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Youth and Alcoholism in India: A Gandhian Perspective

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Abstract

In a country like India which has an exploding population and a large chunk of that living under poverty and extreme conditions. Malnutrition figures of Indian people are not so good; people are not even able to get two-time meal easily, they have to toil hard for that. In spite of these all deteriorating living conditions people are addicted to alcohol and spending a larger part of their earnings on it, instead of improving their lifestyle. But the question arises, why people in large number are addicted to alcohol? And how this habit affecting them and their family and all over society? Does this affecting countries growth? In this paper we will discuss these all question and their answers from the point of view of Mahatma Gandhi, we will see how Mahatma Gandhi understood this drunkard society and what they suggested the solution for it, like sweeping out the existence of drink revenue and abolishing the liquor shops. This paper is based on content analysis written by Mahatma Gandhi and other people on the related topic.

Keywords- Youth, Alcoholism, Gandhi,

Introduction

Habit of drinking alcohol and increasing number of alcoholics, drunkards and the problems caused by these have been creating a seriously negative impact on the moral fabric of the nation. Today India is caught in the grip of various opposing forces. On the one hand we are trying to establish a strong economy, which has triggered off various forces like liberalization, modernization, and privatization and accelerated urbanization, and on the other we are also trying to keep alive the philosophy for which Mahatma Gandhi lived and died. The forces of modernization not only bring the modern amenities, facilities and ways of thinking, but also the negative things like life full of tension, economic insecurity and related problems. Instead of finding a way out of this dilemma, people try to find the routes of escape. One such route is to keep oneself away from realities. What better way is there to do for them is to drink alcohol. And easily available to everyone, from common man to millionaire is the bottle of liquor. India a nation opening up widely towards economic liberalization is almost on the verge of a moral collapse. Our religious teachings are gradually losing grip on the minds of people. The behavior patterns, which were unthinkable during the last century, have almost been

accepted as the order of the day though inevitably, now that is a new normal. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi has become all the more relevant to bring about a total change. It is the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, which can enable us to cope with the tension filled world of distress and depression caused by liberalization and modernization that has paved the way for increased alcoholism. There are states Governments which argue in favor of being 'wet states' because of huge revenue collection on excise. At the same time they tend to ignore the big amount being spent for the welfare of the sick, widows and children as a result of man's drunkenness. A study of social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, hence, should include his views regarding the problem of alcoholism.

Meaning of Alcoholism

In general parlance 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. It is almost similar to the problem of drug addiction because the disorganizing effects of alcoholic liquor and narcotics differ, only in degree; World Health Organization Expert Committee has defined it, "as a state of periodic or chronic intoxication, detrimental to the individual and to society, produced by repeated consumption of a drug, either natural or synthetic".

Causes of alcoholism

Many scholars have given different reasons for drinking alcohol. Caltin Starting Bonger and Janax are the leading ones among such researchers. The reasons given by them can be summarized as follows.

1. Misery drinking
2. Occupation factors (Fatigue and exhaustion)
3. Bad housing and lack of recreational facilities
4. Ignorance
5. Inherent nervous defects
6. God's curse or gift
7. For companionship and fun
8. Fashion
9. Business reasons
10. Urbanization
11. Sudden success in business, and
12. Social inadequacy

How Mahatma Gandhi saw alcoholism

Gandhi saw the drink habit as foreign to India, blaming it on British imperialism. According to Gandhi the pursuit of prohibition was a patriotic pursuit that could be followed even India sought its independence. While not denied the fact that a few Indians had drunk in the past, Gandhi claimed that "if drink in spite of its harmfulness was not a fashionable vice among Englishmen, we would not find it in the organized state we do in this pauper country." Supporting Gandhi's assessment, a recent account of the colonial period in India argues that "drinking change from ritualistic and occasional to become part of routine everyday social intercourse and entertainment." Indeed, according to this recent study, the British were much more comfortable with the increased Indian consumption of alcohol than with Indian use of cannabis and opium. The British government's tolerance for the increased consumption of alcohol within India might well have been related to the significant revenue brought in by alcohol sales. From this perspective, Gandhi's argument

that prohibition was patriotic make sense because any diminution in consumption, let alone a complete ban, would hurt imperial finance not only this but the call for prohibition placed Indian nationalist in opposition of moral superiority over their foreign superlords. Acknowledging huge loss in revenue, Gandhi cheerfully suggested that the British recovered their loss by reducing military expenditure.

What he suggested

Prohibition was a very important plank in the constructive program of Gandhi. He carried on an extensive and an intensive debate over it for almost three decades. An indication of the impact of Gandhi's movement for prohibition is its inclusion in the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India under article 47. A study of Gandhi's views on prohibition gives us an insight into his ideas on morality on which his ideal society stands and this in turn, is helpful in understanding his justification of prohibition. We find that the reasons he advances in favour of prohibition are not independent but inter-dependent, and it is this inter-dependence that brings out the nature of morality as understood by him. If we want to make our society a Ramraj, its base should be the moral base on which social, political, economic transactions take place.

His justification towards prohibition

Gandhi writes in Young India 4 Feb 1926 "drinking led to sexual excesses and that under the spell of drink people committed sexual crimes, which they would have never committed had they been sober. He says, 'The drunkard forgets the distinction between wife, mother and sister and indulges in crimes of which in his sober moments he will be ashamed. Anyone who has anything to do with labour knows to what state the laborers are reduced when they are under satanic influence of drink'".

Gandhi also gave some substantial views on economic impact of alcoholism he writes in young India 26 March 1925 that "The total excise revenue of the State Travancore in 1922 was Rs.46,94,300 against land revenue Rs.38,18,652 and out of a total revenue of Rs.1,96,70,130. Thus the liquor revenue is a terrific item. I was told that drink was most prevalent among the Christians and that it was decimating hundreds of homes and bringing poverty and disgrace upon thousands of men otherwise able and intelligent". with the help of these figures we can understand how much Gandhi was worried for the economic indirect exploitation of poor and labourers of the country because according to him most of drunkards were poor laborers for this argument Gandhi writes in young India 8 Sep 1927 that "It is the factory labourers and others that drink. They are forlorn, uncared for and they take to drink. They are no more vicious by nature than teetotalers are saints by nature".

Religion also influenced Gandhi's thoughts on alcoholism; he had a hopeful attitude towards different religions for prohibition as he writes in young India 8 April 1926 that "Every religion has denounced it (drinking) with more or less vehemence. The emphasis is no doubt on denouncement, though particular religions may differ as to the degree of permissiveness. The place of drink may vary from one society to another. As to the attitude of particular religions, drinking intoxicants is contrary to Islam and Hinduism. Trade in them is demonstrably sinful."

B kumarappa writes "Gandhi says, 'Drink is more a disease than a vice. I know crores of men who would gladly, leave off drink if they could. I know some that have asked that the temptation might be put away from them. In spite of the temptation having been put away at their instance, I have known them to steal drink. I do not, therefore, think that it was wrong to have removed the temptation. Diseased persons got to be helped against themselves'."

Those who drink not only weaken their body and soul, but also take the road to greater and greater impoverishment. It is not known for certain whether the majority of the poor and in any case the non-poor are insubstantial in number in India - drink. But those who drink surely increase their economic misery. 'The majority of the people are controlled by their environment', says Gandhi.

Contemporary repercussions of Gandhi's thought

The Prohibition Enquiry Committee was appointed by the Planning Commission, Government of India in 1954 with Shriman Narayan as Chairman 'to examine the experience gained regarding measures adopted by state Government to promote prohibition with a view to assessing the extent to which these have been successful and analyzing the practical difficulties - administrative, economic, social and other - which have come in the way of implementation of the program of prohibition and to make recommendation for a program for prohibition on a national basis'. As per the article 47 of the constitution, Committee recommended that "there should be stoppage of drinking in hotels, bars, restaurants, messes, clubs, and cinemas and in parties and functions except in hotels serving tourists and visitors which should provide separate room for serving liquors, and advertisements, relating to drinks should be stopped.

Current scenario

Currently in all over India we have four states and one union territory dry which are Bihar, Gujarat, Mizoram and Nagaland and Lakshadweep having blanket ban on alcohol. Some states also practicing partial ban and strict rules for alcohol consumption and trading. Government of India also observe dry days, dry days are specific days when the sale of alcohol is prohibited, such days are Republic Day 26 January, independence Day 15 August and Gandhi Jayanti 2 October. Election commission also bans sale of liquor on polling days. Some states have their own rules for dry days to observe on some religious festivals and functions.

Conclusion

Consuming alcohol is immoral according to Gandhi, not only immoral but fatal for the society and individual. There are many instances where alcohol consumption led to deviation from ethical life. For example drink and drive causes most of the deaths caused by road accident, Traffic violations, domestic violence on women, rapes, misunderstanding in relationship, improper behavior at gatherings, fighting's etc all show that consumption of alcohol leads to unethical life. Good morals lead to better ethics in one's life. Morals must be in tune with ethics in society and then only harmony and peace prevails. Just for personal happiness, having morals which cause hardships to others cannot be termed as moral at all and alcohol consumption is one among such. And in the other way Gandhi also saw alcoholism as an economic problem and linked it with colonial exploitative revenue system. Following strong line is enough to understand Gandhi's anger and anguish on alcoholism.

"I would rather have India reduced to a state of pauperism than have thousands of drunkards in our midst. I would rather have India without education if that is the price to be paid for making it dry".

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