

Some interesting indigenous beverages among the tribals of Central India

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Received 3 November 2006; revised 5 December 2006

Central India is rich in ethnic as well as floristic diversity. The tribal groups of this region mainly depend on the forests for food, medicine and shelter. Beverages play an important role in the life of these tribals. The paper presents the detailed account of two important beverages, *Handia* and *Mahua* consumed by the tribals of Central India.

Keywords: *Handia*, *Mahua*, Traditional beverages, Tribals, Central India

IPC Int. Cl.⁸: A61K36/00, A01G1/00, A01G17/00, A47G19/00, A23L1/00, A23L1/06

In India, about 550 tribal communities contribute 8.08% of the total population of the country. About 20-30% of the total population of scheduled tribe is found in central India. About 40-50 tribes residing in the region are divided in to more than 100 groups. The main tribes are *Andh*, *Baiga*, *Bharia*, *Bhatra*, *Bhil*, *Bhujia*, *Bhillala*, *Birhor*, *Gond*, *Halba*, *Korwa*, *Kol*, *Maria*, *Nagesia*, *Oraon*, *Sahariya*, *Santhal*, etc. These tribal groups largely depend on forests for their basic needs like food, fodder, medicines, timber, and shelter, etc. Among food plants, beverage, alcoholic and non-alcoholic occupies an important position, and plays a main role in social life of tribals. Almost all tribals are fond of drinks and consume during every ceremony, festivals, marriages, funeral feasts, and offer it to their Gods and deities. Among the non-alcoholic beverages, which they consume as cooling or refreshing drinks generally in summer are prepared from various plant species such as *Aegle marmelos* (L.) Corr. fruit pulp, *Asparagus racemosus* Willd. root powder, *Curculigo orchioides* Gaertn. roots, *Chlorophytum tuberosum* Bak. roots, *Curcuma augustifolia* Roxb. rhizomes, *Mangifera indica* L. fruit pulp, and *Sacchraum officinarum* L. juice, etc. The common alcoholic beverages are *Paise* prepared from *Eleusine coracana* (L.) Gaertn., *Tadi* from *Borassus flabellifer* L., *Salpi* from *Caryota urens* L., *Chind* from *Phoenix sylvestris* Roxb., *Handia* from *Oryza sativa* L., and *Mahua* from *Madhuca longifolia* var. *latifolia* (Koen.) Macbr. *Handia* and *Mahua* are

most commonly and popularly consumed drinks among the tribals of central India.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Surguja district of central India. The total area of the districts is about 22,337 sq km. 48.5% of the total area is covered by *Sal* and mixed forests¹. *Gonds*, *Kawars*, *Nagesia*, *Oraons*, *Pandos*, *Korwas*, *Khairwars*, *Majhwars*, *Kodakus*, *Agarias* and *Baigas*, etc are the main tribes of district. Most common beverages in the district are *Handia* and *Mahua*. *Handia* is prepared from grains of *Oryza sativa* L. and *Mahua* from dried corollas of *Madhuca longifolia* var. *latifolia* (Koen.) Macbr. The paper highlights the detailed methods of preparation of these beverages.

Preparation of fermentation cake (*Ranu* tablets)

In the preparation of *Handia* and *Mahua*, *Ranu* tablets play an important role, act as yeast starter or fermentor, and help in fermentation of both beverages. *Ranu* tablets or *Ranu goti* are the mixture of roots, barks, rhizomes, leaves of about 20-25 plant species (Table 1) and binded with the rice flour. For preparation of tablets, rice is soaked in water, pounded, and kept in shady place for drying. The plant species used in preparation of *Ranu goti* are collected mostly from forests, and sometimes grown in the kitchen garden. The roots, leaves, bark, seeds of the plants are sun dried and pounded, powdered and dried in sun. The powder is mixed with flour thoroughly in the ratio of 1:2, and rolled in small

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pieces in the form of small cakes. These tablets are kept in closed room for drying. After drying, these *Ranu* tablets or *Ranu goti* are used for preparing local beverages.

Preparation of *Handia* (Rice beer)

Handia is prepared from grains of *Oryza sativa* L. For this, rice is boiled well and then spread on mat for cooling. After that, the cooked rice and *Ranu* tablets

are placed in earthen pots (*Handia*) and the mouth of vessel is covered by cloth and kept in suitable place for 2-5 days for fermentation. *Ranu* tablets or medicinal cake is added to this boiled rice in appropriate proportion. In one litre generally four tablets are added.. Some plant parts, e.g. *Elephantopus scaber* L. roots, *Argyreia bella* (C.B.Clarke) Raizada stem, *Casearia graveolens* Dalz. bark, *Symplocos racemosa* Roxb. Bark, etc. are



Fig.1 Preparation of Mahua by Close process



Fig. 2 Preparation of Mahua by Tube process

Table 1—Plants used in the preparation of *Ranu* tablets

Plant name	Local name	Parts used
<i>Argyreia bella</i> (C.B.Clarke) Raizada	<i>Chhit</i>	Root
<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L.	<i>Semar</i>	Root
<i>Buchanania lanzana</i> Spreng.	<i>Char</i>	Leaves
<i>Casearia graveolens</i> Dalz.	<i>Chilhi</i>	Root
<i>Cassine glauca</i> (Rottb.) O. Ktze	<i>Jamrasi</i>	Stem bark
<i>Catunaregam spinosa</i> (Thunb.) Tirvengadam	<i>Mainhar</i>	Root
<i>Cissampelos pareira</i> L.	<i>Parhi</i>	Root
<i>Crotalaria albida</i> Heyne ex Roth	Choate ghurguli	Root
<i>Cryptolepis buchanani</i> Roem. & Schult.	<i>Kali dudhi</i>	Root
<i>Datura metal</i> L.	<i>Dhatura</i>	Seed
<i>Elephantopus scaber</i> L.	<i>Manjur choti</i>	Root
<i>Euphorbia prolifera</i> Buch. – Ham. ex D. Don	<i>Tisi</i>	Root
<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i> (L.) R.Br.	<i>Dudhiya</i>	Root
<i>Holarrhena pubescens</i> Wall. ex Don	<i>Korya</i>	Root / stem bark
<i>Knoxia sumatrensis</i> (Retz.) DC.	<i>Khudi kanda</i>	Whole plant
<i>Pueraria tuberosa</i> (Willd.) DC.	<i>Patal kumhra</i>	Root
<i>Scoparia dulcis</i> L.	<i>Bhui dhania</i>	Root/whole plant
<i>Senecio nudicaulis</i> Buch.-Ham. ex D.Don	<i>Ban sarson</i>	Root
<i>Symplocos racemosa</i> Roxb.	<i>Lodh</i>	Stem bark
<i>Tylophora rotundifolia</i> Buch.- Ham. ex Wt.,	<i>Bhuli</i>	Root
<i>Wattakaka volubilis</i> (L.f.) Stapf	<i>Gai lakhan</i>	Leaves

also added to increase intoxication or decrease the period of fermentation. After 3-5 days, the fermented product is extracted with hot & cold water and the extract is drunk as beverage.

Preparation of Mahua

Mahua is prepared from dried corollas of *Madhuca longifolia* var. *latifolia* (Koen.) Macbr. For the preparation of *Mahua*, two methods, Close process and Tube process are used by tribal people (Figs.1 & 2). In Close process, the liquor is collected in the pot, while in tube (*nala*) method, a tube is connected to the pot in which liquor comes out by the help of tube and stored in pot or cane. The dried corollas are kept in pot and some water is added. In the pot, *ranu* tablets and juice of *Buchanania lanzan* Spreng. leaves is added to help the fermentation. The pot is closed by the cloth and kept for 3-5 days or till it start smelling, then the pot is kept on stove for distillation. On this pot, another pot is placed and above this another pot is placed in which the cold water is filled. The junctions of these pots are tied tightly by cloth. The vapour passed through the middle pot strikes the bottom of the upper pot in which the cold water is kept. The vapour cools and the droplets collect in the middle pot. In closed system, in middle pot (*paina*), a small pot called *dokli* is placed in which the liquor is collected. In tube (*nala*) process, the vapour is passed through the tube, which is connected to middle pot and collects in cane or in another pot. The water of upper pot is regularly changed to keep it cool. The collected *mahua* is drunk as beverage. The strength of *mahua* depends on changes of water of upper pot.

Discussion

Preparation of these two beverages is very common among the tribals of central India and is prepared in almost every second house. Both these beverages have great importance in the social life of tribals. These beverages act as binding agent among the tribal communities. In every function, they join together and drink beverages and enjoy. *Handia* (rice beer) is

generally prepared during festivals or ceremonies. In marriages, the number of *Handia* to be given to girl side is decided well in advance. *Mahua* is daily consumed by these tribals. Women and children are also fond of these beverages but consume in small quantity and preferably during festivals or ceremonies. Tribals not only consume these beverages for intoxication but also meet 5-10% of the daily requirements of the nutrients, playing supplementary role in the nutrition of the people². In small quantity, these beverages are also used as medicine for treating different ailments or diseases. *Handia* is taken as light tranquillizer by *Maria* tribe of Bastar³. It is also given to treat fever, dysentery, diarrhoea and gynaecological complaints⁴. *Mahua* is given to treat dysentery by *Baiga*, *Gond*, and *Kol* tribe of Surguja district⁵. *Ranu* tablets are also used in treating cholera by *Gond* tribe of Surguja district.

Acknowledgement

Authors are thankful to Dr SK Jain for his constant guidance and encouragement; Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Dehradun for financial support; Director NBRI for infrastructure facilities; Forest, revenue officials and tribals of Surguja for help in field work.

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