted period of fermentation and adequate quantity of water is added, mixed thoroughly and allowed to remain for 1 more night. This act of addition of water is called *hor kangthur*. The next day alcohol [*hor-arak*] is distilled from it. In the beginning, a very crude form of still called *bhot* was employed for distillation. It consists of an earthen pot with a swollen base and a long neck where fermented rice is placed an another earthen pot referred to as *bhot* with to lateral nozzles as outlets and whose mouth is tightly fitted to the mouth of the long – necked pot. Two bamboo tubes called *charang* are connected to the nozzles of the *bhot*, which separately leads to earthen pots, which are placed on condensers in the formed of saucers filled with cold water. *Charang* is usually made from *tereng* (neohouzeaua daulooa, Gamble A.camus) or *kaipho* (dendor kalamus hamiltonii nees and arn. Ex Munro) and consists of one or two internodes. The gaps between joins of the compartment of the still are shield with a mixture of paddy husk [*bichurang* and *phek-e*]. A little amount of *bichurang* is placed on top of the *bhot*. On hitting, the alcohol component

being volatile, formed vapour and reaches the *bhot*, which is collected as a liquid in earthen pots through the two *charang*. Completion of distillation is judged by the hardness of *bichurang*, placed on the *bhot* which of course requires a great deal of experience.

Bhot is an abandoned art and is replaced by an improved one at present. This consists of three components-the lower one is a metallic utensil which consists of the fermented rice; the middle part is an earthen pot which a perforated base called *Phule chekrak* [*phule*-cooking utensil; *chekrak*-perforated] and contains a small wooden bowl with tubular outlets called *chobak* to which the side tube *charang* is fitted. The *charang* in this case consists of a single inter-node and a node at one end. The upper part is actually a condenser in the form of a metallic saucer filled with cold water. The gap between the components of the still is sealed with a mixture of *bichurang* and *phek-e*. On heating, alcohol forms vapour, passes through the perforated base of *phule chekrak* and reaches the cool base of the condenser where it becomes liquid and falls back on the *chobak*. The liquefied alcohol passes through the outlet and is then collected through the side tube [*charang*]. It is reported that when about 40 grams of *thap* is added to 5 kg. Of rice, about 5.5 liters of alcohol can be extracted. The fermented rice after distillation is now called *hor sera* or leftover. The latter is used as feed for pigs and sometimes as a fish attractant. It is, however, difficult to trace the origin of the primitive still, *bhot* as well as the improved still, but the latter is of common use among various tribes of Karbi Anglong District.

Rice being hard to come by, the hill Karbis uses other substrates such as *eleusine corocana gaertn.* [*krem-malu* or *malu*], ripe banana, jack fruit and *citrullus vulgaris schrad.* [*Thoithe dumpre*] for preparing *hor*. In this regard fermentation with *C. vulgaris* is worth mentioning. An appropriate hole is made on the fruit while it is still attached to the plant. The inner pericarp is scooped and to it, an adequate quantity of *thap* is added and mixed properly. The hole is then sealed with the part of the fruit removed earlier and allowed to remain for three nights. On the fourth day, the fruit is detached from the plant and the beer so formed is collected and consumed. Generally, distillation, in this case, is not carried out. In Karbi society, rice beer is divided into four types they are-

1. *Hor kangthir* or *Thap*: This type of wine is not drunk by the people. This is for *Hemphu arnam*. It should be kept in a clean and pure way.
2. *Horlang keman*: Rice bee [*Horlangr*] can be drunk by all people. This type of *Horlang* is made with cooked rice and mixed with yeast and keep it for 2 or 3 days at a hot temperature which later on produced *Horlang*. It is yellow in colour.
3. *Horpo keman*: This type of rice beer is white in colour after extracting the yellow liquid wine [*Horlang*] from the mixture of rice and yeasts. The mixture of rice and yeasts is again mixed with water, and again this water is extracted from rice and yeasts, which the water is called *Horpo*. This is not served to god this is only for people to drink.
4. *Hor Arak*: *Hor* is a very powerful intoxicating liquid. Karbi women make this type of wine [*Hor*] by the process of evaporation. The mixture of rice and yeasts with water will keep in the big vessel and heat it with fire, and the vapour which is produced is collected in another bottle and for this type of liquid is called *Hor Arak*.

The Karbi society and uses of *Hor-alang*

The Karbis are animists, worshipping surroundings nature, and natural objects like thick forests, big rivers, mountains, waterfalls, big trees, and even the moon and the sun. The Karbi society is blended with folklores, folk-song, and folk-tales. They follow some institutions generation after generation in oral mode and voodoos of mantras. And in each and every worship of the Karbis, including from birth to death ceremony, local homemade, Rice beer is very important. Without Rice beer, any rituals and worships of the Karbis cannot be done. Rice beer played a very important role in the lives of the Karbis. Rice beer is used in rituals and worships of the Karbis like-

- Worshiping of *Rit anglong arnam*, i.e. God of cultivation
- Worshiping of *Peng arnam* [God of household]
- Worshiping of *Volok aseh* or *chinthong arnam* [God of Law]

- At having Rongker [Great annual Village Festival]
- Worshiping of Habit aseh or Duikrai [God of Forest]
- At Sangkimi arnam kepi or ingtat kachejai [Offering of new rice to god]
- Worshiping of Chojun [God of heaven or Indra]

Conclusion

Hor-Alang is a traditional alcoholic beverage. It is produced by microbial fermentation of steamed rice with yeast and water. Different versions of this drink exist and they are locally known by different names. Although rice beer has been introduced to many other countries through trade and globalization, research into its characteristics and health benefits is still predominantly conducted in the regions of its origin.

Highly concentrated alcohol is locally preferred as *Hor-Acho* [*Hor*-alcohol; *acho*-pure/ concentrated]. *Hor-acho* is sometimes used as medicine in rural areas in cases like dysentery and pharyngitis. For this purpose one or two doses @ 10-50 ml. *Hor-acho* is taken to cure the ailments. During the 1960s and 1970s when there was an epidemic of cholera, people in rural areas used to rub *Hor-acho* on their bodies as a precaution. *Horlang* is often used as a preservative for dried fish [manthu]; dried fishes are first soaked in salt water and then sprinkled with *Horlang*. They are properly mixed and stored in a dried bamboo tube called *lang pong*. *Horlang* is reported to add aroma and flavor and increase the longevity of the food [i.e. dried fish]. When compared to traditional wine [made from grapes or other fruits], as well as beer, wine made from rice contains more alcohol. Its alcohol content can be in the range of 18% to 25%. In comparison, regular wine usually contains 10% to 20% alcohol, whereas beer ranges from 4% to 8% alcohol. Therefore, it is natural to assume that drinking too much of this wine –or any other alcoholic beverage for that matter might not be beneficial for the body. Moreover, because of rice wine’s higher alcohol content, the familiar effects of alcohol- such as nausea, blurry vision, lost balance, lost muscle control,

and a hangover- might be felt earlier than consuming a similar portion of drink with less alcohol content.

However, there are also many documented health benefits of drinking rice beer. Rice beer is a highly nutritious beverage that contains an abundance of essential amino acids, sugars and organic acids, as well as vitamins and minerals. Since rice beer is a fermented product, it is not surprising that the drink also contains many strains of lactic acid bacteria, which are often considered probiotic. Although traditional home remedies can often have a therapeutic value, these examples show that generalizations can be dangerous. The Health benefits of rice beer should not be taken out of the context of scientific research. Uninformed applications can sometimes have a harmful effect, as seen in this example. Furthermore, and perhaps most important, many medical professionals believe that any potential benefits from the consumption of various alcoholic beverages are not worth the risks that are associated with ingesting ethanol.

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