

‘*Judima*’ The Traditional Rice Wine of *Dimasa* Community of Assam: A Potential Candidate for GI Registration

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A geographical indication (GI) is also a tool to protect traditional knowledge (TK), and can promote the trade of TK based GI products. North East India is a hub of TK and traditional alcoholic beverages which constitute a popular TK amongst most tribes. The process of making such beverages and the ingredients used are different in different tribes. Amongst the *Dimasa* tribe in Assam, their popular alcoholic beverage is a traditional rice wine named *Judima*. This paper is a case study of *Judima* as a potential GI and includes step by step procedure for GI registration, the hurdles which might pose in the process and how it could be overcome. The paper also examines the prospects of socio economic upliftment of rural communities as a result of GI registration of their bio-cultural products.

Keywords: Geographical indications, *Judima*, *Dimasa*, traditional knowledge, traditional rice wine

The importance of geographical indication (GI) also lies in the fact that it can be an important tool for protection and promotion of the traditional knowledge (TK) of a community. TK is a manifestation of the culture of a community. The life style of tribal, indigenous or local communities plays a key role in the development of traditional knowledge. Clothes, songs, dance forms and also food and cuisine forms an integral part of the cultural life of a community.¹ Although GI cannot protect the knowledge itself, however, it facilitates the trade of traditional knowledge based GI products for the socio-economic development of the producers of GIs.²

Judima is the traditional rice wine of the *Dimasa* tribe of Assam. This tribe is largely based in the Dima Hasao district of Assam.³ *Judima* is an integral part of the cultural and social life of the *Dimasa* community. Celebrations of important rituals including birth, death, and worship are incomplete without *Judima*. During marriages, it is extremely important, as carrying of rice-beer to the bride’s house symbolizes the fixing of marriage.⁴

Tribal communities share an intimate relationship with nature and hence, their cuisines have a direct link to the place and the habitat where they live. In India, especially North East India, the cuisines of different tribal communities are unique. The use of natural products is immense in most food recipes. In case of

Judima, the most preferred rice used is Bora or waxy rice which is indigenous to the region. The Maiju variety of Bora rice however, is considered best for premium quality of *Judima*. The yeast is prepared from the bark of a plant called *Thembra* (*Acacia pennata*) which is again mostly collected from forests surrounding the region. Undoubtedly, the taste of *Judima* is as a result of the various ingredients used in a particular manner known exclusively to the *Dimasa* community of Assam. So, without a doubt *Judima* is a traditional knowledge of the *Dimasa* community.

Geographical Indications, Traditional Knowledge and Community Interest: The Interrelationship

What does GI Represent?

As per the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, geographical indications in relation to the goods means an indication which identifies such goods as agricultural goods, natural goods or manufactured goods as originating, or manufactured in the territory of country, or a region or locality in the territory, where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of such goods is essentially attributable to its geographical origin and in case where such goods are manufactured goods, one of the activities of either the production or processing or preparation of the goods concerned takes place in such territory, region or locality, as the case may be.⁵

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Since, time immemorial some places have often been famous for particular products, for example, *Pashmina* shawls of Kashmir. *Pashmina* shawls are finer, lighter and much warmer than any other shawl⁶ and this quality makes it different (product differentiation) leading to being preferred by the consumers. The quality of *Pashmina* is as a result of the wool of *Pashmina* goat indigenous to the high altitude of the Himalayas and also the unique process of manufacture known only to the people of that region.⁶ A consumer survey done by the European Union revealed that 40 per cent of consumers surveyed were willing to pay a premium as high as 10 per cent for origin guaranteed products (WTO, 2004).⁷

How does GI Serve the Community Interest?

GI protection ensures that free riders cannot exploit or sell a product in the market stating that it belongs from a particular area. It can protect consumers from being deceived on one hand and on the other hand protect reputation and good will of producers in the market. Many traditional cultural expressions and bio-cultural products⁸ can also come within the scope of the GI Act. Hence, GI can in a way protect the cultural identity of communities with regard to that product.

GIs can also greatly improve the economic condition of the rural population. As already cited, GIs can be a mechanism for producers to fetch premium prices. In India, there are examples where GI recognition to product of a community has alleviated the economic conditions of the communities who were living in acute poverty. One apt example is that of '*Pochampally Ikat*' of Andhra Pradesh. In various studies conducted, it was projected that before the Cluster Development Programme of Ikat was launched by the Textile Committee, most weavers of Ikat were extremely poor.⁹ After the GI registration took place, it was observed that the income of these weavers increased to quite an extent. Moreover, with the registration of Ikat as a GI it got a lot of publicity¹⁰ which gave it more customers. The publicity also attracted the attention of Air India which gave the weavers a huge consignment of sarees for its air-hostesses. Also seeing the progress post GI registration of Ikat, the cluster held deliberations with the state government and was encouraged by the government to apply for development of a 'Handloom Park' under the Scheme for Integrated Textiles Park of the Government of

India. The Handloom Park was planned in a way that it would be provided with all the raw materials and facilities which included mechanisation in pre-weaving; modern dying process; state of the art testing labs; exclusive design labs with R&D (research and development); dedicated training centre; physical and social infrastructure to facilitate high value/volume products, among other things.⁹ The weaver would just have to go there and weave. The entire production process is planned in a manner to give way to specialisation and division of labour which will result in lower production cost and higher yield of production. The Handloom Park would also associate with famous designers and have professional support. It is expected that the park will go a long way in protecting the age old art form, create employment opportunities, as it will also establish *Pochampally Ikat* as a brand. Thus, it can be very well observed that with GI recognition, the popularity of Ikat increased and also led to innovations in designs and product diversification. This example of *Pochampally Ikat* indicates that in case *Judima* is also registered as a GI it may go a long way in creating economic prosperity to the *Dimasa* community. It will not only provide a way for legal remedy in case of infringement but also pave the way for premium price, brand building and productivity.

Case Study of *Judima* as Potential GI

Judima is the traditional rice wine brewed by the *Dimasa* tribe based in Assam. The folk tale amongst the community regarding the brewing of *Judima* goes that a man belonging to the *Dimasa* tribe while heading to work in his paddy field carried rice wrapped in a banana leaf for his lunch. He hung the packet where his rice was kept on the trunk of a tree and got to his work. When he came to have his lunch, he found that some liquid was flowing out of the packet and when he tasted it, it was sweet. On trying to find out, how the liquid came out and what made it sweet, he realised that it must have been the tree which has turned it into sweet. Since then, the bark of that tree named *Thembra* (*Acacia pennata*) has been used in the process of making *Judima*. *Acacia pennata* or Climbing Wattle from the family Mimosaceae (Touch-me-not family) is a plant native to South and South-East Asia.¹¹

Process of Making *Judima*

The whole process for preparation of *Judima* is completed in two stages, (a) making of rice starter

cakes and (b) preparation of rice wine.¹² *Judima* is brewed by fermenting rice. The process starts with the preparation of starter cake also called *Humao* locally. Mostly in South East Asia, the uniqueness in making traditional alcoholic beverages has been in the use of starter rice cake.¹³ The starter cake is prepared from the bark of the plant *Thembra* (*Acacia pennata*). The bark is dried, chopped into tiny pieces and crushed to powder. This powder is then mixed with the rice flour with some water and made into dough. The starter cake is kept to dry for three to five days and is then stored in a cool place. It is usually kept away from the sun as it decreases the fermenting capacity. During the process of making the wine, rice specially glutinous rice called Bora rice is used. There is one variety of Bora rice also called '*Bairing*' which is most preferred for the wine. The rice is boiled and then spread on bamboo mats for cooling. Then the starter cake is crushed and mixed with the rice and the mixture is then kept in earthen vessels. The fermentation usually takes three to five days depending on the season. In summer it takes lesser time, in winter more. The liquid which comes out is then strained and is used for drinking. The taste usually depends on the time it is kept. The higher the time, the better it tastes.

Studies have indicated that *Judima* may have tremendous health benefits and can prevent and/or treat different diseases and psychological disorders. The plant leaves/ barks which are used in the starter cake contain different phyto-chemicals and these phyto-chemicals either alone or in combination may have therapeutic potential in curing various ailments.¹⁴

Important Steps in the Process of Registration of *Judima* under The GI Act

The procedures and steps with regard to registration of the GI are laid down in the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Rules, 2002. The application for GI can be filed by an association of persons or producers or any organization or authority which represents the interest of producers of the concerned GI goods. An affidavit in this direction will be required if the association is not of producers of goods. In case of *Judima*, if the producers of *Judima* get together and form an association, they can file for GI registration or any other *Dimasa* association or Department of Autonomous Council of Dima Hasao who can represent the interest of producers can file for registration as well.

The application must be made in triplicate. The application should contain the duly filled application form GI-1A of the GI Rules, 2002. The required formalities are:

- (1) It should include a statement on how the GI serves to designate the goods as originating from the concerned territory or locality in Dima Hasao and in respect of specific quality, reputation or other characteristic of which are due exclusively to the geographical, environmental and with its inherent natural and human factors and the production, processing or preparation of which takes place in such territory, region or locality. The said statement shall include:
 - a. Specification – A brief statement regarding the taste, colour of *Judima* along with special characteristics like medicinal qualities described in 50 to 100 words.
 - b. Description of *Judima* giving its uniqueness and geographical linkage clearly indicating its special characteristics, unique features, linkage to the given geographical location including human creativity involved by the *Dimasa* tribe. Environmental factors such as soil, water and climatic conditions for the production of *Judima* may be clearly brought out along with any standard benchmark set by the producers of the GI. Fixing such a standard may be necessary for quality control, inspection and enforcement of the GI. The rice varieties used, the use of the *Thembra* (*Acacia pennata*) and the ideal conditions (temperature, duration of various processing steps etc.) for ascertaining the special quality of *Judima* has to be laid down.
 - c. Method of production described in detail including the process involved, raw materials and tools, packaging specialty if any, etc.
 - d. Uniqueness of the product be described in not more than 100 words to compare with other similar products so as to establish uniqueness of the goods for which registration is to be applied for. The use of *Thembra* and how it is essential for the final product is unique and of utmost importance. Most tribal communities in North East India prepare traditional rice wine, but the use of *Thembra* is only unique to the *Dimasas*.
 - e. To establish the proof of origin, either documentary evidence such as, gazetteers, published documents, news articles, advertisement materials, be produced to prove the existence of the Geographical

Indications. In the case of *Judima*, the etymology of *Judima* (Ju in *Dimasa* means any alcoholic beverages and Dima means *Dimasa* people, hence *Judima* is the alcoholic beverage of the *Dimasas*) can be a strong proof of origin to prove the existence of geographical indications. During the registration of *Naga Mircha* as a GI, the Registry accepted the etymology as well as the role of *Naga Mircha* in the diet of the Naga people as the proof of origin.¹⁵ The approach taken in the case of *Naga Mircha* can be adopted in the case of *Judima*.

- f. Details of an inspection body as may be set-up by the applicant to monitor the production in respect of quality, integrity and consistency of the product as well as the genuine use of the GI be clearly given.
- g. Present scenario of the GI product including the present market of *Judima* be given with the details of exports, if any, total turnover of the product, and the activities undertaken by the applicant in development and promotion of the GI.

The application will also include

- (2) The class of goods to which the geographical indication relates shall apply; in case of *Judima* it will be Class 33.
- (3) Three copies of the geographical map of the territory of the country or region or locality in which *Judima* is produced, be given along with the application. Thus, three copies of locational map of Dima Hasao district where *Judima* is produced has to be given. It should clearly show the title, name of publisher and date of issue of the map.
- (4) The particulars regarding the appearance of the geographical indication as to whether it is comprised of the words or figurative elements or both; the logo or any other indicator for *Judima*.
- (5) A statement containing particulars of the producers of *Judima* proposed to be initially registered.

The application shall be signed by the applicant or his agent and must be accompanied by a statement of case. The application has to be sent to the GI Registry, Chennai or filed online along with the prescribed fees. Generally, application can be filed by (1) a legal practitioner or (2) a registered agent.

Conclusion

Judima is a strong case for getting GI registration. There are many alcoholic beverages which have got GI registration. *Feni* of Goa is one such example. *Judima* can also seek protection in similar lines to *Feni*. Definitely, there are a few challenges as well. For example, proof of origin is an important part of the registration process. In case of *Judima* that might pose some challenge. As mentioned before, proof of origin is generally established by providing documentary evidences such as, gazetteers, published documents, news articles, advertisement materials, to prove the existence of the geographical indications. However, finding out documentary support to establish proof of origin might be difficult in case of many products hailing from North East India. So a soft approach like the one adopted by the GI Registry in case of *Naga Mircha* have to be adopted in such cases as well. The etymology of the product name and the role the product plays in the lives of the people of the community should be regarded as adequate proof of origin. This soft approach will go a long way in giving GI recognition to many products of the North Eastern states.

Also, more scientific research may be undertaken to highlight the nutraceutical and therapeutic properties of *Judima* which can give a huge boost to the trade of the protected GI. Another important challenge is to find an efficient and stable process to preserve *Judima*, increase its shelf life and proper packaging which will not affect the quality of the product. Other related regulatory concern is that government should not list it as country liquor which might not be allowed to be exported. In case of *Feni*, that has been a problem. So claim with regard to *Feni* is that it should be listed as 'heritage liquor' or an IMFL (Indian made foreign liquor).¹⁶

The community has to be made aware of the economic potentiality of *Judima* and producers of *Judima* have to come up for economic exploitation. If these hurdles can be overcome, *Judima* can go a long way in maintaining the cultural identity of *Dimasas* as well as bringing economic prosperity.

References

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- systems of social organization, traditional ceremonies; (4) knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, traditional knowledge, local genius, traditional medicine; (5) traditional craftsmanship, including painting, sculpture, architecture, dress, clothing, traditional food/cuisine/drinks, traditional modes of transportation, http://www.tkd.res.in/TKDL/Conference/pdf_files/Indonesia_1.pdf (accessed on 14 January 2016).
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