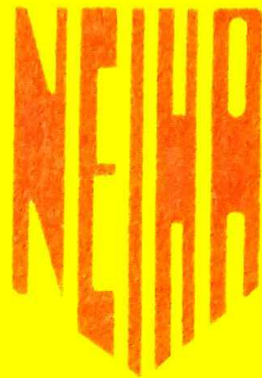


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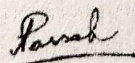
During the presentation of papers in the different academic sections of the session, critical comments for improvements were made by the respective Chairpersons and other attendees. The Editorial Board further screened the papers after their final submission for consideration for publication. Thus the papers included in the Volume have been comprehensively reviewed.

All the participants of the sessions would recall with gratitude the affectionate hospitality of the management, faculty, other staff and students of Tura Christian College, Tura and people at large. The artistes who participated in the cultural programmes performed exceedingly well and were highly appreciated. We are grateful to the enthusiastic history lovers in the state.

I am also thankful to ICSSR-NERC, Shillong for providing financial support for holding the Session.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Chairpersons of various academic sections during the three day sessions for their diligent comments on each and every paper. I am also thankful to the members of the Editorial Board, Profs. J. B. Bhattacharjee, D. R. Syiemlieh, A. K. Thakur and Rajib Handique for editing the papers and being decisive about their possible publications. Their commitment to the cause of NEIHA made my job as the Editor much easier. I would also like to thank the Treasurer, Dr. Rusievan Shangpliang for ably managing the finances of NEIHA and Dr. Sagar Boruah for his commitment to NEIHA. My colleagues, research scholars and office staff of the Department of History, NEHU, Shillong also deserve my sincere thanks for helping us in running the Permanent Office of NEIHA and in the timely printing of the Proceedings Volume. Last but not the least, Mr Pradeep Kr. Shaha and his efficient and committed staff at Modern Offset, Shillong deserve our heartfelt thanks for their passionate efforts in getting the Volume ready in time for release for the 42nd session.

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(Amena N. Passah)

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Cultural Dynamics of Fermented Drink (*Zutho*): In Changing Times

Lanukumla Ao

Introduction

Zutho is a traditional fermented drink made from sticky rice brewed and used commonly by households of the Angamis of Northeast India. Its production and use among the Angamis predate the coming of colonialism in the region. However, in spite of its popularity, the production and use of *Zutho* have been slowly driven underground with the dawn of Christianity. In this background, this paper examines the cultural dynamics of the production and use of *Zutho* in Nagaland.

Cultural dynamics is the process of change that a culture or element of culture in a society undergoes. The paper attempts to investigate the various factors that have contributed to the changes in the production and use of *Zutho* from pre-colonial times to modern times. It examines the ancestral practice of brewing and drinking traditional rice beer known as *Zutho* by the Angamis and the ethics which underlay the practice. It also reviews the wider context in which the colonial's religion and moral sanction penetrated the ancestral culture and discontinued the open production and use of *Zutho*. The paper examines the extent to which the influence of the colonial religion on cultural activity converted the practice of brewing and drinking rice beer into a forbidden moral activity which became forcefully suppressed. It also considers the impact of the drinking culture in both past and present Naga society in precipitating the present-day problem of persistent alcoholism. The paper will investigate the cultural dynamics that have produced the ethical changes in the making and use of *Zutho* from a popularly accepted practice to a modern-day covert operation among the Angamis. It will examine the case of the historical manufacture and use of *Zutho* in Kohima Village.

The consumption of rice beer prepared from rice is a common practice among many tribal communities residing in the Northeastern states of India, and many of them have been preparing it since time immemorial.¹ It also plays an important role in the socio-cultural life of the tribal people as it is associated with many occasions like

merry-making, ritual ceremonies, festivals, marriages and even death ceremonies.²

Rice is a major crop cultivated by the people of Nagaland as a staple food. Therefore, the production and consumption of *Zutho* were ecologically and economically viable and sustainable. *Zutho* was the most popular and readily available beverage in the Angami society. It was brewed in every household and drunk by young and older men and women anytime. Considered a healthy refreshing drink, many used it as a substitute for water and refreshment after a day's hard work.³ Before the introduction of Christianity to the Angamis society by the Christian missionaries and the advent of colonialism, every family made *Zutho* which they consumed to quench thirst and for strength renewal. They knew how to consume the drink without getting drunk.

The introduction of Christianity by missionaries into the Angami society changed how the production and use of *Zutho* were perceived and treated. However, these changes were gradually introduced to the people. The early converts to the Christian religion would carry *Zutho* with them on their trips to preach the Gospel. At first, the missionaries did not restrict the use of *Zutho*, which they considered a non-intoxicating beverage made from rice. But interestingly, the intoxicating power of *Zutho* was discovered when a missionary asked the people to make *Zutho* for a Christmas celebration one year. The celebration turns out to be a drunken affair as celebrants become intoxicated by drinking *Zutho*. Obviously, that occasion made to forbidding the production and use of *Zutho* by the missionaries.⁴

Drinking Culture and its Cultural Significance

All Naga families were rice growers. Therefore, rice was not only a staple in their meals, but the production and consumption of rice beer was a constant feature in their daily lives. They drank rice beer for personal leisure and during all social events. Drinking rice beer was a main aspect of their normal lifestyle: working, relaxing, showing hospitality, sharing friendships, and participating in their celebrations, including religious functions.⁵

Rice beer itself was more than a drink in Naga society. It had social and religious functions. For instance, it was used as an offering in every religious ritual, including ceremonies to ward off evil spirits, plagues, sickness, and calamities of any nature. An important religious custom among the tribe is the dedication of a plot of land for cultivation. The ceremony is called *Sekheryni*. The forest land marked out for cultivation would be cleared, and a hearth would be built on it. The head of the

family preparing the land for cultivation would conduct a ritual in which a cup of rice beer would be offered for their God to drink first. Then he would ceremoniously pour a little on the ground and afterwards drink it. After slashing the forest, burning it down would occur after about two or three months.

The next day each family would set out to the field armed with their sacrificial animals like pigs or chickens and eggs, depending on what they could afford. The ritual would start with the offering of rice beer. According to the tribal belief, the *Sekheryni* ceremony was necessary to obtain the protection of their God for safe and successful cultivation and harvest of their fields. *Sekheryni* is one of the biggest festivals of the Angamis. It is celebrated for six days. Special rice beer was brewed for the festival, and the people drank lots of it as they merrily sang and danced. The people celebrated it for six days, and the whole celebration was about invoking God's blessings on the seeds they had sowed. For this festival, a special rice beer was brewed, and everybody enjoyed drinking it as they sang and danced. Consumption of rice beer was part and parcel of their feasting. The preparation of *Zutho* involved a series of processes which are described below.⁵

1. Sticky rice (*Kemenya*): Rice was washed properly and soaked in water until soft. Then the soft rice was put in a strainer made of bamboo (*Zucharha*) and allowed to dry. The dried rice was pound powder. This process had to be carefully done because if the water used was not clean, the rice was not boiled properly, the water was not drained well, or the rice was not appropriately dried, some illness would occur. Illness included joint pain and fever. Therefore, the making of *Zutho* involved exclusively good hygienic practices.
2. Yeats (*Khri*)—an ingredient used in the preparation of *Zutho*. Paddy was soaked in water for 2-3 hours. When the water was fully absorbed, the paddy was placed in a bamboo basket lined with leaves, and it was covered with a cloth and left for 2-3 days, during which roots sprouted out of it. The root-sprouting paddy was allowed to dry, ground, and mixed with the pounded sticky rice. Water was added to the mixture. The mixture was kept for 2-3 days approximately to make the wine. The weather determined how long the mixture was kept before it was ready to be drunk. If the weather was warm, the wine would be ready for drinking in a day. The pure form of the drink produced was *Thoutshe*, from which the addition made *Zutho* of more boiled water. *Zutho* was really *Thoutshe* diluted with water. Many who could not afford *Thoutshe* used it because it was less expensive.

3. Wooden spoon (*Seicie*) –an instrument used to stir the wine. All the utensils used in preparing must be clean; if not, wine is not tasty and could cause illness.

Festivals were incomplete without *Zutho*. There was no gender restriction for drinking. Special appreciation was given to those who could make the best *Zutho*, and usually, the best producers would be engaged to provide the beer for visiting guests.

In early times even the converted Christians used to carry *Zutho* when they travelled from village to village to spread the Gospel. Even the missionaries did not restrict them, considering them to be simply a drink made from rice. However, religious freedom in rice beer drinking among tribal Christians would not last forever. An account is given of Rivenburg, a Christian missionary, who asked the villagers to make *Zutho* to celebrate Christmas. After enquiring about the process of making the drink, he concluded that the relatively short period of fermentation required 3-4 days – which is far less than the period of fermentation for other brands of drinks meant that the rice beer would not be a strong drink. Unfortunately, that Christmas celebration with *Zutho* drinking led to drunkenness and bitter arguments. It is said that the missionaries prohibited the drinking of *Zutho* after this one incident.⁶

Alighter's account is about the Late Bapföh Dzüvichü, who was baptized at 60 and later became Reverend of Baptist Revival Church, Kohima Village. He was asked at his baptism if he would stop drinking *Zutho*. He answered, "If I say yes and drink, then it will be sin in front of man and God... So, I will slowly try to stop."⁷ It must be pointed out that although the Christian missionaries had not restricted *Zutho* drinking in the beginning, many converts from their convictions after hearing the Gospel and becoming converted stopped drinking the rice beer.

In the recent past, people used wooden pots and clay pots (which they bought from the southern Angami region) to make *Zutho* and the taste was good. However, in modern times the traditional methods of making *Zutho* is no more in practice; people started using vessels. *Zutho* is made in vessels; the first 1-2 days, the taste is in good proportion, but the taste does not remain the same later.⁸ Why the change in using vessels for making *Zutho*? The change can be accounted for by the difficulty in obtaining enough wood to make pots and the fragility of earthen pots.

Conclusion

In the dynamism of change wrought in the collision between Western and traditional cultures under colonialism, the relished native

rice beer, which was an esteemed symbol of cultural identity and enjoyed sacred status in the tribal communities of Nagaland, suddenly was found defiled and caught in the crossfire between western and traditional perspectives. It is interesting to note that drinking rice beer did not make anyone a deviant person according to the mores of traditional tribal communities. But with the dawn of Christianity, drinking rice beer was a morally prohibited practice. Drinking rice beer became a stigma of primitiveness, and abstinence from it was considered a badge of civilization in the New World. Nonetheless, the irony cannot be overlooked that while Christian missionaries under colonialism were prohibiting their converts from drinking *Zutho*, which characteristically was produced and stored in bamboo vessels, British officers in the colonies were freely drinking huge quantities of rum stored in wooden barrels.

These days the production of *Zutho* has become commercialized. Village councils and Churches do not encourage it, but some people produce it as a source of income to support their families. Some weak forms of monitoring and penalty enforcement are incapable of imposing significant or adequate control. For instance, the Prohibition Act of 1989 has achieved little effect in curbing alcoholism. The evil of alcohol has simply been substituted for the Christian prohibition of the evil of drinking rice beer. Churches and organizations across the segments of society are on a war footing with alcohol. What the missionaries failed to understand was the ethos of the culture in which rice beer was a part of the people's regular diet. Although the traditional society saw the free flow of rice beer, there were ethics and discipline behind its drinking culture. The missionaries considered this local drink which did not feature in the standard Western diet, as an evil intoxicating drink, so drinking rice beer was stigmatized as 'unchristian.' By banning the consumption of rice beer in the participation in feasts and festivals, the missionaries gave the Bible, and the message of deliverance with one hand and, with the other hand, took away the essence of culture while turning a blind eye to the greater evil of consumption of imported western alcohol.

The missionaries taught moral values which denounced the making and use of *Zutho*. They promoted abstinence from *using Zutho* as an important aspect of a moral lifestyle. Those who converted to Christianity felt that abstaining from drinking *Zutho* was a commendable sign of their commitment to their new religion. However, the influence of the Christian missionaries did not lead to a complete end to the production and use of *Zutho*. It led to a hidden practice in the making and use of *Zutho*.

Notes and References

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