

Brewing Culture of *Chakpa Andro* in Manipur: An Anthropological Study

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Abstract: The present paper tries to bring out the socio-cultural and economic importance of local brew among the *Chakpa Andro* community of Manipur. Andro is one of the largest Scheduled caste communities in the state, mainly practicing agriculture beside brewing of traditional beer, hard distilled liquor, piggery, poultry, etc. The traditional brew, locally termed as *Yu*, had been the part and parcel of their traditional life. The study reflects the distinct brewing practice found among them with special reference to the social, economic, religious and ceremonial significance. It also discussed the changing patterns of material uses in brewing with the influence of technological advancement. Through participant observation, semi-structured interview, an anthropological discourse has been made to understand the significance of this particular practice in building social cohesion and inter-community solidarity. Further, the research also delves into the power dynamics and commodification aspects of this socially sanctioned practice.

Keywords: *Andro*, ceremonial, material culture, solidarity, tradition, *Yu*.

Introduction

Alcoholic beverages have been a part of social life of many societies for millennia, and its psychoactive and motor effect have been interpreted in the folk wisdom, mythology, arts and tradition (Heath 1987, p. 100). This fermented brew was believed to be found as earliest as in 7000-6650 BCE during the neolithic period in Jiahu of Henan province in China (McGovern et al. 2004, p. 17593). In every nook and corners of the world, there is diverse heritage regarding food and dietary habits. However, every food has its cultural meaning and value associated with custom and culture of that particular social or ethnic group. Apart from drinking, alcoholic beverages has also become a substance of rituals and social bonding in many ethnic groups, like non-edible purpose such as worshiping Gods, offering to nature (Tamang et al. 2010, p. 181).

Alcohol is considered as one of the most important cultural elements, found to be used as ritual and societal artifacts in diverse cultures and its form and meaning of uses is culturally defined (Mandelbaum 1965, p. 281). Among the North-west Croatian, significance of alcohol is often associated with the symbol of ritual and socialization in celebration of their cultural gathering by consuming alcohol as a part of ritual chain to incorporate and relate members on the emotional level (Brezovec 2017, p. 141). According to Behera and Pfeffer (2002, p. 63), liquor among the *Sundi of Gadaba* and non-ST *Desia* of Koraput, Orissa it's believed to be related with their belief and faith to confiscate the demon and also some economic purpose and therefore liquor become the reason of their existence. Similarly, among the traditional Nigerian society, consumption of alcohol was tolerant as it played a complex role in socio-cultural relationships of different communities. Among these people consumption was age and gender based where women and children are not permitted. However, due to globalization certain impact in the pattern of consumptions among diverse age and gender are also mentioned (Dumbili 2013, p. 20-22).

Moreover, fermented drinks are mostly found to be confined with the culture and existence of various ethnic tribes in every corner of the world. It is the indispensable part of tribal life style attached culturally and religiously (Nath 2019, p. 1). The leaf yeast of Tay ethnic group of Vietnam used for thousands of years in making of alcohol is a unique traditional knowledge. It depicts their cultural characteristic of the society in the path of development. Beside there are various socio-cultural association entails with message, beliefs and religions in their society (Hop et al. 2020, p. 6). Hence, the uses of alcohol have its own traditional significance

Apart from that alcohol may be used as Medicinal, nutritional, intoxicant and also used as sacral substances (Makela 1983, p. 22). It is used as traditional medicinal purpose since early civilization, a cuneiform tablet of the Sumerian considered alcohol as the earliest preserved medicine, dated back to 2100. B.C. and in Hippocrates therapeutic, wine is regard as remedies in acute and chronic ailments (Vallee 1998, p. 83). The alcoholic beverages have also been used as traditional medicine in some society (Singh et al. 2018, p. 2). Thus, looking into multiple dimensions of this practice, the present study highlights the significance of brewing culture among the *Chakpa Andro*.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted in Andro village of Manipur. The main objective of the study is to understand the importance of alcohol in everyday life of the people of Andro. The study also tries to examine the socio-cultural and economic importance of local liquor in their society.

Statement of Problem

Manipur is a small state in northeastern India having diverse communities, cultures and religions and is home to Hindu *vaishnavism*, Muslim, Christian and Meitei *Sanamahism*.

Among these, Andro is an aged old scheduled caste village integrating into the Meitei community. The people of the village locally known as Andro, which is also the name of the village. The people have its own distinct culture and traditional values, different from the rest of the general Meitei community. It is informed that the preservation of the 'Eternal Fire' locally termed as the Fire of *Andro*, that dedicated to the village God, '*Panam Ningthou*' since 1st century AD during the reign of king *Poireiton* of *Khuman* clan (Lisam 2011, p. 587). Apart from religious view, the village has its own unique form of livelihood that associate with its occupational behavior. The making of local rice brew is famous and become a very important element in various ceremonies and ritual practices. Pottery making and pig farming are also some of the livelihood practices that have been practicing from generations and both activities are equally considered to be important in every aspect of life. One distinct character of the people is food habit, like eating insects of many kinds, as a prominent dietary habits among the people of Andro. However, with the influence of outside culture the unique culture and traditional values of the village found to be changed gradually. Therefore, studying such old village and its culture like Andro become an important topic to preserve its unique culture for the future generation to come.

Area of the Study

Andro is an old scheduled caste community in Manipur situated on the eastern side of Baruni Hill, 27 km away from the capital city of Imphal. The people of Andro are known as *Lois* caste that belongs to the *Chakpa* ethnic group. According to census India 2011 report, Andro has population of 8744 of which 4307 are males and 4437 are females. The *Chakpa Andro* has 15 localities (*Leikais*), i.e. namely *Khuman*, *Leitan Pekpham*, *Machengpat*, *Loupaochum*, *Awang leikai*, *Mamang leikai*, *Chingdong leikai*, *Laipat*, *Makha leikai*, *Khunou leikai*, *Kharam leikai*, *Champra leikai*, *Sanapat*, *Lamthabung*, and *Torongthel*. All the 14 localities are considered under the domain of municipal council, except *Torongthel* is under Nagar panchayat. The community fall under the category of Meitei. But the people of the village preferred themselves to be termed as *Chakpa Andro* rather than the Meitei. The village with its famous local liquor and pork meat become a source of attraction to large tourists across the state. The people of the village produced liquor since olden time and the significance of liquor to the people is highly counted.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in Andro village, Imphal East District of Manipur. The study mainly focused on the people of *Chakpa Andro* people of Manipur, the

production of local hard distilled liquor and fermented beer, which is closely associated with their religious and cultural entities.

In the present study, both qualitative and quantitative source of data collection were employed. Qualitative data collection methods include, such as interview, key-informants, participant observations, and along with auto-ethnographic method etc. The primary data were collected through participant observation and personal interview from 5 different localities, i.e. *Torongthel*, *Khunou leikai*, *Machengpat*, *Khuman*, and *Maringthel*. The 5 localities are situated on the periphery location of the Andro village. The respondents were mainly the women, who involved in brewing activities, and the religious practitioner. The brewing process is clearly observed from the initial process to the final distillation stage. Moreover, secondary data were collected from various sources like books, articles from journals, daily newspaper, etc. The local practice of traditional brew among *Phayeng*, *Sekami*, *Khurkhul*, *Leimaram*, etc. were also collected from personal interviews.

Findings and Discussion

The production of local brew in the village is associated with the sense of beliefs and ritual practices. Brewing activity is mainly engaged by the women folks as their main task, locally termed as *Yu-thongbi* (*yu* means alcohol; *thongbi* means woman who engaged in practicing the distillation process). However, there is no certain rule for the men to prohibit in brewing, but men are mostly engaged on collection of firewood and agricultural activities etc.

Materials Used for local brew distillation

The main materials used in the preparation of local brew are:

Rice, *yangli* (bark of *Albizia myriophylla*), *hamei* (cake of rice powder and *yangli*), *ngangkok* (large earthen pot, which later change to large aluminum vessel), *kharung/chaphu* (earthen jar for fermentation or storing), firewood, water, outlet small pipe, rice husk, and blanket (for warming).

Phases of Brewing Preparation

In Manipur alcohol is traditionally term as ‘*Yu*’. This ‘*Yu*’ is classified into three categories, *kalei* (distilled hard liquor), *Atingba* (fermented rice before distil, i.e. beer type), *Waiyu* (wine).

The whole process of liquor production involves different phases-

Phase 1: The making of *hamei* (yeast cake) is the initial process and involve proper care in the preparation. The rice is grinded into smooth powder and mixed with grains of *yangli* and water. The mixture is smoothly smear and make into disc shape cake. The

new *hamei* is rubbed with the powdered of the earlier *hamei* and placed on rice husk. In the process, any fruits and sour items are avoided from touching the *hamei* as it will spoil the value and taste of the *hamei*. The making of *hamei* is also undertaken with distinct process associated with strong belief and practices. The last two piece of the *hamei* is made under certain shape and size, one will be much bigger and thicker as compare to the rest which is taken as the mother and the other piece will be longer in shape which is symbolically considered as the father. Both the parents are considered to be the guardian of the remaining pieces, guarding from any defect. And they keep a piece of charcoal and chilly on the side to protect from evil eyes. And finally, the cakes are covered with thick layer of warm clothes in order to ferment quickly. The fermentation took for almost 4 to 7 days, based on the climatic condition. According to the *hamei* maker, the transition period between winter and summer is considered to be the best time for making *hamei*. As informed, the preparation of *hamei* during the warm season may produced sour taste. However, the task of *hamei* prepared during cold season may take longer time for fermentation.

Phase 2: The second phase begins with the process of *chak nganba* (*chak* means rice; *nganba* means steaming). The rice is steamed with care and precaution are taken to avoid any sour substances, that can spoil the fermentation. The rinsed rice is put inside the *ngankok*, the earthen hollow pot (*ngan* means steam; *Kok* means top/head) which is place on the top of large earthen jar filled with water, which is later changed into a big aluminum vessel due to modernization. Through heating the water, the steam cooked the rice. The cooked rice is properly cold down through rinsing with cold water. The rice is then mixed with *hamei* powder in an appropriate proportion, eight kg of rice by four cakes of *hamei*. The mixture is stored inside the *kharung/chaphu* (huge jar/pot) for further fermentation, a piece of charcoal is placed on its top with the belief of protecting it from the evil eyes.

Phase 3: The third phase is the process of *yu-tingba* (*tingba* means store/soak), which is the stage of fermentation. It takes mainly 10 to 15 days for proper fermentation. The number of days depends on the climatic conditions. As long as they can stored for fermentation, they can produce fine product but if they suspect souring, they distil it earlier. After the fermentation of 6 to 8 days, watering of the *yu* is taken place, which is locally termed as *yu-atingba*. The liquid substance from this *atingba* is consumed as *yu-atingba*. If maximum amount of *yu-atingba* is removed there will be less concentration in the distilling process of the final product. Therefore, they try to minimize the extraction of *yu-atingba* so as to maintain higher quality of their final product. People considered *yu-houba* (*houba* means fermented) after 10 to 15 days of proper fermentation process.

Phase 4: The final stage is the distilling process commonly known as *yu-thongba* in Manipur. The *atingba* is put in a large aluminum vessel. On top of the vessel there is an

aluminum puffer plate with small multiple holes where steam could pass through. On top of the puffer plate a hollow cylindrical vessel with little funnel hole is attached on the side for the alcohol to come through the pipe. On top of the cylindrical vessel, there is a thick aluminum vessel with cold water for the steam to condensed. The condensed droplet of alcohol is fallen on a small plate i.e. *marei* (tongue) attaching with the outlet pipe inside the cylindrical vessel. The alcohol is filled inside a jar of 7-10 liters capacity. The first 1-2 bottles (i.e. bottle of 750 ml) is termed as the *Machin* (means tip), which is high in alcoholic concentration. So, people rarely extract the *Machin* for it will dilute the concentration in the remaining alcohol distillation process.

The solid leftover of the distillation is also economically used and valued in their society. This residue of the brew is very useful in Andro and its neighbouring villages for the *ook-chak* i.e. pig feed (*ook* means pig; *chak* means food). Andro is also famous for its fine pork meat in the state. Alcohol and pork become an essential item in every ceremonial practice among the Andros.

The production of Waiyu (wine)

The making of *Waiyu* (*wai* means rice husk) is uncommon. It is mainly produced in special occasions like in worship of village God and Goddesses i.e. *Lai-haraoba* (*lai* means God; *haraoba* means festival) of the village. In the process, paddy is grinded into a grain and mixed with *hamei*. The mixture is stored in earthen jar for 3 to 4 days to be fermented properly and water is poured in it. On the following day, the liquid portion (*waiyu*) is sucked up from the earthen pot with a bamboo pipe, known as *Tongchei* (*tong* means hollow; *chei* means stick).

Uses of Alcohol in Andro

In Andro, as in many other places, alcohol is used for various reasons, including social and cultural gatherings, religious ceremonies, medicine and personal consumption. However, the people of Andro used alcohol in a very significance manner. Alcohol become a part of life in every ritual and festival of the village. The people in village practice various rituals and festival at different timing of the season in a year. These festivals and rituals may be carried out at community level in general, as well as individual or household level in particular.

In the Meitei calendar, there are twelve months beginning from the 1st lunar day of April (*Sajibu*). Its twelve months are- *Sajibu* (March-April), *Kaalen* (April-May), *Ee-Nгаа* (May-June), *Ee-Ngen* (June-July), *Thouwan* (July-August), *Laangban* (August-September), *Meraa* (September-October), *Heeyaangei* (October-November), *Poinu* (November-December), *Waakching* (December-January), *Fairel* (January-February), and *Lamtaa* (February-March).

As according to the belief of the local people, different rituals and ceremonies may organized at different time of a year.

Rituals and Festival

Some of the ceremonial elements which are engaged with the uses of alcohol in Andro are as follow:

Khunthong Latpa: It is a ritual, performed on the first *Thangja* (Saturday) in the month of *Lamtaa*. Among the Manipur in general Meitei, it is termed as *Sharoi Khangba*, whereas in Andro it is known as *Khunthong Latpa* (*khun* means village; *thong* means entry/door; *latpa* means worship/offering). It is a ritual of offering foods to evil spirits not to bring harm to the people of the region in the ensuing year. *Yelhing thaba* (*yel* come from the word *yen* which means hen/cock; *hing* means live; *thaba* means to release/free) is associated with *yu*. Here, *yu* is of two kinds; one is *puk-yu* (*puk* means stomach), it's the rice beer that allowed to consume. And the other is the '*Lai-yu*' (*lai* means deity/God), is not fit for consumption and is made by putting piece of '*hamei*' in plane water for the offering purpose.

Laisha Tanba: *Laisha Tanba* (*Sha* means animal; *Tanba* means to hunt) is an occasion of community hunting to offer to their principal deity '*Panam Ningthou*'. It is celebrated on the first *Nongmaiching* (Sunday) of *Lamtaa* of Meitei calendar. The only animal of the occasion is *shaaji* (stag). Before the advancement of hunting, a small offering is made to the deity who is considered in charge of the surrounding region. *Yu* is offered along with banana, egg, water, *kabok* (puffed rice), and betel nuts and leaves on a broad leave of a tree '*Khaangla*'. The hunting occasion start after the offering.

Cheiraoba: *Cheiraoba* is the celebration of new year among the Meitei of Manipur. It is celebrated on the '*Sajibu Nongma Panba*', the first day of '*Sajibu*' (March-April). On this day the offering of cooked foods, such as pork meat, fish, chicken, vegetables etc. along with '*Yu*' is offered, as a share for the souls of the deceased member/ancestors of the family among the Andro.

Laangban Chakhangba/Asheeman khangba: *Laangban Chakhangba* (feast giving) or *Asheeman khangba* (*asheeman* means value of decease; *khangba* means to know), is a ritual performance of death anniversary of deceased person of the family. It has to be performed on a convenient day of '*Laangban*' (September), begins from 16th *thaban* of *laangban* in Meitei calendar till the end of that month. The ritual is to invite the deceased/ancestors of the seven generation along with the immediate ancestor. On this day fruits, betel nut and leaves, a light and '*Yu*' are offered to the ancestor of seven '*Yeks-Salais*' (clans). The offering of '*Yu*' is compulsory, without it the celebration is considered as incomplete. Both '*Kalei*' (strong liquor) and '*Waiyu*' (wine) are offered on this ritual.

Lam Haiba: *Lam Haiba* (*lam* means land; *haiba* means to cut/clean) is a ritual performance of cleaning the roads and paths which are filled with grass and leaves. It is performed only by the men on the first *Nongmaiching* (Sunday) of *Laangban* month in Meitei calendar. A day before the occasion, certain amount of chili's, salt and alcohol were contributed from every house of the village. The ritual is celebrated to pray to the almighty God for a healthy and productive year. By the end of the ceremony, sharing of 'Shingju' (a mixture of chili and edible leaves) and 'Yu' is accompanied irrespective of their age.

Kurak Lamdaiba: *Kurak Lamdaiba* is derived from a term *Kumlak Lamdaiba* (*kumlak* means inter-season; *Lamdaiba* means interconnection), bordering of two seasons, autumn and winter season. The ritual is practiced by many other rural areas of Manipur. However, the ritual performance of Andro is found to be different from other areas. It is celebrated on the first 'Erai' (Friday), of 'Meraa' month of Meitei calendar. On this day, 'Waiyu' is prepared by a few selected families. The selection process is engaged by the 'Loishang' (village administrative institute). *Waiyu* is treated to everyone who attend in the occasion.

Formation of Traditional Institute

Arangba and Pujari Mahut Sinba

The appointment of new 'Arangba' (arrangers/managers) and 'Pujari' (cooks) carried out with the retirement of the seniors. The *Arangba* and *Pujari* interrelated to one another in every occasion, such as death ritual, worshiping of village God etc. Among the Andro, death anniversary is accompanied by a feast. In the feast the *Arangba* arrange the necessary requirement of the feast and the *Pujari* cooks the foods. On this appointment occasion, both 'waiyu' and 'kalei' are offered to the *Loishang*, accompanying with a grand feast. On this day every house member of the *Arangba* and *Pujari* are participated.

Marriage Ceremony

Marriage is a significance moment of one's life, to both male and female. It is locally termed as *Luhongba* among the Meitei. Sharing of happiness to friend in this celebration has its own unique characteristic. According to the people of Andro, serving 'Yu' (liquor) to every person who drink is a sign of pride and respect. Pork and *Yu* were served on this day at the resident of the groom. Young and old men were fully drunk on this day without any restriction from the family member.

Heru Kaba

It is an occasion to welcome the newly married couple just after the completion of 6 months. The couple offers 'Waiyu' with fruits and vegetables at the *Loishang* (village

institute) of the village. The offer is made with the believed of *Thou Chanba* (*thou* mean the task; *chanba* means to include), i.e. permission to allow in participation of any occasion of the village. This shows the rituals aspect of inducting a new member in their society for well being and solidarity in their community.

Birth Ceremony

Locally, birth ceremony is termed as '*Yupan Thaba*' (*Yu* means alcohol; *pan* means outside; *thaba* means to offer) among the Andro. It is held on fifth and sixth day of birth depending on sex of the child. For a male it is held on fifth day and if female, it is held on sixth day. It is a feast giving ceremony mainly for the women folk who are taking part in the birth giving moment. The women use to come along with a hen or fish on to the house of the child birth place. Men were excluded except the male members of the family. The offering of *Waiyu* along with '*Meitei thum*' (local salt) is taken placed. Before the feast, '*Waiyu*' is served among the women who drinks. There is no restriction for drinking and get drunk on this day. At the end of the ceremony, each person who present blessed the child for a healthy and long life by touching the forehead.

Death Ceremony

In Andro *Yu* (liquor) become a very important element of existence. There is no uncommon without the present of '*Yu*' in every occasion of life, i.e. from birth to death. The offering of *Yu* in the funeral process is quite common among the people of Andro. A young married man will collect the *Yu* from the neighbouring house of the deceased. The *Yu* is served by the young man to the elders who performed the funeral activity. The consumption of *Yu* is with the believe of prohibition from the hesitation and fear in the funeral process. On 12th day of death, '*Shorat*' (ritual ceremony) is performed. People will present with white dresses. On this day a grand feast of pork and other edible item is provided. Before the feast, '*Yu*' is served by the young boys to the elders who are sitting in hierarchical order from old to young.

Yu as Ethno-medicine

Alcohol and its product usually have medicinal purpose. The people of Andro have the effective knowledge of using alcohol in traditional medicine in various way. Each variety of *Yu* (*Machin* /*Kalei*, *Waiyu* and *Atingbu*) has different way of treatment based on the nature and condition of illness.

Machin- It is mainly used in treatments of wound and allergic area of the skin by rubbing on the affected area of the skin, and cleaning the wounded area as disinfectant. It also applied when a person is facing a problem of joint and muscle pain.

Waiyu and Atingba- The composition of *waiyu* and *atingba* is similar, so they are mostly consumed in order to treat in case of stone in kidney or urinary tract infection. It helps to break the stones and flows out through urination.

Yu as Economic Entity

The people of Andro are mostly agriculturists, but production of *Yu* (alcohol) become one of the most important livelihoods of the villager. The village is legalized customarily to produce alcohol, but exporting the products outside the village is a huge challenge as Manipur is a dry State. The commercialization of alcohol in the village found to be switched over the course of time and situation of the state. The *Yu* of Andro is reaching in every corner of the state apart from restriction to enter in another village by keeping police check post. At the meant time there is still porosity within the check point. Each woman brewers are found to be financially independent with the help of alcohol products. Andro is famous for its pork and *Yu*. It becomes one of the most important economic backbones of the village. Numbers of street vendors with pork and *Yu* is found on the side of the road, and it becomes the source of attraction among the tourists.

After all, with the impact of commercialization, the quality of the *Yu* is found to be adulterated by the middle man through adding many additives, like black ginger, Gensing, black sticky rice, fruits of many kinds etc. The packaging of the *Yu* by simple polythene plastic bags were replaced by bottling with different recognized or unrecognized brand name. With all these the quality of Andro *Yu*, which was significance in the old time is being found diluted.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the significance of locally prepared alcohol among the people of Andro. Manipur being a dry state having various restriction on uses of alcohol, but there are certain ethnic groups who are exempted under customary law. Andro is one among them, having a rich culture and tradition of producing local Liquor since olden time. Every ritual and occasion never far from alcohol among the Andros. But under certain impact of commercialization the actual quality of alcohol changes over the period of time with unaware addition of some unethical additives which result to adulteration of pure local alcohol. Therefore, it's a high time for everyone to be aware with certain rule and regulation to be exercised by concern authorities.

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