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Chakhao (Black Scented Rice): The Black Gold of Manipur

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Chakhao, glutinous aromatic black rice, the indigenous variety of Manipur with its unique traits like colour, aroma, flavour, stickiness and therapeutical products is a full package item for value added product. These consumables serve as the eye openers for the "Chakhao Era" as these have their own nutritional value and might as well help in arousing the curiosity of the general mass. Being said, in many western countries nowadays Chakhao is used in popular cuisines which being one of the reasons why this particular black rice is becoming the centre of attraction in the global market earning the title black gold of Manipur because of its scope for earning foreign exchange.

Keywords: Glutinous, Global Market, Chakhao

Introduction

Manipur's black rice locally named as Chak-Hao, known for its unique scented & glutinous nature, has been cultivated in the state over centuries with traditional organic methods. 'Chak' means 'rice' while 'Hao' means 'delicious' literally delicious rice. The demand for good quality Chakhao has been increasing in international market because of its organic in character. Since numerous health benefits are associated with the whole grain black rice, it has a good market potential in the international market. Furthermore, COVID-19 has initiated some behavioural changed in consumer which is directed towards plant-based nutrition and reduction in meat consumption. Owing to which black rice is being prominently imported in Europe because of high protein nature compare to other rice varieties and its anthocyanin content. Driven in part by the rapidly increasing size of the world's human population, the black rice market is set to proliferate over the next decade. Black rice is an excellent source of nutrients and is inexpensive whilst being a cost-effective solution to feed impoverished people in developing countries.

Deservingly, having genuinely originated from Manipur, it has bagged the Geographical Indication (GI) tag on 20th April 2020 (GI No. 602) for its local specific and unique properties. GI tag is an indication that identifies products which originate or are produced from a particular area and have the special quality that is attributable to its geographical origin. The agro-climatic condition of Manipur valley is the lone unique place for sweet scented glutinous and colourful character of Chakhao variety.

Types of variety cultivated in Manipur

There were three variety of Chakhao commonly cultivated by the farmers viz. Chakhao Poreiton, Chakhao Amubi Chakhao, Anghouba and Chakhao Sana. Chakhao Amubi is the tallest among them and its grain is quite slender and long whilst Chakhao Poreiton has medium grain which is quite plump and has the highest number of grains and tillers. As Chakhao Sana is a trial variety it was not known to many.

Organic certified land under Chakhao cultivation

2000 hectares of land which cultivated Chakhao has been fully certified under standards laid down and administered in India by APEDA i.e. National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) under MOVCDNER Phase-I and another 1000 hectares of area has obtained first year scope certificate under MOVCDNER Phase – II.

Revenue prospect of Chakhao

In villages of Manipur the cost one kilogram of black rice cost about Rs.50.00 whereas in Khwairamband market of Imphal it costs about Rs.90.00. In e-commerce platforms like amazon.in, Chakhao is being sold at variety of prices ranging from Rs. 300 to 500 per kilogram and India-mart sells black rice at a price of around Rs. 240.00 per kilogram. Henceforth, the farmers of Manipur can earn more by cultivating Chak-Hao if there is reliable tie-up. The government of India also emphasising on the promotion of organic farming through Parampargat Krishi Vikas Yojana and Organic Value Chain Development in North East India. Under the Start-up policy of India Manipur state would have an opportunity to organise Chakhao based agri-business activity.

Nutritional prospect of Chakhao

Chakhao is dark purplish in colour due to the high anthocyanin content which is located in the pericarp layers (Takashi *et al.*, 2001). Anthocyanin pigment which is present in Chakhao has been documented as health promoting food ingredients because of antioxidant activity. Chakhao rice extracts could be a potential source of anti-oxidative phyto-chemicals and a useful ingredient for nutraceuticals and natural colourants rather than the toxic synthetic. Some of the nutraceutical compounds present which can be extracted economically are tocotrienols, gamma aminobutyric acid, oryzanol, rice bran saccharine, lutein, zeaxanthin, butylate hydroanisole, phytosterol, etc.

Way forward

Owing to its rich disposition of antioxidants, Chakhao not only is beneficial to health but becomes an ideal candidate for being used in cosmetics especially face products and hair products. These products are promoted and developed immensely in east countries like Japan, Korea, Thailand etc. Looking into it, the small state of Manipur is also not lagging behind as there is body care products like soap, shampoo, etc made out of Chakhao. As the domestic demand for the black glutinous aromatic rice of Manipur increases, efforts are being made to develop high yield varieties without losing the grain's quality, cooking quality and aroma. People are mostly ignorant when it comes to Chakhao, in terms of production or in terms of knowhow mostly because it's not in everyday palate or not a very contributing factor to the pocket. It has been more than one year since Chakhao bagged the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. The GI status was supposed to give the much-needed fillip to the commercial cultivation of Chakhao and its global marketing. However, it is still cultivated in small pockets. Thereupon, effort must be given to bring forth this indigenous organic product of Manipur in this new era when the world is ready for this black beauty.

Conclusion

Since time immemorial, Chakhao has always been a champion in winning hearts and talking about Manipur where this rice is nurtured by nature, it is called the "Lands of God", one of the most fertile subtropical farming zones of Asia bejewelled with beautiful landscapes and favourable climatic hotspots. Chakhao, the indigenous variety of Manipur with its unique traits like colour, aroma, flavor, stickiness and therapeutical products is a full package item for value added product.

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