gShort Communication

Traditionally fermented alcoholic beverages of high altitude Bhotiya tribal community in Kumaun Himalaya, India

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INTRODUCTION

Bhotiya is a tribal community in the high altitude hills of Uttarakhand state. Bhotiya community is known for its ethnic knowledge globally. The Bhotiya have old age tradition of preparing fermented beverages like Jaan and Kacchi with traditionally prepared starter culture called Balam. These beverages play an important role in the socio-economic and cultural life of Bhotiya tribe of Munsyari region in Johar valley. This paper deals with the detailed account of two important alcoholic beverages prepared and consumed by the Bhotiya tribal community, inhabiting the Munsyari region of Kumaun Himalaya.

Key words: Bhotiya tribe, traditional knowledge, Balam, Jaan, Kacchi, Kumaun Himalaya.
these beverages to guest and relatives. Hence, this study aimed to explore the fermentation technology and its socio-economic impact on Bhotiya tribal community and commercial exploration of traditional fermentation technology and knowledge.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out during 2011-2012 in Munsyari developmental block of Pithoragarh district in Kumaun Himalaya. The house head and village elders were requested to share the traditional knowledge on various aspect of topic such as fermentation process, preparation of starter culture, Balam and plants used in it, distillation process of fermentation and traditional uses of beverages and implications on the socio-economic culture of Bhotiya tribes. Collected information was confirmed from elderly persons and women who are often engaged in distillation process and preparation of Balam (yeast culture).

Preparation of Balam (starter culture)

The starter culture, Balam is prepared by using wheat (Triticum spp.) as substrate and mixed with number of herbs and spices. For preparation of Balam, wheat grains are washed first by water, dried in sunlight, ground to flour and then roasted in pan over fire till it turns brown colour. The roasted flour is mixed with the plant Cinnamomum zeylanicum Brey., Ammonium subulatum Roxb., Piper longum Linn. and Ficus religiosa Linn. seeds (Das and Pandey, 2007). The mixture is mixed thoroughly and required amount of water is added and rolled into a thick paste open to semidry. The semi-dried mixture is then pressed between palms to make Balam balls of required size. These balls are dried in shade, ready to use and stored.

Flow sheet of Balam preparation

Selection of wheat grain

Washed in water

Sun dried

Ground to flour

Roasted to brown

Mix thoroughly with essential plant parts and water

Mixture rolled into thick paste and left to dry

Made Balam balls (starter culture prepared)

Preparation of Jaan (local beer)

Jaan is prepared by fermentation of boiled rice (Oryza sativa Linn.). At first, appropriate amount of cleaned rice is boiled, dewatered and left to moderate cool. After that, starter culture (Balam) mixed thoroughly with it and this mixture was transferred to an earthen pot or container. The partially air tight earthen pot or containers are left for four to seven days in dark places for further fermentation. The ferment is filtered and filtrate is called Jaan. The filtered rice is used in making a traditional dish Sej.

Flow sheet of Jaan preparation

Cleaned and washed rice grains

Boiled and dewatered

Left to moderate cool

Mixed with starter culture (Balam)

Transfer the mixture in earthen pot or container made partially air tight

Fermented for 3-7 days in dark place

Ferment filtered, filtrate is called Jaan (ready to drink)

Rice left as residue is used in making traditional dish (Sej)

Preparation of Kacchi (distilled liquor)

Kacchi is the barley (Hordeum vulgare Linn.) based distilled beverage of Bhotiya tribe. First of all barley seeds are soaked in water, half boiled and allowed to moderate cool. After that the cooled seeds are mixed thoroughly with starter culture (Balam) in appropriate proportion and transferred to earthen pot or container, made partially airtight and left in dark for 4-7 days for fermentation. The ferment is then transferred to a distillation pot (Taula) for distillation (Photo 1(A)).

Then the pot is kept in fire for distillation. On this pot, a wooden frame is fixed which are perforated at middle and above this another copper plate (Parat) is placed in which cold water is filled. The vapour passing through the middle perforated wooden frame (Jokhal) strikes the bottom of copper pot in which cold water is filled. The vapour cools and droplets are collected in middle wooden frame. The water of upper copper plate is regularly changed to keep it cool. The strength of Kacchi depends on temperature of water of upper copper plate (Parat).

Flow sheet of Kacchi preparation

Collection of barley seeds

Soaked in water

Water soaked seeds are half boiled and left to moderate cool

Mixed well with starter culture (Balam)

Transfer the mixture in earthen pot or container made partially air tight

Fermented for 3-7 days in dark place

Ferment is transferred to traditional distillation apparatus

Distil is collected in wooden pots

Collected distilled liquor is called Kacchi (ready to drink)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Investigation among Bhotiya people of Munsyari reveals that preparation of these two beverages is very common among the Bhotiya tribe in Johar Valley and prepared in almost every house. Both beverages play important role in the social life of Bhotiya community. These beverages
act as binding agent among this tribal community. In every function, they join together and drink the beverages. Jaan is generally prepared during festivals and ceremonies. Women and children are also fond of these beverages but consume them in small quantity during festivals and ceremonies. In marriage ceremonies Kacchi is offered by the girl to the guests. Bhotiyas not only consume these beverages for amusement but these beverages also play supplementary role in the nutrition of these people. In small quantity, these beverages are also used as medicine for treating different ailments and diseases. Jaan is also used to treat fever, dysentery, cough and cold and stomach ailments. Kacchi is used in stomach-ache, dysentery, cold and fatigue. Balam are also used in cholera and treating weakness of cattle. Sej is prepared with residual rice in Jaan preparation, eaten as mind booster and treatment of physical and mental fatigue.

These beverages also give financial support to the poor tribal people. They sell Kacchi in local areas at cost of 60-80 rupees per litre and Balam balls cost is 40-50 rupees per kilograms. Jaan cost is rupees 40-60 per litre. It gives financial support to significant number of families residing in remote areas depending on it. The present study also reveals that Balam is the potential yeast medium known to the Bhotiyas since time immemorial. The commercial exploitation of Balam may be explored.

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