

Nihonshu

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In news– Japan has recently filed an application seeking Geographical Indication (GI) tag for nihonshu/Japanese sake, an alcoholic beverage.

What is nihonshu?

- In Japan, nihonshu is regarded as **a special and valuable beverage made from fermenting rice**.
- People traditionally **drink nihonshu on special occasions, such as festivals, weddings** or funerals, but it is also consumed on a daily basis. Thus, it is an integral part of the lifestyle and culture in Japan.
- **The sake market (almost all are nihonshu) is the second largest brewed liquor** (such as beer) market in Japan.
- For making nihonshu **three main raw materials – rice, koji-kin (a type of fungal spore) and water – are required**.
- The production of nihonshu follows an **alcoholic fermentation method called parallel multiple fermentation** and involves raw material treatment, koji making, starter culture making, mash making, pressing, heat sterilisation and bottling. The rice and koji used should originate in Japan.
- The economy of Japan was based around rice, which was used as a sort of quasi-money before the establishment of a monetary economy in the **Meiji period (1869-1912)**. As a result, nihonshu production was thoroughly under the government's control.
- As **nihonshu's production became more industrialised in the Edo period (1603-1868)**, those who had special licences began hiring many farmers in the agricultural off-season.
- They gradually won a reputation as craftsmen, which resulted in the establishment of the hierarchical Toi

system (Toii is the person responsible for sake brewing), likened to an apprenticeship or guild system.

- The Toii has full authority for the production of nihonshu at breweries and leads all the workers.
- In addition, the Toii plays an important role in training young apprentices by imparting upon them their techniques and experience.
- Through this system, the techniques of making nihonshu are being passed on to the present day.
- A GI is a label that is applied to products that have a specific geographical origin and have characteristics that are related to that particular location.
- It is learnt that this is the **first time a product from Japan has filed for a tag** at the Geographical Indication Registry.

What is GI Tag?

- According to the World International Property Organization or WIPO, a GI or Geographical Indication Tag is used for products which have specific geographical origin or have qualities that can be attributed specifically to the region.
- In addition, the qualities, characteristics or reputation of the product should be essentially due to the place of origin.
- Once a product gets this tag, any person or company cannot sell a similar item under that name.
- This tag is valid for a period of 10 years following which it can be renewed.