Rice is the staple food for over half the world’s population. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) declared 2004 as the International Year of Rice (IYR). The dedication of a particular year to rice, a single crop, is unprecedented in the UNGA’s history. It reflects the facts that rice is not only a fundamental commodity and primary food source for more than half the world population, but also a focus within a complex rice based ecosystem that influences issues of global concern such as food security, poverty alleviation, preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable development. The slogan of international year of rice 2004 is “Rice is Life”.

Almost a billion households in Asia, Africa and the Americas depend on rice systems for their main source of employment and livelihood. About four-fifths of the world’s rice are produced by small scale farmers and are consumed locally. Rice systems support a wide variety of plants and animals, which also help to supplement rural diets and incomes. Rice is therefore on the frontline in the fight against world hunger and poverty.

Rice is the major food crop of the people of India. The Eastern India comprises of Eastern U.P., Eastern M.P, Assam, Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa. This is the largest rice growing region in the country and accounts for 63.3% (26.8 million ha) of India’s rice area. About 78.7% (21.1 million ha) of the rice area in this region is rainfed (Rath et al. 2007). The North Eastern Region (NER) of India including Assam is considered as one of the primary centers of origin of rice plant. The NER
has remained geographically isolated, undisturbed and least explored which combine with unique environmental situations and topographical variations gave room for the wide genetic variability of rice. The traditional rice genotypes of NER have many valuable genes possessing resistance to various biotic, abiotic stresses, quality and plant architecture. With the advent of modern varieties and improved rice production technology, several of these traditional genotypes have been driven towards extinction. Immediate steps need to be taken to save the existing traditional genotypes.

Rice is the staple food of Barak valley zone and the main cereal crop covering an area of 2.2 lakh hectares. Traditional cultivars of this zone are losing patronage because of changes in the system of cultivation and popularization of modern high yielding varieties. The farmers of this region still prefer to grow some bold grained traditional rice varieties particularly in sali (Kharif) season because of their different desirable qualities that are not available in the modern high yielding varieties.

Physically hard working classes of people have great demands for bold grained rice having good taste and qualities. Most of the modern high yielding varieties are medium and fine grained. Very limited work on bold grained rice genetics has been carried out so far. Keeping the desire of hard working people in mind, the unexplored bold grained gene pool of the Barak valley zone needs immediate characterization for their various desired qualities for further varietal improvement in future.

Rahul chakraborty