



JUMAI AND ITS CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE IN BORO SOCIETY OF ASSAM

Rabindranath Sarma*

Centre for Tribal Folklore, Language and Literature Central University of Jharkhand Brambe,
Ranchi-835205, India

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ABSTRACT

Assam is a home land of different ethnic groups and mingling point of Aryan and Mongolian culture. Both tribal -- non-tribal and plains and hills people make greater Assamese society. Boro is a major tribal group of Assam. Rice is staple food and *jumai* (Rice Beer) is traditional beverage of them. Preparation of Rice Beer is a complex process and it takes several days. Use of Rice Beer is still found among them particularly in rites, rituals and festivals. It is mentioned about rice beer in various folk expressions. This paper is an attempt to study preparation of Rice Beer and its significance in Boro society.

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INTRODUCTION

Assam is a home land of different ethnic groups and mingling point of Aryan and Mongolian culture. Both tribal -- non-tribal and plains and hills people make greater Assamese society. Boro is a major tribal group of Assam. (Datta, 1994) The Boros of Assam belong to the great Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman sub-family. The Boro population is spread over almost whole of the foot hill region of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. But they are now largely concentrated on the stretch between the undivided Goalpara district and Sonitpur districts and they also inhabit in Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur Karbi-Anglong and Nagaon districts of Assam.

The population of Assam in the 2011 census is 3.12 Crore. These figures include both tribal and non-tribal population. Out of the tribal groups of Assam Boro is the largest group (2,600,000 individuals, as per 2011 census). Rice is staple food and Rice Beer is traditional beverage of them. Preparation of Rice Beer is a complex process and it takes several days. Use of Rice Beer is still found among them particularly in rites, rituals and festivals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To study about Rice Beer of the Boros, Interview and Observation method were used. For this purpose researcher visited three districts of Assam – Udalguri, Baksa and Kokrajhar. The areas were selected based on the information available upon the prevalence of traditional methods of preparation of rice-beer. Information was collected from the village folk involved in the process of making rice-beer.

Few data have collected from secondary sources too.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Rice is the staple diet, but this is supplemented by a plentiful supply of vegetables, sometimes procured from the neighbouring forests, and it is seldom that they do not manage to procure some kind of animal food, flesh or fish, of which latter they are very fond, when untainted by Hinduism, they have liberty to eat almost every kind of flesh (egg, pork) with the one exception of the domestic cow. The most highly prized article of diet is pig, and numbers of these animals may be seen in all Boro villages. The favourite beverage is a kind of rice beer known as *mad* or *jau* prepared by steeping rice in water for two or three days. Another liquor, *photika* or *phitika* prepared from *mad* or *jau* by distillation is of a less innocent character. It is perfectly colourless and has a strong pungent taste, redolent of smoke and has something in common with very strong whisky. This, if taken in any quantity affects the brain very rapidly and injuriously.

There is a myth about the creation of the *jau* or *jumai* (rice beer) among the Boros. The rice beer has a great importance in the Boro society. Besides its use in the social functions, it is also offered to the Bathou Borai (the chief God) and other minor gods and goddesses. The *jumai* or *jau* is prepared with traditional system.

Rice-beer is very much essential liquor using in Boro marriage. In a marriage song, it is found the women of the bride's side sing jokingly of the groom's arrangements:

*Enjur mukhani gomothin,
Nongni zoualay khoithin thin,
Khoithin thin.
Ukhum mudani cilimala,*

*Corresponding author: Rabindranath Sarma

Centre for Tribal Folklore, Language and Literature
Central University of Jharkhand Brambe, Ranchi-835205,
India

Nongni zoualay melema.
Dabkha khibuni habru,
Nongni zoualay doibru buru. (Brahma,1960:p 24)
The cockroach of the wall of house
The rice-beer you have served is become sour extremely
At the house top a centipede clings;
No taste of your wine
There is mud on the rice-beer pot
You have must mixed water to treat this wine.
Boro people have sense of humour through folksong, which makes life enjoyable. A person impersonating a son-in-law in order to get good rice-beer receives a rebuff.
Barbuliya Barbuliya
Nongzamadoi phoidonmon
Zou goila?
Thuribarini gonca
Dohay longzobca! (Brahma, 1960:p 32)
Hello Barbuliya, listen to me
Your son-in-law has arrived.
Haven't your liquor?
Come bring it out
And then Barbuliya replied
All that I possessed
The neighbours came and drank it off.

The Boros think that Mahadeva first taught them how to brew rice-beer as a means of protecting human life; and he naturally asked for the first offering of *jumai* to be made to himself. It is no wonder then that the Boros will offer a pot of *jumai* in their variopus *pujas*. (Das, 1999:38)

Before, preparing *jumai*, a medicine which is called *amaw* is essential. The *amaw* is made of uncooked rice, twelve pieces of *mokhna* flowers, (a kind of wild plants); some leave of *kanthals* or jack fruit tree, some leaves of pineapple tree, roots of *agarcitha*, (a kind of small plant), and the top leaves of the banana tree. All these things are grind together and the dust of the things is mixed with water and then it is transformed in-to cake-forms. On the cakes (the newly prepared raw *amaw*) dusts of two old *amaw* are applied. The two old *amaw* are called *amaw mokhang* in Boro. The *amaw mokhang* is essential for making the *amaw*. After three or four days the raw cakes become full fledged *amaw* and ready for the use.

The rice is cooked and placed on a winnowing fan, where the dust of the medicine *amaw* is placed and mixed with the cooked rice. Then it is stored in an earthen pitcher which is called *maldang* in Boro. After three or four days the cooked rice which is kept in an earthen pot (*maldang*) becomes *jau* or *jumai* and it can be consumed as rice beer. The rice beer of a *maldang* or *jonga* can be used keeping for seven or nine days. After the expiry of this period the taste becomes sour and unbearable. The *jumai* prepared from the *maibra* rice or *bara cawl* (one kind of sticky rice). It can be preserved for two to three months, and the taste sweet as honey.

The use of rice beer (*jumai*) in the Boro society is justified in the following reasons. They welcome their guests offering a full glass of *jumai* or *jau* and they become very glad if they can entertain their guests with *jumai* and porks (*oma bedor*). This has become their traditional customs. They are hard working. After doing a hard labour at the field they consume rice beer (*jau*) after the work and become refreshers. The rice beer is used as medicine also. If they suffer from some diseases like disorder of bowels cholera, etc., they use rice beer as medicine and get relief from the disease. During the festivals, ceremonies and *pujas* they offer *jumai* to the Gods and Goddesses. It is essential for the *ojas* or the medicine men of the Boros.

Not only consumption, some of them are using this thing as a commodity of profit making business. This has rather broken the traditional custom of the Boros, but it helps to the economy.

The Boros have different festivals like Bwisagu, Domasi, Garja Puja, Kherai Puja etc. In every *puja* or ritual they offer Rice Beer to respective God and serve among guests too.

CONCLUSION

After all Rice Beer has a great role in Boro society in every aspect of their life. Preparation of Rice Beer is complex process. They use Rice Beer not only as traditional beverage but also offering to guests and major festivals too. The *jumai* is common as offering in some rituals. Earlier, people consumed a lot. But now-a-days due to the modern education consumption is decreasing.

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