

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION- A SOCIAL EVIL A STUDY IN RELATION TO KERALA

MANJU RAJAN

Former Guest Lecturer

Dept. of Economics

S.N. College, Cherthala, Alappuzha, India

ABSTRACT

Alcoholism is one of the major social evil around the world. Alcohol is an invention of the devil. The people of Kerala are labelled as heavy drinkers. Kerala has the highest per capita alcohol consumption in India overtaking traditionally heavy drinking states like Punjab and Haryana. Persons in India aged 15 years or older drinks 4.3 litres of pure alcohol per year. A drinker consumes 28.7 litres of pure alcohol annually. Kerala government exchequer depends mainly on the revenue from liquor market. Gandhiji believed that the consumption of alcohol was a major social evil. He encouraged complete prohibition in India. In 2015 the Kerala government imposed certain restrictions on the selling of alcohol to reduce its consumption. This was done to reduce the road accidents caused by drunk driving as well as domestic violence caused by alcohol abuse. A major part of Kerala's income comes from Tourism industry. The ban had badly affected the tourism industry. In June 2017 the new government eased the liquor restrictions. Now Kerala is in the front row along with international countries in the liquor use. Keralites spend more money on liquor than on rice.

KEYWORDS: Alcoholism, State Exchequer, Prohibition, Liquor Industry, Social Evil, KSBC (Kerala State Beverages Corporation), IMFL (Indian Manufactured Foreign Liquor), Social problems.

INTRODUCTION

Social evils are actions committed by a large group within a society that is controversial or in conflict with the morality within a society such as alcohol use, drug use, human trafficking etc. Illiteracy and poverty are the major root cause of social evils. Liquor has been a part of human civilization for thousands of years. Alcoholism means the habitual consumption of alcoholic liquor in increasing quantities leading to a dependence on alcohol and creating problems for the individual concerned, his family and the society. The tradition of liquor consumption has existed in our country right from the dawn of history. There has been a rapid rise in the consumption of alcohol in India. Since India's economic liberalisation, the market for Indian Manufactured Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and imported liquors is growing very fast. India is the largest whisky market in the world. There is heavy demand for imported whisky and wine. Kerala has the highest per capita alcohol consumption in India, at over 8 litres per person per year. Toddy, a home-made spirit from coconut trees is an integral part of Kerala's culture.

The governments are relying on alcohol revenue to fund their budgets. Revenue from liquor goes to many accounts in many departments. Sales Tax, Excise Duty and Import Fee are some of the various forms of alcohol revenue. In Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Delhi the wholesale and retail liquor business are under government control. In Maharashtra the liquor business is in the private sector. In other states the government runs the wholesale business and the retail business is done by the private parties.

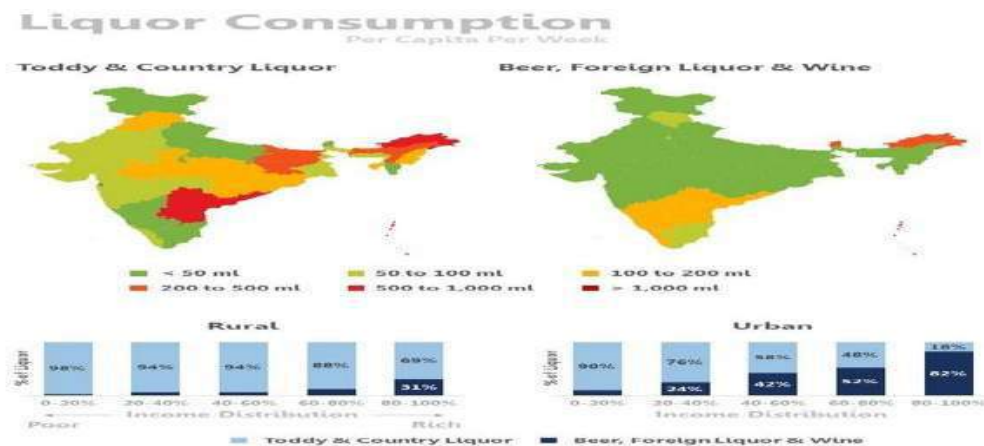
There are various spirits that are derived through the distillation and fermentation.

The alcoholic content of the distilled spirit is much higher than the fermented or brewed beverages. Toddy and arrack, the traditional alcoholic beverages are known as country liquors. Alcohol may also be synthetically produced from ethylene obtained from refinery gas. According to Abkari Act of Kerala, toddy has been defined as “fermented or unfermented juice drawn from Coconut, Palmyra, date or any other kind of palm tree.” The sweet toddy or Neera also comes within the scope of the word toddy. At the peak of its fermentation the alcohol content of toddy may go up to 8.1 percent.

Illicit liquor is liquor for which duty has not been paid. It includes IMFL (Indian Manufactured Foreign Liquor) and arrack that is smuggled into the state and the country liquor that is brewed at home from grains and fruits. Its high profit margin and the easy way in which it can be made make it a big business here. According to the excise department officials one third of all liquor consumed in the state is illicit alcohol.

Liquor consumption per capita per week in various states of India are given below

Fig. 1

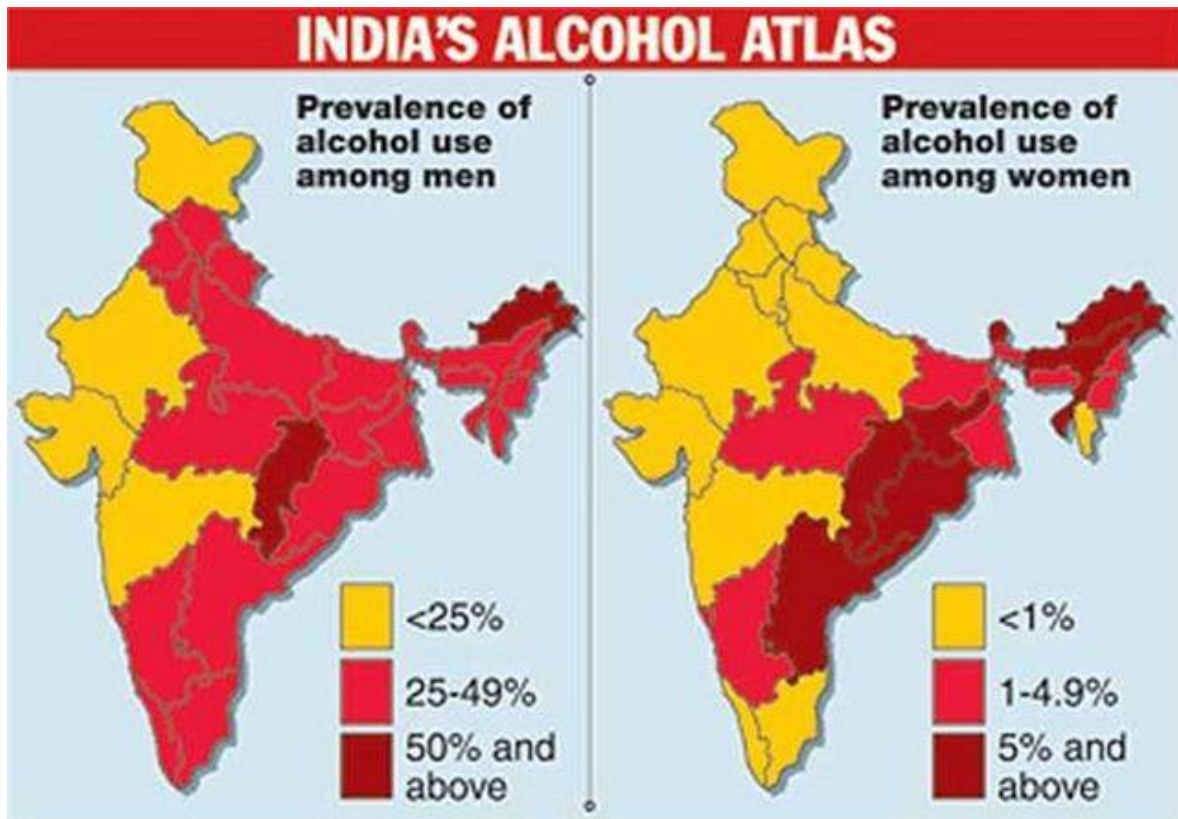


Source: The Hindu

The consumption of alcohol based on socio economic status in Rural and Urban India is given above.

India's alcoholic atlas shows the percentage of alcohol consumption by men and women in various states.

Fig. 2



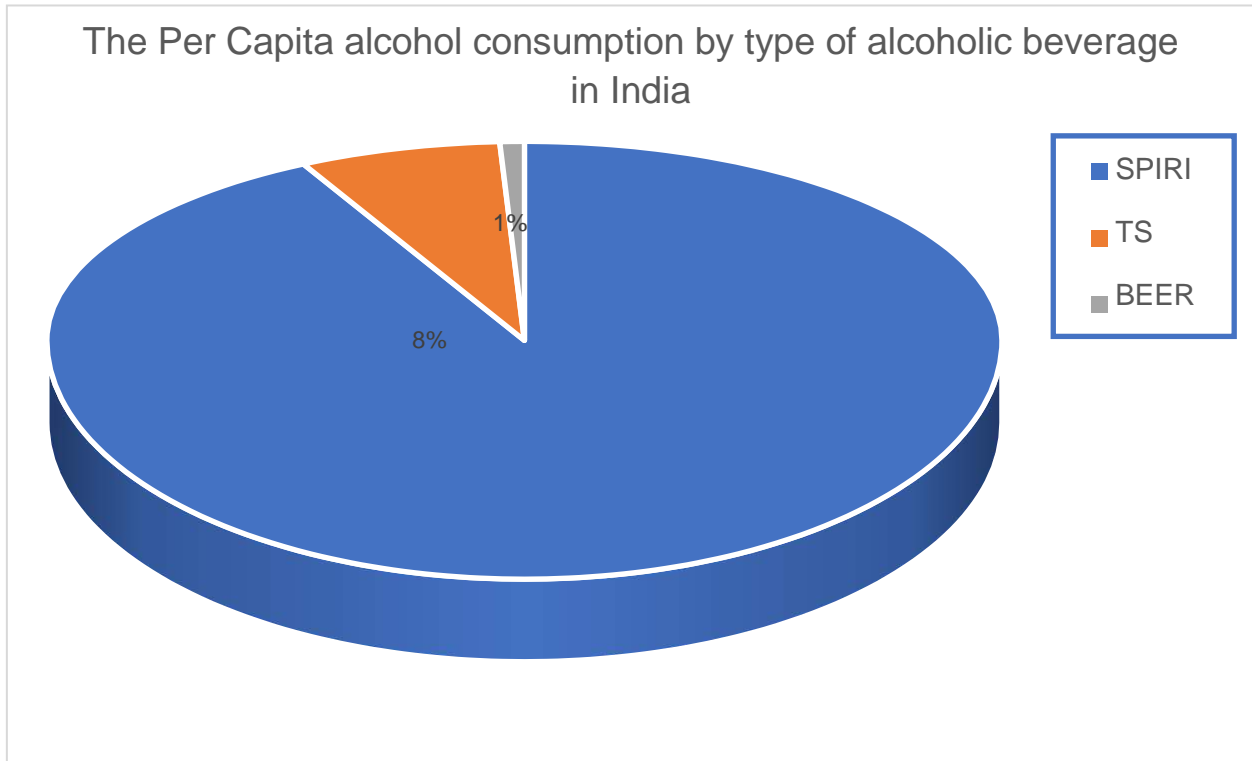
Source: The Hindu

Alcohol consumers can be of two types (1) Moderate drinkers and (2) Heavy drinkers. Moderate drinkers are those who consume liquor in limited quantities and who can hold their physical and mental balance properly even after a larger quantity of alcohol.

Heavy drinking was defined as average consumption of 40g or more of pure alcohol a day for men and 20g or more for women. Heavy drinkers are those who cannot limit the consumption to a moderate quantity and who cannot hold their physical and mental balance properly even when they consume a very small quantity of alcohol. Some people are of the opinion that alcohol if

used moderately, makes life in today's highly tension gripped world more tolerable. It relaxes and gives a pleasurable feeling from a painful feeling. It is also used as a drug for treating sick people.

Fig. 3



Source: Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health, WHO

Kerala government exchequer depends mainly on the revenue from liquor market. Keralites spend more money on liquor than on rice. The Kerala State Beverages Corporation (KSBC) was established on 23rd February 1984 to provide genuine liquor at reasonable prices to consumers. KSBC is the only wholesale distributor of Indian Manufactured Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and Beer in Kerala.

The liquor industries are worth Rupees 7500 crore a year in Kerala. The sales are sky rocketing year after year. From the sales and revenue receipts of the KSBC we can see that the Kerala government exchequer depends greatly on liquor market. Liquor market contributes about 20 percentage of the tax revenue collected by the government. Liquor market is the major contributor to the revenue receipts of Kerala government.

Prohibition is the act or practice of forbidding something by law. Prohibition refers to the banning of the manufacture, storage, transportation, sale, possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Alcohol is a subject in the state list under the Seventh Schedule of the constitution of India. Therefore, the laws relating to alcohol vary from state to state. Kerala and Tamil Nadu prohibit private parties from owing liquor stores making the state government the sole retailer of alcohol in these states.

Alcohol prohibition is in force in the states of Bihar, Gujarat, Nagaland and in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep. All other states and Union Territories permit the sale of alcohol. Liquor restrictions were imposed in Kerala in 2015 to reduce alcohol consumption. Thereby reducing road accidents caused by drunk driving and domestic violence caused by alcohol use. Only 5-star hotels were allowed to serve alcohol. It has affected the tourism industry in Kerala, which is another major revenue earning sector in the state. Kerala government revised the alcohol policy in June 2017. As a result, closed bars were reopened. The new policy of the state government allows two- and three-star hotels to serve liquor and new bars will be allowed to apply for licenses.

Alcohol use creates many social and health problems. Alcohol consumption is a social evil. Alcohol related road accidents are increasing. Domestic violence is another major problem of alcohol use. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and prison records, 59% crimes and 40% road accidents recorded in Kerala are related to alcohol abuse.

Under section 15 A (As amended by Abkari (Amendment) Act 2014(Act No: 7 of 2014) w.e.f. 27/2/2013, persons below the age of 21 should not drink alcohol (Penal Section 63 of Abkari Act). In this situation take action under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act. If alcohol or any other intoxicating drug is given to children below the age of 18 years, the police can take action under section 118(I) Kerala Police Act.

Table 1 - The quantity of liquor a person can keep legally (Abkari Act, Section 10, 13):

No	Liquor	MaximumQuantity
1	Toddy	2.5 Ltr
2	IMFL	3 Ltr
3	Beer	7.8 Ltr

4	Wine	7.8 Ltr
5	Foreign Liquor	4.5 Ltr
6	Coco Brandy	1.5 Ltr

A person can keep 21.1 Ltr of liquor at a time (except foreign liquor and coco brandy). If anyone makes or imports or exports arrack, it is an offence under section 8(2) of Abkari Act. Punishment for this offence is 10 years imprisonment and Rupees one lakh fine.

The amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act were passed by the Parliament recently. The new laws were effective from September 1, 2019. Under the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019, drunken driving attracts a fine of Rupees 10,000 and /or imprisonment of six months to two years.

The Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) legal limit is 0.05% or 30 mg alcohol in 100ml blood. Different penalties are assessed depending on the blood alcohol content at the time of the offence.

The income elasticity of liquor is relatively high in Kerala. The increase in the per capita income of the people due to the increase in remittances by Non- Resident Indians is an important factor for the high consumption of alcohol in Kerala. The new policy of the state government has contributed to the rise in alcohol sales.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the main Objectives of the Study.

- 1) To analyse the social evils of Alcohol consumption in Kerala
- 2) To analyse the economic benefits of alcohol consumption in terms of revenue to the state exchequer
- 3) To suggest alternative measures to compensate the revenue from alcohol consumption to the government, if prohibition is fully implemented.

METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly descriptive in nature. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through direct interview and a structured questionnaire. A survey was conducted throughout the state of Kerala. The study shows the growth trend of the

liquor industry in the state. The Secondary data were collected from Kerala State Beverages Corporation (KSBC) Publications, various journals, articles, and websites.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kerala stands top among the Indian states in the case of liquor consumption. It is the major revenue earning sector in Kerala. The state government exchequer depends mainly on the revenue from the liquor industry. The sales and revenue reports of the Kerala State Beverages Corporation (KSBC) shows the growth trend of liquor market in the state. The Kerala budget 2019-2020 made changes in the tax structure on alcohol. The government has imposed 210 percent tax on liquor costing over Rupees 400 and 200 percent tax on those costing less than Rupees 400. Beer would be taxed at 100 percent. The government has decided to give nod for the sale of Foreign Made Foreign Liquor (FMFL) in the state. For FMFL the tax rate would be 78 percent and for imported wine the tax would be 28 percent. The government is expecting Rupees 60 crore increase in revenue from the changes in the tax structure on liquor. For the state government, the fast-growing liquor market means an increase in the inflow of funds or an increase in dependence on alcohol revenue. Some people suggest to supply subsidised alcohol through Public Distribution System to the drinkers living Below the Poverty Line. This may help to reduce alcohol consumption.

Economic affluence, changing life style and urbanisation all are persuading young people to drink. Even women and children were addicted to alcohol. The Kerala government has raised the legal drinking age from 21 to 23 years. Maharashtra and New Delhi had raised the minimum age to 25. But it had no impact on the society. There was no change on the number of drinkers. Alcohol users must be trained by community-based organisations and local self-governments on its moderated and restricted use. Vimukthi is an anti-narcotics campaign launched by the government of Kerala to create awareness among the people especially the youth. Addiction free Kerala is the aim of this campaign. State wide awareness programmes were organised against drug addiction and alcoholism under the Excise Department. Drug free state is the motto of this mission.

The state government's dependence on alcohol revenue is unhealthy and disproportionate. Beverages Corporation give the government more than Rs.600 for every Rs.100 it spent on alcohol. The purchase price of Officers' Choice Rum is Rs.61.03 (750ml) for BEVCO. The

selling price is Rs.650.The huge differential goes to the government as revenue.An alcohol buyer has to pay the highest tax in Kerala.

Table 2 - The break-up of purchase price and selling price is given below.

Brand(750ml) Price(Rs.)	PurchasePrice(Rs.)	Shop Selling
Officers' Choice Brandy Deluxe	60.49	690
Officers' Choice Rum	61.03	650
Officers' Choice Whisky Prestige	58.27	630
Bejois Premium Brandy	52.43	560
Bacardi Classic Super Rum	167.36	1,240
Old Monk XXX Premium Rum	71.64	770
Signature Rare Aged Whisky	177.88	1,270
Mansion House French Brandy	77.36	820
Bagpiper Gold Premium Whiskey	83.15	880
Royal Challenge Sp. Premium Whiskey	153.33	1170

Equity is not possible in alcohol taxation. Asking a daily wage worker to pay 600% tax is not a good idea. The government argues that by charging more for liquor, the poor will be reluctant to drinking. But this argument will not work. No matter what will be the price, the habitual drinker will buy his drink. Only the quantity of food for his family will shrink. Every hike in the price of alcohol leads to a reduction in the household income of the poor.

“Sabko maloom hai meim sharabi nahi
Phirbhi koi pilaye toh meim kya karoo”
(Everyone knows that I am not a drinker
But what can I do if someone pours me a drink?)

This famous Gazal song shows the excuse of a drunkard. It is similar to the state governments excuse over alcohol taxation. The state governments say that they don't need the tax money from alcohol, but if people wish to drink what else they will do but tax the drink.

In the financial year 2018-2019 where a jump of Rupees 1567.58 crore from 2017- 2018 has been recorded in alcohol sales. The quantity of liquor sales last year was 216.34 lakh cases,with 450 hotels operating with liquor sales license. 121.12 lakh cases of beer were sold last

year. The sales figures show a pattern of continued increase in growth of liquor sales in the state since 1984-1985, when the revenue was just Rupees 55.46 crores.

The latest figures show that the alcohol sales from the outlets of KSBC (BEVCO) and Consumer Fed in the fiscal year 2018-2019 registered a revenue of Rupees 14,504 crores, the highest ever.

Table 3 shows the gross sales revenue from the liquor market to the Kerala government. The sales are skyrocketing year after year. as compared to the previous year. During 2009-2010 period the gross sales revenue was Rs.5539.85 crores. During 2018-2019 the gross sales revenue touched an ever time high of Rs.14,504 crores.

Table 3

YEAR	GROSS SALES (Figures in Rs Crores)
2009-2010	5539.85
2010-2011	6730.30
2011-2012	7860.15
2012-2013	8818.18
2013-2014	9353.74
2014-2015	10012.84
2015-2016	11577.29
2016-2017	12134.14
2017-2018	12937.09
2018-2019	14504.67

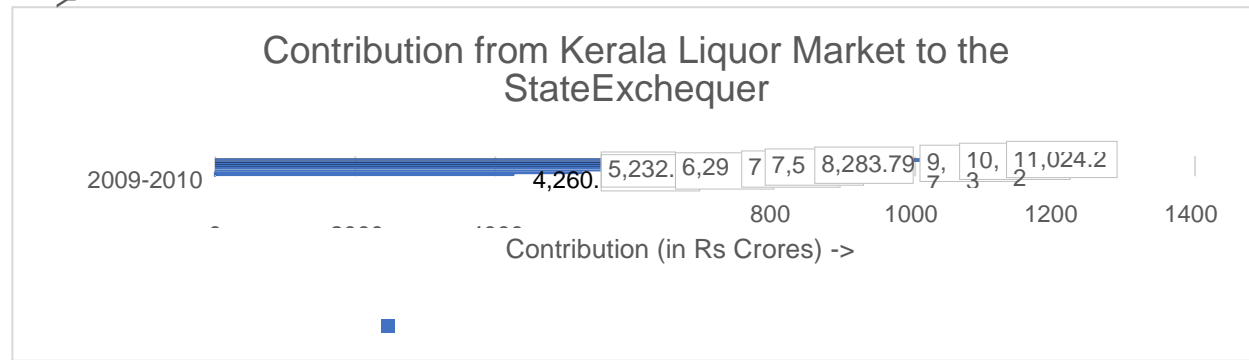
Source: - Sales and Revenue Report, Kerala State Beverages Corporation

Table 4 shows the contribution from the liquor market to the Kerala government exchequer. It shows the dependence of Kerala government exchequer on the IMFL market

Table 4

YEAR STATE EXCHEQUER	CONTRIBUTION TO (Figures in Rs Crores)
2009-2010	4260.2
2010-2011	7
2011-2012	5232.5
2012-2013	3
2011-2012	6292.4
2012-	8
	7240.8

2013	9
2013-2014	7575.7
2014-2015	8283.7



2015-2016	9787.05
2016-2017	10353.3
2017-2018	11024.2

Source: - Sales and Revenue Report, Kerala State Beverages Corporation

Figure 4 shows a graphical representation of the gross sales revenue from 2009-2010 to 2018-2019. Here we can observe an upward progressive line here.

Fig.4



Source: - Sales and Revenue Report, Kerala State Beverages Corporation

Figure 5 shows the diagrammatic representation of the contribution from the liquor market to the

Kerala government exchequer.

Fig. 5

Source: - Sales and Revenue Report, Kerala State Beverages Corporation

Alcohol consumption has health and social consequences. Domestic violence has been on the rise. All such undesirable things are directly linked to liquor. Alcohol can increase the user's sense of personal power and domination over others. A person under the influence of alcohol will try to exercise that power and control over others. There is some association between violence against women and alcohol consumption by men. Various incidents of crimes and violence against women in both home and in public places have been reported against alcohol users. It can cause chronic illnesses like Liver cirrhosis, liver cancer, oesophageal cancer and cardiac problems to those who consume liquor heavily. It can result in disablement or death from motor vehicle accidents. Liquor consumption may lead to depression and suicide. Alcohol is the third most common cause of death in developed countries. Alcohol abuse is one of the main killers of youth in India.

Alcoholism is one of the principle social problem around the world. It can have serious social and economic consequences for individuals, their family and the society as a whole. Alcoholism is the major risk factor for disability, disease and death. Hence, we must give priority to find out a solution to reduce alcohol consumption. Major social factors leading to alcoholism are the following

- Family and peers
- Social drinking
- Partner drinking
- Lifestyle
- Poverty and unemployment

The following are the major social problems due to alcoholism

- Domestic violence
- Child abuse
- Losing friends
- Loss of control over behaviour
- Divorce
- Losing jobs

- Financialproblems

PROHIBITION

Prohibition is the legal act of prohibiting the manufacture, storage, transportation and sale of alcohol including alcoholic beverages. Gandhiji considered alcohol consumption as a social evil. The Constitution of India (Article 47 in the Directive Principles of State Policy) stated that “the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the use except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health. “Most of the Indian states have seen ignored this principle, since the revenue that comes from alcohol is hard to ignore.

Attempts of prohibition were not fully successful in India. Liquor is officially prohibited in the states of Gujarat, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur and in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep. Liquor restrictions were imposed in Kerala in 2015. Only 5-star hotels were allowed to serve alcohol. It affected the Tourism industry which is another major revenue earning sector in the state. Prohibition led to huge loss of state revenue. Loss of excise revenue from the sale of alcohol discouraged most state governments from enforcing long-term prohibition. No serious efforts were made by the Indian states to ban alcohol completely.

In India there were many social movements demanding prohibition. Notable one was the protest by rural women against the sale of alcohol during 1970s. Fed up by abuse, beating and torture by husbands’ women went on a strike against alcohol. Women used chilli powder, broom sticks, kerosene and match boxes as weapons in the strike. In Andhra Pradesh and Kerala some women’s groups adopted a militant stand and forcefully closed down alcohol outlets.

Critics argue that prohibition may lead to illicit distillation, an increase in organised crimes and death from spurious liquors. Prohibition may lead to the creation of smugglers and home brewers. They encourage people to drink more than they drink when the alcohol was legal. In the absence of complete co-operation of enforcing authorities, speedy disposal of cases, well defined laws and regulations, well planned effort to prevent smuggling and strict action against offender’s prohibition has failed in many states. The effects of prohibition include large scale sale of spurious and cheap liquor. Larger police machinery will be needed to enforce prohibition. Enforcing prohibition is a waste of man power. It will open another avenue for corruption. Prohibition will not work if it is implemented in bits and pieces. Only a strong and sustained campaign will help check the spread of alcoholism.

Dry days are specific days when the sale of alcohol is prohibited. Dry days are fixed by the state governments. Most Indian states observe dry days on major religious festivals. National holidays such as Republic Day (January 26), Independence Day (August 15) and Gandhi Jayanti (October 2) are usually dry days throughout India. Currently, first of every month is dry day in Kerala and liquor won't be available from BEVCO outlets. Very soon alcohol will be available on the first day of every month also as the government plans to announce a new liquor policy. The tourism industry also demands this. The decision not to sell liquor on the first day of every month being pay day. This one-day ban has not been very effective, as people buy and stock liquor the previous day itself.

If prohibition is implemented fully in Kerala, it will affect the Kerala economy very adversely. Because Kerala economy depends very much on liquor industry. The government budgets are funded by booze. In Kerala 22% of the total government revenue come from the bottle. Prohibition will affect the tourism industry. The Kerala government is increasingly relying on alcohol revenue. The way the government is making money out of the alcohol business is perplexing. The government is sluggish in finding other sources of revenue. The government must find out some other sources of revenue. It is the duty of the government to maintain the health of the people in the state. The social cost of alcohol far exceeds the economic benefits. The government's first priority should be towards the society. The government should withdraw from selling and promoting alcohol. Prohibition does not mean that people will stop drinking. Drinkers will find other avenues to do so.

The following measures can be taken to prevent the increased use of alcohol

- Control of production and sale of alcohol
- Strict rules with regard to drink driving
- Raising prices and taxes
- Ban on advertisement of alcoholic products
- Raising minimum age for drinking

The increase in the consumption of alcohol in Kerala has been an issue of great concern. It is a social evil at the same time a source of revenue for the government. Therefore, the government will not go for prohibition. Alcohol related crimes, road accidents and domestic violence are increasing day by day. The incidence of alcohol related diseases like liver cirrhosis,

heart and brain damages etc are also increasing. Even if prohibition is enforced the flow of illicit liquor will definitely be increased. Liquor tragedies are killing so many people. Prohibition may lead to increase in liquor tragedies. Actually, the mind of the people should be changed. If there is any special occasion in a house whether it is a sad one or happy one, liquor should be served there. An event is incomplete without liquor. That's the situation here in Kerala. Man's passion for liquor took away peace of mind of the family. The only way is to make awareness among the people about the social evils of alcohol consumption. The attitude of the people should be changed. Each family should turn itself into a place of worship. Some people consider drinking liquor is immoral. The sale of liquor reaches its peak during Onam, Christmas and New Year. The people should make an introspection as to what they will gain out of liquor. The parents should be the role model for their children. The government should take steps to educate the people about the perils of excess alcohol consumption. Quitting alcohol is not very easy for addicted people. First they should admit it as a problem, talk to a Doctor, Get new good friends, change their attitude and change their dietary habits. They can quit drinking only if they have the real intention to quit.

Kerala is known as God's own country because of its scenic beauty. Kerala is known for its high literacy rate. But most of the people here were addicted to alcohol. Keralites consumed nearly Rupees 500 crore worth of alcohol this Onam. Brandy is the most favoured drink in Kerala followed by Rum and Vodka. Mc Dowell's No.1 emerged as the most preferred brand. Consumers show interest on popular brands of cheap Indian made Brandy and Rum.

CONCLUSION

Alcoholism is becoming a major social and health problem in Kerala. If this situation continues what will be the future of the state? God's Own Country will become drunkards own Country. One of the Directive Principles of State Policy directs the state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living, and to improve public health as one among the primary duties of the state and in particular, the prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health. The state government should take this as a serious matter. Ofcourse, revenue is needed by the state. Revenue should be generated without harming the people. The state government should take steps to control the consumption of alcohol. The government can generate revenue from other sources especially by attracting more tourists to the state. The government should give priority to

the health of the citizens. Here in Kerala the government mechanism is funded by a market, which is working against the promise given by the Indian Constitution to its citizens.

If the government should not take steps to control alcohol consumption God's Own Country will become Bacchus Own Country (Bacchus – God of Wines). Alcoholism is a major public health problem. We must unite against this Social Evil. Nothing is impossible in this world.

The final aim should be to build an alcohol-free world.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ramanathan, H.N, Ganesan, S. (2010). Alcohol: A Social Evil and a Source of Revenue.
- [2] Saxena, S. Memorandum to World Health Organisation. Geneva, January 1997.
- [3] Adv. Salim Kambisseril, Former Deputy Director of Prosecution, Kuttakrithyangal: Niyamavum Shikshayum.
- [4] Johnson Edayaranmula, J. Drinking patterns in Kerala, Director, Alcohol and Drug Information Centre, India.
- [5] The Hindu Business Line, The Alcohol Economy, December 2013.
- [6] The Kerala State Beverages Corporation official website
- [7] Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health
- [8] Ramanathan, H.N, Raj, V.P.J. (2007). Prohibition; A Constitutional Promise and the Reality – A study on the Indian Made Foreign Liquor Markets in Kerala.
- [9] National Crime Reports Bureau
- [10] Benegal, V. NIMHANS, Bengaluru.
- [11] Hafis Mohammed, N.P, Madyathil Ninum Mayakkumarunil Ninum Shashwatha Mochanam (2014). Mathrubhumi Books.
- [12] The Hindu, Articles