



Socio-Cultural Causes of Alcoholism in the Community of Mountain Region

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Abstract

Alcoholic practices are more commonly found within mountain ethnic communities such as Gurung, Sherpas, Newars, etc. The main objective of this research article is to identify and to explore the causes of alcoholism in the socio-cultural practices of mountain regions. This research is based on a qualitative research approach. A case study and ethnographic observation method are used to collect primary data. The historical content analysis method is used to collect secondary data. The content analysis method is used to analyze both primary and secondary data. There found so many causes behind alcoholism. The cultures, the rituals, the unemployment, the peer pressures, the circle, the job nature, the passion, the environment, the weather, the untimely demise of beloved ones, the miseries, the poverty, the enjoyment, and the happiness, the unawareness all lead and inspire people to have alcoholism.

Keywords: Alcoholism, community, culture, ritual, socialization,

Introduction

The division of the caste system according to the Hindu doctrine as traditional drinking caste (Matawali) and some as non-drinking caste (Taghadhari) has played a significance role for making Mongoloid people habitual of alcohol. Alcohol cases are more commonly found within such communities than in the Brahmin communities. Those communities were found far above than the Brahmin in the context of alcohol. It was due to the division of caste system or stratification of people according to the Hindu caste system prevailing from the medieval period, which was not based on the scientific rules. The alcoholism is a legally forbidden personal conduct, which triggers poverty, women violence as well as sexual abuses too (Regmi, 2001). Ortner(1979)writes, The Sherpa method is sheer attrition; they simply will not take no for an answer. The person serving the beer usually the wife, daughter or servant of the host attempts to fill one's glass, saying 'Drink, drink, drink', over and over again. One covers one's glass with one's hand, but the server tries to pry one's hand off or to pull the glass out of one's hand, continuing to cry, 'Drink, drink!' The guest may resort to hiding his glass under the bench with the server dragging at his arm. Finally again the host and other members of the host family chime in 'Drink! Drink!' And again one finally relents. Similarly Lowdin(1998)adds that *Ayela*, the distilled liquor by the women from rice or millet is used to greet the guests in Newari culture. At some festivals, it is made and consumed in many households. The quality of the liquor determines the host's reputation. It is extensively used, particularly on feast days and animal sacrifices which are concluded by a toast of *ayela*, which is offered even to the children as sacrament. Religiously, *ayela* is connected to *Jogini*. According to Dahit(2062BS), liquor is to be offered on the head of the goat or pig during the puja called the *poot parahau* in Tharu culture which is conducted after one year from the birth of a child to wish the child's success, happiness, wellbeing etc. The homemade liquor is compulsory to fix the marriage, which is called *pakka porahi*. Also, it is equally necessary to conduct *pujas* on the festive occasions. The ancestral spirits or household divinities are to be offered with liquor during the *kulpuja*.

The Newars attach much importance to these homemade items of food and drinks because if these are obtained from outside, it dampens the prestige of the family. It takes months to prepare these items. Liquor is stored in huge earthen jars known as *tepa-ghyampa*. Liquor serves as the means for the manifestations of protest in case either of the parties cancels the marriage. As a retaliatory measure in such cases, the huge earthen jars containing the liquor are brought to the locality of the failing party. In front of its house, the liquor is spilt over and the jars broken to pieces. By this, it is implied that the party is insulted and dishonored (Nepali, 1988).

Pignede has intensively studied about the Gurungs and writes, One day, at about 6 o'clock in the evening; a dispute breaks out between the *pacu* priest and his neighbor. The priest was lazy and very fond of grain alcohol. He was poor. His neighbor, a woman of 62, was fairly rich. That evening, the *pacu*, a little worse for drink, comes as usual, to ask, or rather beg, for something from his neighbor who for one reason or another refuses him. The priest answered her curtly. His neighbor took offence and soon the man and woman were saying what was in their minds. "Lazy, alcoholic!" she cried. "Miserly, rude woman!" he shouted back. The next morning, the dispute revived for a few minutes and then died away. Everything returns to normal

(Pignede, 1993). In this context, this paper is focused to explore the socio-cultural causes of alcoholism in mountain region including Gurung community.

Objective and Method

The main objective of this research article to identify and to explore the causes of alcoholism in the socio-cultural practices of mountain region. This research is based on qualitative research approach. Both primary and secondary data are used in this research. Case study and ethnographic observation method is used to collect primary data. Purposive and snowball sampling method is used to participated in cases. Historical content analysis method is used to collect secondary data. Content analysis method is used to analyze the both primary and secondary data.

Theoretical Discourse

Culture drive to individuals in adopting process of socio-cultural circumstances of socio-cultural structure (Harris, 1971). Similarly, Linton(1945) states that the culture of society is the way of life of its members, the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. To a large degree culture determines how members of a society think and feel it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. Members of society usually take their culture for granted. Every society has certain common problems to deal with, for example the problem of dependent members such as the very young and the very old. However, solutions to such problems are culturally determined: they vary from society to society. The solutions provided in one society may well be regarded as indefensible by members of their societies (Haralammbos and Heald, 2010).

Findings and Discussion

The Social Circumstances

In some communities like that of the Gurungs, the social environment is such that mostly the women usually urge for drinking whether it be for greeting or hospitality. Being a member of a society, the alcoholic can find people like him and he is more convinced that he is not alone to drink alcohol. It means there are many drunker in a society and drinking alcohol has been a passion due to its cultural acceptability. According to them, most people drink alcohol, so why not me? The alcohol prone environment or the uncontrolled production, selling and consumption of alcohol are the contributing factors to alcoholism.

Easily available

From my own experience from the east Panchthar to the west Surkhet in a long career of about 18 years, with more than 300 communities of different and diverse ethnicities and culture, there founds its prevalence everywhere and none of them was alcohol free community. According to case-1, it is easily available locally in abundance is another cause behind alcoholism. Also, it has been source of income for many households. It is prepared locally and can be sold to the users in an unhindered way to make quick money.

Peer Pressure

It is a common cause to drink alcohol amongst the teenagers. They get indulged for alcoholism due to the peer pressure which has been main a cause of being delinquent. As per cases No. 9 and 12, the main cause behind being them habitual was due to the peer pressure. In this world, nobody can be without fellow friends but the peer pressure and the imitation of circle's bad habit in the name of solidarity, amalgamation and comradeship have been the main causes behind alcoholism. At first, they take just for curiosity but later on they become habitual drinking frequently. Most of the teenagers are found binge drinkers in festive occasions.

The Family Conflict

Any conflict within the household and family, with the friends can lead a person to alcoholism. As per cases No.9, 8 and 7; the family conflict especially with their wives led them towards alcoholism. Case 7 said that due to his excessive drinking behavior, the second wife also left him as she did not like such behavior although the couple has a daughter. He could not respect and endorse the wife's desire, so the family conflict/quarrel caused to break up the husband wife's relationship, he said with regret.

Tragedy/Break up

Some were found alcoholic after the tragedy/mishap with them. Case 3 and 4 said that they could not stop drinking after their beloved father and mother's sudden deaths respectively. As per case 5, he became heavy drunker after the break up with his first wife. She became drunker after the divorce with her husband who was a British army. So, it is one factor due to which a person gets indulged for alcoholism. This means, people drink alcohol to relieve from mental tension and stress. Such tragedy and break up scenes are often shown with drinking much alcohol in the cinema too. So, it has been symbolic to such events.

Seniors' Impression

My parents also used to drink liquor, said case 6 and 10 and so many others which can be considered as genetic or seniors' impression. It means there was a drinking environment within their families and communities which impressed and motivated them for drinking liquor. The family impression is such impression which inspires people to start liquor from own household.

Job Nature

Job nature has been found one of the contributing factors for alcoholism. A job far from the household in the remote and cold areas is a cause behind alcoholism. The army career is also another factor which encourages people for alcoholism. During the service periods in Jomsom and Manang which is mountain region of Nepal, the money received as salary was not enough even for drinking liquor. According to case 11 and 12, liquor is generally consumed to maintain the exhausted body due to the wage labor work all over the day. Case 12 said, after promotion the dose and frequency of liquor drinking was increased due to the facilities in the officers' mess. The respondents who were drivers by the profession said that they became habitual due to the long distance and hectic driving. The field workers who have to conduct frequent field visit programs were also found regular alcohol users.

Obstacle to Success

It is also found as one of the causes of alcoholism. The visa process to Macau was rejected which caused me to be more alcoholic. According case 13, such kind of setback or failure in the course of career making in the lifetime is a reason of alcoholism. As per case 14 and 15, they could not become successful to join to the Indian army due to which they were engulfed of frustration and humiliation and then the liquor became the regular drink in the name to relieve from such tensions and stress, they recalled.

Humiliation (Poor Self-esteem)

“Now the life is over, I can do no more good things in the life”, said case 16, 17 and mentioned, the only option left is to have much liquor so that they could pass out time easily. There is no hope of betterment in the life, which is according to them full of anxieties, miseries and adversities then what the meaning of living is, they say. Such type of perception usually prevails among them, which might be due to the alcoholism as it kills the creative power of the human being because of the alcohol's stimulating and suppressing effect. Now, only the liquor is the most essential substance to live otherwise they cannot even sleep well too.

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We can see only the alcohol drinking is the best way of relaxation displayed in the hoarding boards erected in every juncture of the city and roadway. It also may lead a man to alcoholism. According to case 17 and 19, the Tele-Vision culture has been found one of the contributing factors among the teenagers of the urban areas to render them as heavy and binge drinker

Comparison with untimely deceased non drinkers

My fellow was passed away in his early age who was a non-drinker, someone is sickened although he/she doesn't drink & smoke too, there is always victory of drinker over non-drinker and what the use of money is, says Capt T. Bahadur Gurung of Bhachok. '*Nakhayarabhandha Khayarai Jitinchha*', what for to save, most of them said so. If death is an inevitable, we should do relaxations during the lifetime and after death there is nothing left for him/her, said T. Subba Grg of Pokhara. Being a

member of a society, he/she has many evidences of untimely deaths who did not drink at all. Such logic has been a reason behind the alcoholism. They said, the non-drunker too were passed away in their early ages but some drunker were living healthy long life.

More Pretence

Unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, unawareness, adversity, the leisure time, gambling, the thought of *jataile payako* and *grain juice*, the wild celebrations of Shivaratri, Holy and other festivals, the ceremonies, the present trend of heavy metal rock concerts; all contribute more or less for alcoholism. The prevailing *rodhi* system of grouping in a circle, less priority to education, lack of basic facilities such as schools and hospitals, the cold weather and the festivals; all have a share behind alcoholism. The communities are such where pretences are created to have liquor. It is served and consumed both during the enjoyment and misery i.e. '*Khusima pani dukkhama pani raksii piunchhan*'. It means it has been a common drink in their daily lives. Some usually take it as the matter of prestige or reputation and alcohol is served accordingly with the false concept of making the attendees happy. The wealthy man, the poorest of the poor, the winner and the loser too, all drink liquor making pretence as if liquor drinking is an indispensable part. Some drink to get conditioned as per the environment/situation.

The Sutkeri Pa (in the time of delivery)

The Gurungs brew rice before the child's birth to feed the new child's mom, which is called the *sutkeri pa*. After the delivery, she takes the *pa* so that her body would be hot, she could yield more milk to feed the baby and it makes the mother sleepy. The relatives also come to see the new baby and to have the *pa*. Then, first rice feeding ceremony takes place, for son in six months and for daughter in five months, which is called *kaen piba* followed by a feast where liquor is served to the invitees.

The Chhewar

Tonsure, the *chhewar* by the maternal uncle takes place in the age of 3. A function is organized to feed the guests served with liquor. All the relatives are invited along with the *chelis* who bring liquor as *koseli* to celebrate the *chhewar*. A sum of charity is given away to the child being tonsured by the relatives. Previously, it was conducted for all the sons but nowadays, it is performed for only the sons other than the eldest one for whom the *putpute* is carried out.

The Putpute

The *Putpute* is carried out for the first son when he is 5, 7 or 9 years old. It takes for 2 days which is initiated with *thegana chunba* in the evening followed by a night long Krishna *chalitra* (*charitra*) or *maruni* dance and then ends with blessings or benefaction to the child by the *maruni gurus* and maternal uncles including the dignified adults of the village. Varieties of gifts along with a sum of money are presented to the child. As liquor is prepared on the previous days during the preparation time, it is available thoroughly and served in short time interval all over the night. All the performers and spectators can have it.

Ngyae Chala (Guniyo choli) Pinba (First skirt giving) ceremony

The ceremony takes place when the girl is 9, 11 or 13 years old but it is obsolete now in the urban areas. The ceremony is limited within the family members, the girl's friends and some close relatives only. The seniors are then served with liquor with some *tipan tapan*. The attendees present some gifts to the girl. Now, the girl becomes eligible to wear the traditional Gurung dress.

The Marriage

The marriage ceremony takes place as the micro social institution (Hensline,1997). Previously underage marriages were in practice. Most of them are monogamous but a few are polygamous and in Mustang polygamy too. Previously, marriage by elopement was more in practice and the *rodhis* used to be the elopement centers like marriage bureau. Nowadays, arrange marriages as well as love marriages also equally take place (Giddens,2001). A few eloped others wives too which is an offensive manner. For an arrange marriage, the homemade first class liquor is to be offered for the consent of the bride's side. It is first of all taken to the *nehedhiyan* and then carried to the possible bride's house by the *lamee*. It takes a few days or several days for the decision. The bride's parents, uncles and relatives gather to discuss the matter and finally the proposal is approved by having the liquor otherwise it is returned. In the case of marriage by elopement, the *paindi* decides the *tena kurasi* day to go to the bride's parental house for the consent from the bride's relatives' side. *Choba se* with *nganba pa* are taken with them to visit the bride's parents and relatives. The marriage is then socially sanctioned after accepting the gifts carried along with them (Murdock,1949). For this, sometimes it requires long mediation. A few cases were found rejected as well, as with the case No. 5. After all, all the role players such as the *nehedhiyan ama*, the *calechara*, the *samsyo*, the *lamee*, the guys who carried bride on their backs should tear the leaves of a plant with taking liquor three times and have it (*sonsera*) who are further given away some sum of cash too.

The Chaurasi Puja (Worshiping ceremony of 84 years old)

Some perform the *chaurasi puja* to be conducted by the lamas or pundits where relatives attend the ceremony. The close relatives are invited to attend in the *puja*. It requires a day long time to complete the puja. The old man then presents a sum of money to each attendee with benefactions. The attendees are served with foods including the liquor too. For this too, all the preparations including the liquor making start from 2/3 days before.

The Death Ritual

Ritual is the refinement process of human life cycle (Prabhu,1961).The death rites are conducted either by the *lamas or gyapren (klipren) with pachyu* in Gurung community. To invite them formally, it is compulsory to offer a *theki* of liquor otherwise they won't come. They along with the helpers should serve with liquor in each time interval. The maternal uncles should be compulsorily invited with a *theki* of liquor. The relatives then offer *prasad* including the liquor to the dead body during the death rite performance, which are taken away by the *joyin chela* later on when the dead body is cremated. The *joyin chelas* have the decisive roles in such time. Each of the role players should give away some

sum of money by three times offerings of liquor (*pa thonba*). Then the *paindi* forecasts the best date to conduct the *pae* g which takes place for at least two days. A well preparation then kicks off including the preparation of the liquors, collection of fire woods, big flat tree leaves for having meals, (nowadays it is not in practice due to the availabilities of utensils) etc. During the *pae*, different people execute the different roles such as the *paindi*, the *tharsikhle*, the *khainji*, the *dautharakhle*, the *banwai*, the *khegi*, the *mho kra*, the *dhiyanama* etc and each of them should served with liquor in each time interval until the ending time. The *pla* or *chhempara* containing *astu* of the dead body is decorated with beautiful clothes by the *chelis* offering foods and liquors as *prasad*, then the *chhyantu* or *serga* dance starts and continues till day after tomorrow. The dance performers are to be served with liquors in each time interval all over the night. The initiation, the welcome, the farewell and the ending all are done by serving liquor. The lamas also use liquor to execute *sergema* to be done many times during the *pae*. The guests present in the *pae* are invited to each relative's house where they are served with liquor including the *cellroti*.

Conclusion

Although alcohol is a hazardous drink, many get intoxicated with alcohol during the process of socialization. It might be more or less the reasons to get conditioned themselves to the situation, environment, circle, ritual, or culture. According to the case study, none of them had used alcohol inappropriately in the initial phase or during the underage. They had used it saying 'First time' many times. In the process of socialization and acculturation, he/she drank many times to celebrate ceremonies, feasts, and festivals or in the pretenses of enjoyment or to relieve mental and physical tension and stress, etc. In this way, saying many times to quit the drinking habit, slowly and slowly the abuser comes under its influence and becomes addicted. According to the facts of ethnographic observation and case study, we can draw a conclusion that the alcoholism has been an indispensable substance to the people's lives and the alcoholism exists in every human settlement as it has been consumed since the time immemorial. There found so many causes behind alcoholism. The cultures, the rituals, the unemployment, the peer pressures, the circle, the job nature, the passion, the environment, the weather, the untimely demise of beloved ones, the miseries, the poverty, the enjoyment, and the happiness, the unawareness all lead and inspire people to have alcoholism. These facts are partial analog to the theoretical explanation of Linton, Harris, and Haralambos.

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