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Capsicum chinense Jacq.: An economically important spice of the Northeastern India

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ABSTRACT

Capsicum chinense is not only one of the peppers found to be used as heat spice. It has incredible value for the Northeastern people of India. Apart from the medicinal uses of this pepper especially in digestive problems and many other ailments, this spice has a strong value economically in all the Northeastern states of India. The present study is to highlight the importance of *Capsicum chinense* as an ingredient in the identity of the North-eastern people of India.

INTRODUCTION

The Northeastern part of India represents the states Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. The northeastern people will be incomplete to be themselves without the ingredient spice *Capsicum chinense* as their identity. The spice originates from Northeastern India especially Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. Although it is cultivated other northeastern states and these states has its own local name of this spice as Oo- morok in Manipur, Naga Chilli in Nagaland, Bih

Jolokia in Assamese. Other local names include Bhut Jolokia, Raja Mircha, Ghost chilli, Ghost pepper etc. This species has unique medicinal properties especially in digestive problems, gastric problems. It has been reportedly used to tone muscles, relieve toothache, and treat diseases like asthma, cough and sore throat. As for Northeastern people, they are more than to be used as medicinal plant (Bhagowati & Chankija 2009; Gogoi 2017). The pungent nature, the strong flavor and an enormous heat make this pepper unique from all the

remaining peppers in the world. And people love to add this flavor to their delicacies apart from the heat which is extremely strong. The State Government of Nagaland has patent rights of the geographical indication of this spice under the Registration and Protection Act, 1999 (Mathur et al. 2000; Sanatombi et al. 2008).

Morphology

It is herbaceous plant of the family Solanaceae. The leaves are compound with dark green stem, flowers are like pendent pair per axil, corolla white, anthers blue and purple filament and ovate. Fruits are elongated 5-8 cm in length. It has an undulating surface with conical to sub-conical in shape. The immature fruit is green and mature with varying colour from yellow, orange, red to deep maroon colour.

A survey was made during different seasons of the year 2017 for economic food plants in one of the famous markets of Manipur known as Ima market where only women run the market (Figure 1) and sell huge diversity of different wild as well as cultivated food plants whole day starting from 4 am in the morning. The survey revealed that *Capsicum Chinense* was available throughout the year with a high market value of 2-3 chilies per 10 Rupees. They are cultivated and exported even in neighboring states in the form of pickles or an ingredient in other pickles (Figure 2). Although they are cultivated huge piles are sold during summer and rainy reason and less in winter season. People in Manipur either store this spice in the form of pickles or in dried form (Figure 3). The flavor of the fresh and dried are said to be different with less flavor in the dried peppers.

METHODOLOGY



Figure 1: *Capsicum chinense* sold in Ima Market (Women Market) of Manipur



Figure 2: Pickle of *C. chinense*

Figure 3: Dried *C. chinense*

RESULTS AND FUTURE ASPECTS

Capsicum chinense are not commonly available in markets except in North-eastern India. In Northeastern India, it is one of the most important spices consumed in almost every household. In Ukhrul District of Manipur, Hill Wild introduced a chocolate with the flavor of *Capsicum chinense* which gives a tingling sensation in the tongue and not overpowering (The Northeast Store online market). The northeastern people have a special connection with this heat spice which is much more than a pepper spice. The market for this spice need to be broadened and a deeper understanding is needed on how to store and how to bring about more value added products out of the spice.

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