

Indigenous Knowledge on Jou Fermentation: An Analysis in the Bodo Society

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Abstract

'Rice Beer' is popularly known as 'Jou' in Bodo. Jou is a traditional alcoholic beverage of the Bodos. Since time immemorial it has been used in various occasions in their society. It plays a great role in the society. They prepare the Jou with certain traditional methods and use different materials at their own house—the paper attempts to explore the traditional knowledge associated with the preparation it. Moreover, the materials used in the past and present and their usage in society will be discussed thoroughly in this research paper.

Methodology

While researching a specific topic, the methodology is very important. In this paper, the descriptive method and analytical method has been adopted as a methodology.

Data Collection

The required information and data used in this paper have been collected using both primary and secondary sources. As a primary source, the data have been collected from the aged people living in the community since childhood, and from the places and habitation where most of the Bodo people exist. Again, as a secondary source, the data have been collected from journals, research papers, and important books that are related to the topic of Rice Beer.

Keywords:

Jou, Bodo; Traditional Knowledge; Uses, Society

Introduction

The Bodo community is a tribe of India. They are the largest tribe in North-Eastern India. They have colorful traditions and culture. They are identified as the Mongoloid and their language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family. The Bodos have been living their lives depending on nature from a very early age. Their rich heritage includes a distinct language, literature, religion, and culture, as well as traditional foods, clothing, festivals, dance forms, musical

practices, and various traditional tools essential for their lifestyle. As the traditional religion, they worship "Bwrai Bathou" from a very early age. Likewise, in the field of drinking, they have their traditional alcoholic beverage called *Jou*; moreover, it is not only used for drinking purposes but is useful in different cultural and social activities in the community. Mostly, the women prepare Jou in their own house collecting necessary items from nature. Thus,

the Bodos have gained expertise in agriculture, fishing, hunting, making their traditional items, and many more.

There is a myth about preparing alcohol in the Bodo community. Bhaben Narji mentioned in his book titled *Boro Kachari Somaj Aru Sanskriti* thus-“at one time there were two elderly men and a woman. They used to make a living by cutting wood in the forest and selling it. For them, it was so tiring to go deep into the forest, cut it down, and carries it back to sell. Hence, the old man used to pray to the Almighty to relieve him of his fatigue.

One such day, the old man went a long way in search of woods. On his way, he sat down in the shadow of a tree, exhausted. Many birds were enjoying themselves singing on the branch of that tree. Wondering why the birds are so joyful he looked up and saw that they were drinking some kind of juice from the wooden cave. The old man climbed up the tree to find out what this kind of thing was. Then it seems that some water-like material had accumulated in the wooden cave. The old man wanted to drink the water as he was very tired.

After a while, the old man took a sip of it with his hands. Taking another sip, he examined it carefully and came down from the tree. Once he climbed down from the tree, the old man drifted into a long, peaceful sleep.

After some time, the old man wakes up and feels his body unusually light. The exhaustion and tiredness are no longer there. On this day, the old man was able to cut a large amount of firewood. From that day forward, the old man went to that side of the tree every day to collect firewood and drink its water.

Consequently, drinking the water made the old man's body stronger and more vibrant. When the old man's wife noticed how healthy he had become, she asked him about it, and he told her about the water he had been drinking from the cave. On hearing this, the old man's wife requested him to bring her the juice of the tree. As per the request, the old man brought the juice in a hollow bamboo. After tasting its delicious quality, the old man's wife asked him to bring it every day. After spending a long time retrieving water from the cave, the lord Mahadev (Bathou Bwrai) came to them one night in their dreams and told them to prepare it and share it with the world, preserving it for all time. With the first liquor brewed, Mahadev told the old woman to offer her prayers and worship to him in her dream. The old man and woman did exactly as Mahadev had told them. Thus, it is believed by the Bodos that Jou (Rice beer) came into existence from that day [1].

Discussion

As mentioned above, the Bodo people prepare the rice beer on their own. There are many primitive traditional rules and regulations for preparing the rice beer “Jou”, which are traditionally observed from an early age. Those will be explained in detail below.

Indigenous Knowledge Associated With making Emao (Rice beer's cake/Yeast):

While making the rice beer, the most important ingredient is the

Emao. The main function of *emao* is to make rice beer intoxicated. It is important to know what an *Emao* is and how it is made. *Emao* is a circular like cake mainly made from Rice or Brewer's rice. The most important ingredients of it are rice or brewer's rice and the leaves of some plants which are easily available from nature. As, Bongphang Rakheb, Mwkhwna Leaf, Pineapple Leaf, Jackfruit Leaf, Banana Leaf, Sugarcane Leaf, Agwrsitha, etc are used.

The processes of preparation of rice beer begin with the making of starter culture for fermentation. Starter culture are traditionally made and preserved in a semi sterilized medium. Usually, a gluten ground rice of local variety mixed with a number of plant parts having medicinal properties to make the starter cake [2]. The starter cakes are the source of amylolytic enzymes, starch degrading moulds, lactic acid bacteria and alcohol producing yeasts [3]. Rice beer is a traditional alcoholic beverage prepared and consumed by almost all the ethnic tribes of North-east India. The beer prepared and consumed is enriched with proteins, vitamins, amino acids and several nutritional components [4].

In the Bodo society, it is observed in respect of making *Emao* the required quantity of rice or brewer's rice is taken and kept submerged in water for about 2-3 hours, and then it is taken out and kept hanging in a bag with small pores for about one hour so that the remaining water comes out of it. Then this rice or brewer's rice is ground into a floured substance with the help of traditional grinding tools known as *Ualh* and *Gaihen*. The process of grinding in *Ualh* is continued by adding all the leaves that are mentioned above. The process is continued until it grinds into smaller particles. These leaves are prepared by washing them before using them. When the leaves are surely mixed with the flour, then it is sieved with *Sandri* (a traditional tool made of bamboo for sieving), and the leftover larger particles are ground further. When the particles are fairly ground enough, it is taken out of the *Ualh* and placed on *Songrai* (a traditional tool made of bamboo to keep things) where they are converted into the dough by adding a sufficient amount of water. Then this dough is made into a cakelike structure and after that, it is very important to add old *Emao* (*Emao khoru*) to the newly made *emao*. So, some old *emao* is ground into powder and spread on newly made wet *emao* also known as *emao gwrlwi*. Then some of the rice straws are placed on *Songrai* and placed this newly made *emao* on it. Again, *emao* is covered with some rice straws and jute bags or clothes on top of it. This *emao* can be left to dry in the sun or kept at room temperature for 3-4 days until they harden. When these *emao* becomes a little hard then the covered clothes and rice straws are removed and let it dry itself. After 4 or 5 days, the *emao* will be ready to make rice beer. Storing these in a dry or airtight container helps them stay fresh for a year or more. In this way, the Bodo people make the *emao* with the help of nature in a primitive traditional way.

The process of preparing rice beer

In the Bodo community, there are unlikely to be two types of Rice Beer: *Jou Gisi* (*Jou Bidwi*) and *Jou Gwran* (Sereb). Beyond this, there is a special type of Rice Beer known as *Maibra*, so it can be said that there are three types of Rice Beer.



Figure 1: *Emao Gwrlwi* (wet emao).

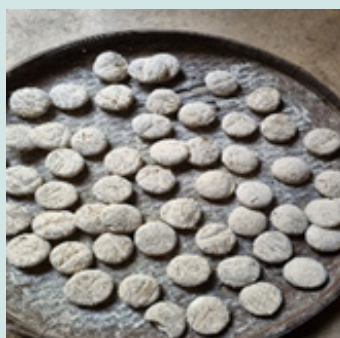


Figure 2: *Emao Gwra* (dried emao).

Jou Gisi/ Jou Bidwi:

For making *Jou Gisi*, the most important ingredient is the rice. Rice is the item that the Bodo people prepare the rice beer. For making rice beer a vessel or pot is taken and a sufficient amount of water is boiled on it until the water reaches the highest boiling point. When the water begins to boil, sufficient rice is poured into it stirred, and cooked. The process of cooking rice is the same as it is. But in some areas like Thelemara, Sonitpur few rice husk is also added. Rice cooked for *jou* is known as *Jumai* in the Bodo. When the rice is cooked well, then it is taken out and placed on the banana leaves, but nowadays plastics are used to place rice instead of banana leaves. The agglomerate rice is crushed and the burned

are removed. After determining the required amount of rice, the necessary quantity of *emao* is taken and ground into a powder. When the rice is in the lukewarm condition the grind *emao* is mixed thoroughly with it. Then when the rice cools it is stored in clay pottery *Jonga*, *Dabkha*, and *Maldang*, but nowadays again plastic buckets are used for it. After one week or more when it starts to form *Jou Bidwi* (liquidity of *Jumai*), a traditional tool known as *Jantha* (made of bamboo with small pores) is inserted into it to separate rice (*Jumai*) from *Jou Bidwi*. Then this can be drunk after half a month or a month and it can be stored for two or more years. With this process, the Bodo people prepare their own Rice Beer at home.



Figure 3: *Jumai*.



Figure 4: Jumai with Jantha.

Maibrani Jou or Jumai

The process of making *maibra Jumai* is the same as the normal process of making *jou Gisi*, the only difference is that *Maibra mairong* (sticky rice) is used for making it instead of any other type of rice. The reason why *Maibra Jumai* is so famous in the Bodo community is that the rice 'Maibra' is of rich quality and the most important reason is that it gives the *Jumai* a sweet and good flavor than the normal rice beer. *Maibra Jumai* earned a high place in the Bodo community with time.

Jou Gwran/ Sereb (Distilled from Jumai):

Jou Gwran is also known as *Sereb*. There are also variations of names within different places. Likewise, the process of making it may vary with the variation of places. For making *Jou Gwran*, *Jumai* or *Jou Gisi* is required, *Jou Gwran* can only be produced from this. When the *Jou bidwi* is over from the *Jumai*, the women pour some water on it and keep it for about 1-3 nights. After keeping it three or more nights, it is ready and the *Jumai* is taken out and placed on a vessel ready for making *Jou Gwran*. For making *Jou Gwran* four types of pots are required. These pots are placed on top of one another in decreasing order of their size. Putting fire on the stove these pots are placed, on the lowest portion biggest pot is placed and in the middle one special type of pot with holes known as *Mwkhra Khoru* (made from clay) and a container is placed inside it to hold the *Jou Gwran*. On top of the *Mwkhra Khoru*, one more pot is placed to keep the cold water in the process of condensation. The water from the top becomes hot in the process of condensation and it needs to change continuously with the cold water whenever necessary. Cold water on the top is the reason for the condensation of the *Jou Gwran* from *Jumai* to the container that is placed inside *Mwkhra Khoru*. While making the *Jou Gwran* in a strong sense then the water to be changed in the process of condensation is changed up to four or five times and to make it less strong it is done within seven or eight times. In this process, the strips from dokhona are mainly used to tighten up the joints between the pots to make them tight and airtight too. In this way, the women of the Bodo community prepare the *Jou Gwran* from the used *Jumai* or *Jou Gisi*. This is the traditional way that the Bodos prepare from an early age, but nowadays the

use of small pipes is also seen in the process.

The processes discussed above are the traditional ways with which the women of the Bodo community prepare *Jou* at their own house. But beyond this, the traditional way or process may vary between places.

Use of Jou in the Bodo Society:

Now a days, the usage and importance of *Jou* is increasing not only among the Bodos but also among the other communities. The *Jou* plays a wide role in the Bodo community. From an early age, the Bodo community used *Jou* in various fields of society, and it is still used. From birth to until death, the Bodo people used *Jou* in their consuetude, religious activities such as reverence, and many other activities. People in society need many essential items to survive and sustain their livelihood. Among these items, *Jou* also has a prominent place in their society.

Jou is used to serve the people in birth and death rituals, marriage ceremony, religious activities, agricultural activities, labouring activities, hospitality. In addition to these, the Bodos have also used *Jou* as a medicine.

There is a belief that *Jou* works just like medicine if it is used in the correct quantity. The Bodos in the rural areas work tirelessly to manage their household and have long been a toiling community. Most of them still do the same, especially in the rural areas. It is believed by the Bodo people that drinking a bowl of *Jou Bidwi* during the evening break after working hard for such a day can give the body strong maturity and great relief.

In addition, it is also believed to cure small ailments like hamaturia, urine burning sensation, numbness, diarrhoea, stomach upset, vomiting, cholera, etc. Moreover, if some of the oxen fall ill an amount of *emao* is fed to cure them.

The role of Bodo Women

Bodo women have been taking a pivotal role in the family since earliest times. They are very labourious and more active than man. Except ploughing in the paddy field, they do everything. Frankly

speaking, they don't rely on others and self-dependent. There is a bad impression in the society for selling a rice beer in the society. They know very well that selling a rice beer is not a good task. According to bad system of the Bodos, selling goods was not a part of culture. If you sell the goods then you will have to tell a lie. So,

they never sold anything. As I observed since childhood, the Bodos used to drink but they did not sell it in the village. In course of time, they compelled to sell rice beer due to certain circumstances such lack of agricultural land, laziness of their husband, loss of their husband etc.



Figure 5: Distillation of Jumai.

Conclusion

The Bodo community is one of the communities that are so rich in their culture and traditional knowledge. As highlighted above, it is evident that the Bodo people are well-versed in both the preparation of *Jou* and its cultural significance. This knowledge has a great cultural significance that has been passed down by the ancestors and continues to be followed today, as well as in the future. These traditional knowledge and wisdoms were handed down from generation to generation by the forbearers and are the most valuable inheritance. The sustainability and even development of indigenous knowledge depends on the application of this knowledge. As I observed many of the indigenous knowledge of the community lost due to impact of science and technology. It is fortunate that 21 items of the Bodos belonging to different varieties of food, dress, and instruments along with *Jou* (rice beer) have also gained GI tag due to efforts of some conscious people. Surely, it will

inspire the younger generation to think and make it more dynamic way in fermentation and marketisation.

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