

Plants Use in The Preparation of Rice Beer (Sanj) With Special Reference to Ahoms of Assam: An Appraisal Towards the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Tek)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Ecological knowledge is relevant for contemporary natural resource management. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is an academic term referring to aboriginal knowledge regarding local environmental resources.

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) represents experience acquired over thousands of years of direct human contact with the environment. The practice of TEK is as old as ancient hunter-gather cultures. In addition to ecology, the study of traditional knowledge is valued in a number of fields like agriculture, pharmacology and ethno-ecology, research into traditional knowledge has a rich history. In fact, in comparison to these fields, the study of indigenous knowledge in ecology is relatively new in various works showed that many indigenous groups in diverse geographical areas had their own systems of managing resources. Thus, the feasibility of applying TEK to contemporary resources management problems in various parts of the world was gradually recognized. Traditional ecological knowledge has been found to have management relevance especially in regard to sustainable use of renewable resources. (McCay and Acheson, 1987; Berkes 1989; Freeman et al,1991). The indigenous tribes and communities have a vast accumulation of traditional knowledge and experience that link humanity with its ancient origins. Their disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which would learn a good deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological system.

There is no universally accepted definition of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). In the literature, the term as by necessity-ambiguous since

the words traditional and ecological knowledge are themselves ambiguous. TEK is a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs handed down through generations by cultural transmissions about the relationship of living beings with one another and environment. Further, TEK is an attribute to societies with historical continuity in resource use practices, by and large, these are non-industrial or less technologically advanced societies many of them indigenous or tribal.

The main purpose of this study to highlight the influential impact of TEK in the management and sustainability of the plant resources among the Ahoms of Assam.

The Ahoms are one of the numerically dominant major Mongoloid populations of upper Assam. They belong to the Tai speaking family and came to Assam from Myanmar through Patkai Range in 1228 A.D. Linguistically the Ahom belongs to the Siamese Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The material contained in the present discussion was collected through a fieldwork among the village Mohemari of Dhakuakhana subdivision of Lakhimpur district of Assam during September of 2011. The study village is a homogenous one, inhabited by the Ahom. The information has been collected from local informants and the personal observation about the uses of the plants also included. For every species correct identify and scientific name and as far as possible vernacular/local name have been given. Photographs have been taken for visual familiarity of the plant used in the preparation of the rice beer Sanj. The plant species have been arranged in alphabetical order by

botanical names followed by the local name and specific parts of the plants have also been recorded.

III. CONCEPT OF TEK TOWARDS THE PREPARATION OF RICE BEER(SANJ)

Like any other communities of Assam, the Ahom have a great weakness for Sanj and is considered as a valuable item for entertaining guests. They consider Sanj as integral part of their agricultural laborious life. But now a days, some of the household deprive from it due to the contract of Aka Sarna Nam Dharma. Still today, it is considered as an offering item in their social and religious rite. It processes a low concentration of alcohol and contains nutritive value mostly in vitamin is of highest importance. It is also considered as an essential part in many traditional ceremony, Me- Dum- Me - Phi, Bihu etc. The Sanj is fermented due to the addition of ingredients, an extract of various medicinal plants called Sanjor pitha. Mixturing of these ingredients, it serves as a reliever of their body fatigue or tiresome and also help in preventing some specific diseases and disorders like malaria ,pains, dysentery etc .It is considered as an offering item to their deity .In the third days ,after being a child birth it is offered to mothers and also given a drops in to the baby’s mouth for the prevention of any bad spirits. They have common practice and well idea about these valued medicinal plants which are indispensable part for making ingredient for the preparation of Sanjor pitha.They collect all these plant species from their household boundaries or from the jungle around their village.

The common plants use for making ‘Sanjor pitha’ are listed alphabetically as bellow-

No.	Name of the Plant	Assamese Name	Parts Used
1	Ananas comosus	Matikothal	Young leaf
2	Artocarpus heterophyllus	Kathal	Leaf
3	Asparagus racemosus	Sotomul	Roots and leaf
4	Centella asiatica	Barmanimoni	Entire plant
5	Clerodendrum viscosum	Dhopat tita	Tender leaf
6	Croton caudatus	Latamahudi	Bark

7	C. jaufra	Gachmahudi	Bark
8	Detella repens	Bonjaluk	Entire plant
9	Desmodium laxiflorum	Bionisapota	Leaf
10	Dracaena angustifolia	Jamlakhuti	Entire plant
11	Euphorbia hirta	Gakhiratibon	Young shoot
12	Hydrocotyle rotundifolia	Sarumanimooni	Entire plant
13	Leucus plukenetii	Dorunbon	Leaves and roots
14	Oryza sativa	Chawal	Grain
15	Paederia scandens	Bhadailota	Young leaf
16	Piper longum	Pipoli	Leaf
17	Polygonum hydropiper	Bihalongoni	Young leaf
18	Psidium guajava	Madhuriam	Young leaf
19	Rauvolfia serpentina	Panimadhuri	Young shoot
20	Saccharum officinarum	Kuhiar	Young leaf
21	Stenochlaena palustre	Dhekialoti	Tender leaf

IV. CONCLUSION

The concept of “Nature Conservation” among the Ahoms of upper Assam continue through religions, beliefs, fetishism etc. They belief the supernatural power and they believed that unique vegetation, grove, some specific plants etc, are the dwelling places of supernatural power, ancestral soul and evil spirits. The plants used by the Ahoms in various aspects which are still preserve through their traditional beliefs and concepts. The plants used by them is not only related to a single purpose but related to their traditional functions like rituals, festivals, worships, magico-religious beliefs. The main content of the paper-the Rice beer of Ahoms have been prepared from rice and different parts of the plant (almost 21 plants species). Though the preparation of rice beer is fast disappearing from the educated sections, only in festive occasions rice beer is prepared, of late a trend towards revivalism is noticed in respect of their traditional culture.

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