

Traditional beverage industry in shock with synthetic syrup, sharbat stds

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The apex food regulator, with its recent decision to review the standards of synthetic syrup and sharbat, has sent shockwaves in the traditional Indian beverage industry. The industry claims that the proposed amendment is not only scientifically flawed but it appears to have been brought in to make it impossible to manufacture any commercial product in the variety.

Major players of traditional Indian beverages like Dabur, Hamdard and Guruji Thandaiwala, have objected to the proposed move wherein two new parameters of 'specific gravity' and 'ph value' have been added and the category of fruit syrup and sharbat is not mentioned.

The industry is of the view that the parameters are made in such a way that it would be difficult for the players to make synthetic syrups and sharbats. It asserts that the existing norms/standards for the category did not require any changes and the proposed changes were unnecessary.

Hence, several representations have been sent to the FSSAI on the proposed draft of Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Amendment Regulations, 2018, relating to revision of standards of synthetic syrup and sharbat.

In the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011, in Regulation 2.3 relating to "Fruit & Vegetable Products," the sub-regulation 2.3.21 relating to "Squashes, Crushes, Fruit Syrups/Fruit Sharbats and Barley Water" is proposed to be substituted by - 2.3.21 for Squashes, Crushes, Cordial and Barley Water, without mentioning fruit syrups and fruit sharbats.

Further the sub-regulation 2.3.24 relating to "Synthetic Syrup or Sharbat" is proposed to be substituted by- 2.3.24 Sharbat and Synthetic Syrup, wherein the 'or' has been changed to 'and,' which has serious implications on such products' manufacturing.

While earlier under 2.3.24 there was no mention of any parameter except of Total Soluble Solids not less than 65 per cent by weight. Now the FSSAI has proposed certain parameters.

For sharbats, Acidity as citric acid is set between 0.05 to 0.15%, Specific Gravity between 1.3 to 1.5%, Total Soluble Solids-TSS - (Per cent by mass) is More than 30.0% and pH is Less than 4.5.

For synthetic syrup, Acidity as citric acid is set at 0.1 to 0.3, Specific Gravity at 1.0 to 1.5, Total Soluble Solids (Percent by mass) More than 30.0 while pH should be Less than 4.5.

According to industry sources, with these parameters it would be difficult to make products.

It adds that the TSS for both sharbat and synthetic syrup is proposed to be reduced to 30% against the current limit of 65%. This is unviable as a product of 30% TSS can only be preserved chemically while under current parameters it is self-preserving. Also there is mention of prohibiting use of any flavour.

An industry insider questions, can a khus syrup be prepared without use of flavouring agents?

Further, acidity for sharbat with mini 25% fruit juice is being fixed at 0.05-0.15% and for synthetic syrup with no fruit juice is being fixed at 0.1-0.3% against the 3.5% under current regulation. It would be impossible to make juice conforming to these parameters, stated another industry insider.

He questions, what is the technical necessity to do so? Adding to this question of pH value of less than 4.5, he says, how this level will be achieved with low acidic content. They are self contradictory, he quipped.

In its presentation, Guruji Thandaiwala Pvt. Ltd stated that the classification of sharbat and syrup was impractical and confusing. The prohibition of using any flavour will make the product tasteless and unsaleable.

Acidity and pH are inter related and with low acidity the pH value prescribed is not achievable. Further with TSS at 30%, the specific gravity of 1.3 is also not achievable.

It has also drawn the attention of FSSAI to 2.3.21 sub regulation 1.4 wherein the regulation says that any syrup/ sharbats containing a minimum of 10% of dry fruits shall also qualify to be called as fruits syrups while in new regulations it has been proposed that 25% fruit juice is required.

Hamdard also in its representation mentioned that for 100 years they are making sharbats in India and they are known for their scientific preservation techniques wherein they also use natural identical flavours along with natural flavours, fruit juices and herbal distillates.

The company said, “The proposed draft for sharbat seems unscientific as it will completely change the sensorial characteristics of the current established sharbat formulations and also destabilise the delicate balance of ingredients, rendering the product unsuitable and unsaleable for desired use.”

Dabur in its representation observed that under Regulation 2.3.24 it should be allowed that the product might contain food additive permitted in these regulations while for sharbat the proposed regulation be modified to Sharbat shall contain 10% fruit juice, distillate of fruit, herb, vegetable or flower or spice alone or in combination.

Dabur explains in its presentation that the current recipes of sharbat are in compliance of existing standards. Herbal distillates are also added to sharbat to avoid process losses and distillates cannot be added to concentrate of 25% as mentioned in the proposed draft standards since volatile content will be lost during the cooking process of sharbat to achieve the desired result.