



THE SOCIAL COST OF ALCOHOLISM IN WEST BENGAL: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

In Indian social phenomenon, role of alcohol in domestic violence is one of the trending and debating issues. The researcher has tried to find out the link between the two variables i.e. alcoholism and domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Further, the researcher examines the social cost of the alcoholism in the state of West Bengal. In the writing of the report views of the 39 women regarding the alcoholism has been taken and analyzed in details. Researcher has received very interesting data and surprising results while examining and analyzing it. The study has revealed that still in Indian society nearly 50 percent women consider alcohol consumption as a social stigma. Further, 31% of women experiences behavioural changes in their partners while they consumed alcohol. Interestingly, about 80% women in India consider alcoholism as responsible for increasing domestic violence in society and 62% consider its responsible of other women related violence. Moreover, the question was asked on possibility of state ban on alcoholism in West Bengal. On this 77% women opined that the state government should prohibit it.

Index Terms - Social Cost of Alcoholism, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Spousal Abuse

I. Introduction

Indian religious and traditional cultural was not supporting the alcohol consumption and it's basically adopted from the western countries. Some historians suggested that ancient south Indians had some knowledge of preparing alcohols. Before the Aryans arrived in India about 1500 BC, there are some evidence that alcohol use was solely a cultural and religious practice among Indian.¹ As well as Fundamental Duties of our Constitution under Part-IV-A state that citizens to cherish and follow the noble ideas which inspired our national struggle for freedom. In this regards we must not forget anti-alcoholism was one of the noble ideas that led to the national movement.² Although directive principles are not enforceable in Court but they are fundamental in governance of the country. According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, it is meaningless to say that directive principles have no value. He considers that they are quite

¹ Saji Joseph & Hemalatha K, "Alcohol and alcoholism in India: A Historical Review", IJSHR, Vol. 5, Issue: 5, October, 2020.

² See, Article 51A (b), The Constitution of India, 1950.

valuable since they establish that economic democracy in India what we should strive for.³ Our constitution embodied few noble ideas within its preamble and under the directive principles of the state policies which aims to improve moral and ethical character of the citizens. In this context Article 47 of the Constitution entrusted the state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living and improve public health and specially to prohibition of the consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health.⁴ Strict prohibition on consumption of alcohol has not been imposed by any state government rather they regulated and used Alcohol as a mean to earn the revenue. In spite of having severe health issues and adverse effect on the public health and safety various state governments encourage the production and sell of alcohol. In this paper special focus is given to alcoholism and its impact towards the public health as well as moral character of citizens. Further, it examines the impact of alcohol upon women specially suffering in domestic frontier. Under the federal structure of the Indian Government the duty to regulate, manufacture and production of alcoholic liquors for human consumption are entrusted to state government under Entry 51 of the List II of the Seventh Schedule of Constitution. So, the various state governments take alcohol as the mean to earn the revenue of the government. A study has shown that availability of the alcohol in the rural and urban areas is a major factor for domestic violence.⁵ Some of the social scientists mark alcohol as the key influencer in marital violence or intimate partner violence.⁶

It is well known that alcohol has a strong relation with the mental disorder and stress or depression.⁷ According to various medical surveys, most of the alcoholic are suffering in Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and General Anxiety Disorder (GAD)⁸, many of the alcohol users are prone to suicide.⁹ Alcoholism has recently increased in all over the India and it has a potentially adverse effect on mental balance of a person. Sometimes, it works as reinforcement to crimes such as domestic violence and road accidents.¹⁰

II. Hypotheses

In the last few decades noticeable increase in the domestic violence has been seen in the Indian society. Specially, during the Covid-19 pandemic the domestic violence and marital violence has increased drastically. At the same time at this period, the country has witnessed highest sale of alcohol in the Indian market. Therefore, it can be presume that behind these increase of domestic violence the use of alcohol might be played a vital role. Alcohol is works as a mood enhancer and a cause of increasing women related

³ The Constituent Assembly Debate, 3 Vol. VII, pp.494-495.

⁴ See, Article 47, The Constitution of India, 1950.

⁵ D.M. Gorman & Erich W.Labouvie et. al. "Alcohol Availablity and Domestic Violence", Drug Alcohol Abuse, 24 (4), 1998 p.663.

⁶ Leonard, K. E., Drinking patterns and intoxication in marital violence: Review, critique, and future directions for research, in *Alcohol and Interpersonal Violence: Fostering Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (S. E. Martin, Ed.), NIAAA Research Monograph No. 24, US. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1993, pp. 253-280.

⁷ Birgitte Thylstrup & Kim Bloomfield et. al. "Alcohol consumption, mental health status, and treatment in Nigeria and Uganda", 7(1), IJADR, 2018, 40 – 47

⁸ Grant, B. F. & Goldstein, R. B et al. (2009). "Socio-demographic and psychopathologic predictors of first incidence of DSM-IV substance use, mood and anxiety disorders: Results from the Wave 2 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions" *Molecular Psychiatry*, 14(11), 1051–1066.

⁹ Maurizio pompili & Gianluca Serafiui et al., "Suicidal Behaviour and Alcohol Abuse", 7 (4), Int J Environ Res Public Health, 2010 Apr; 7(4): 1392–1431.

¹⁰ R.V. Bhatt, "Domestic Violence and Substance abuse, International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics 63 Suppl. 1 (1998), p. 26-27.

violence in the Indian society. Probably, alcohol works as a catalyst for increase of domestic violence and women related crimes in West Bengal as well as in India.

Secondly, State governments are generating huge amount of revenue by the sale of alcohol probably this is the reasons for not prohibiting the alcohol. In spite of reducing or controlling the intoxicated substance the state governments are indulging or promoting the production and sale of liquors. Further, law regulating the availability, sale and production of the alcohol and other intoxicated drinks are not sufficient to control its abuses and the social cost of alcoholism is higher than the revenue earned from its sale and production.

III. Research Methodology

Researcher has worked mainly with two variables i.e. 'Domestic Violence' and 'Alcoholism' and tries to find out relation between them. Some primary data has been collected by the researcher via *Google form* and a questionnaire has been circulated to target groups. The maximum selected population of the sample area is college students or university students and the house wives. The researcher has carefully analyzed the responses of the research participants. There were 64 participants among them 39 female and 24 male and they shared their view regarding consumption of alcohol and socio- economical consequences of the alcoholism in India. This article mainly analyses the data collected from specified sample area and primary data collected by sending questionnaire. Researcher has analyzed some secondary data from the various reliable sources such as research articles, journals, books, periodicals and news paper reports. These secondary data provides a theoretical or doctrinal basis of the research work. After collecting these newspaper articles and research articles researcher has arranged it in chronologically. Depending on such doctrinal data a basic presumption has been made and hypotheses have been framed. Moreover, utmost care has been about confidentiality of the research participates.

IV. The Gandhian Philosophy and Alcoholism

The father of nation M.K. Gandhi was completely opposed to alcohol consumption. According to him, consumption of liquor is the prime social evil, because of it the poverty and health issues are increasing in India. As a life-long follower of teetotalism, he dreamt for an alcohol free nation.¹¹ At the time of the independence movement, Gandhi campaign for total prohibition as a protest against British Colonialism.¹² His inspiration has ultimately resulted under the draft constitution of India and under Article 47 of the constitution enshrine for prohibition of alcoholism.

However, after Gandhi no politician has tried to implement the Gandhi's commitment to prohibition to liquor. The total prohibition of alcohol was a campaign against British rulers as British heavily rely on revenue on the sale of alcohol. Drinking alcohol is British culture not Indian. On the contrary, alcohol consumption was considered as social taboo in India.¹³ Even before the Gandhi two great Hindu leaders of Indian National Congress has advocated for total prohibition of Alcohol in India. They were Gopal Krishna

¹¹ RAMACHANDRA GUHA, GANDHI BEFORE INDIA (2016).

¹² M. K. GANDHI, INDIA OF MY DREAMS (2021)., Pravat Prakasani, 63.

¹³ David Hardiman, "From Custom to Crime: The Politics of Drinking in Colonial South Gujarat," *Subaltern Studies*, 4 (1985), 165-66.

Gokhale and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, independently before Gandhi argued for total prohibition of Alcohol. On the other hand, Indian religious influences promoted Gandhi to shape his prohibition policy because nearly all of the Indian religions condemned the drinking of liquor or any injurious substances. This presumption reached the Gandhi nearly perfection that “*Drinking is not a fashion in India as it is in the West.*”¹⁴

Further, Gandhi stigmatized the alcohol consumption as foreign to India and blame on British for introducing foreign liquor as an imperialistic strategy. Therefore, Gandhi considered the journey towards the total prohibition of alcohol was a part of its patriotic pursuit towards independence. Surprisingly, today we forget the philosophy and noble ideas of the nationalist movement. Presently, in India drinking becomes a ritualistic and occasional to a part of routine everyday social intercourse and amusement.¹⁵

Some Gandhian philosopher also argued that his anti-liquor campaign did hit on British revenues as well as its appeal towards the purification of Indian as a part of ‘*Sanskritization*’. At the time of the ‘*Swadeshi*’ movement a simultaneous process of ‘*Sanskritization*’ was carried on and the lower caste Hindus were tried to uplift their life through the purification. In order to purification they scarify their habits of alcoholism.¹⁶ Thus, Gandhi considered the drinking habits as the vices of the poor.¹⁷ The reason behind this assumption was before the nineteenth century very few members of the higher castes drink regularly. By the end of the nineteenth century this tradition was beginning to change.¹⁸ He had a notion that total prohibition of alcohol is quite easy to India, because it is only a minority that drinks.¹⁹ Gandhi believed that India could prove the efficacy of prohibition of alcohol as India has the capacity and the opportunity to lead the world in the matter of prohibition.²⁰

V. Drinking Habits of Indian and its Consequences

In recent times it has been witnessed that alcohol consuming population of India has increased drastically. The National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5) 2019-21 has reported almost 1% women aged 15 and over drink alcohol and up to 19% of men drink alcohol in same age group.²¹ Further, this population has comparatively higher in urban men up to 19.9% whereas 16.5% among the rural men.²² There are mostly five southern states i.e. Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan collectively hold the 75 % of liquor consumption in the country.²³ It has been seen that incidents of

¹⁴ “Drugs, Drink and Devil,” *Young India*, 22 April, 1926, *Collected Works*, 30:339.

¹⁵ David M. Fahey and Padma Maian et al. “Poverty and Purification: The Politics of Gandhi’s Campaign for Prohibition”, *The Historian*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (2005), pp. 489-490.

¹⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Pearson, 2014, pp. 166-168.

¹⁷ GANDHI, *supra* note 13.

¹⁸ Marc Jason Gilbert, “Drunk on Empire: Alcohol, Opium, the Indian National Congress and the Raj: 1891-1900,” paper presented at the conference *Drugs and Empire: Narcotic History and Modern Colonialism*, Strathclyde University, Glasgow, Scotland, 10-11 April, 2003.

¹⁹ “Criticism Answered,” *Haijan*, 31 July 1937, *Collected Works*, 65: 448.

²⁰ “Prohibition”, *Harijan*, 15 September 1946, *Collected Works*, 92: 133-34, also see, N. Prabha Unnithan and Jay Corzine, “An Application of Status- Politics Theory: Alcohol Prohibition in India and the United States”, *Comparative Social Research*, 10(1987) : 185-204.

²¹ Afshan Yasmeen, *Alcohol consumption among men in India has decreased by 7% since 2015, finds NFHS-5 report*, THE HINDU, May 9, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/alcohol-consumption-among-men-has-decreased-by-7-since-2015-finds-nfhs-5-report/article65398630.ece> (last visited Oct 8, 2022).

²² Editorial, “Alcohol Consumption in India: Trends across States, age groups”, *The Indian Express*, 17 May, 2022.

²³ Editorial, With 45 per cent of national intake, southern states draw 10-15 per cent revenue from liquor: Report, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, May 8, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/liquor/with-45-pc-of-national-intake-southern-states-draw-10-15-pc-revenue-from-liquor-report/articleshow/75609329.cms?from=mdr> (last visited Oct 8, 2022).

domestic violence are comparatively higher in the alcohol consuming states. Although liquor is alleged as catalyst for increase of domestic violence, state governments are reluctant to prohibit it.

However, liquor sale is a big factor in the fiscal budget as a matter of revenue. Alcohol is the easiest way to increase the revenue by the state government. During the Covid- 19 pandemic Delhi government hike the liquor price more than 70% but it did not much adversely affect the sale of liquor. Thus, during the lockdown drinking habits of the Indians are constant and regular.²⁴ During the Covid-19 pandemic a survey report shows that Delhi gets its 12% of the total tax revenue from liquor. Some states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala earn more than 15% of their state revenue from alcohol. Further, for Kerala the tax on liquor is its largest revenue source.²⁵ In the Five southern states- Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala the more than 10% of the revenues come from alcohol.²⁶ These are the prime reasons which tempted the state government not to prohibit the alcohol rather promote its sale and production.

Therefore, fiscally starved states in India find the liquor taxation as an opportunity to raise the revenue. Further, the state find it administratively easy route to increase the revenues through the heavy taxation on the liquor. In this way, the state becomes a partner in promotion of the consumption of alcohol and other potentially addictive substance.²⁷ Moreover, the state government cannot withdraw its responsibility from the offences which are incidental to alcoholism.

VI. Consequences of Alcohol Abuse

Various studies have suggested that alcohol works as cycle of violence. Alcohol function as a mood enhancer and it has a direct correlation with feelings of anger, frustration and irritation. Substance uses may aggravate the feeling of anger towards the gender norms and may shift the focus on the women.²⁸ Even in this twenty first century women are vulnerable so they are the soft targets of the alcoholic. Sometimes intimate partner violence due to alcoholism may not be reported on the account of social stigma. There are so many awareness campaigns involving all level of stakeholders regarding domestic violence. Unfortunately, these are not fruitful in the real sense. The reason behind those liquor traders has the government licenses and the police also gives protection to these liquor trader. Therefore, the campaign carried forwarded by the women cannot be successful.²⁹

The social cost of the alcoholism is very high but state governments never critically examine the social cost of it. A report presented in the Karnataka shows while the state government earned revenue Rs. 581.5 crores through taxation on alcohol. On the other hand, it had to pay Rs. 18.09 crores as individual

²⁴ Harikishan Sharma, "Explained: Why liquor sales matter to states", The Indian Express, Feb 28, 2022.

²⁵ Crisil Report, "Covid Corollaries: Bottled revenues and uncorked spits", 7th May, 2020.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Harikrishan Sharma, "Explained: Why liquor sales matter to states", The Indian Express, 14th May, 2020.

²⁸ VASUNDHARAA S. NAIR & DEBANJAN BANERJEE, "CRISIS WITHIN THE WALLS": RISE OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC, INDIAN PERSPECTIVES", FRONT GLOB WOMENS HEALTH, 28TH MAY, 2021.

²⁹ Women stage protest, want liquor sale to stop, THE TIMES OF INDIA, May 7, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vijayawada/women-stage-protest-want-liquor-sale-to-stop/articleshow/75585296.cms> (last visited Oct 8, 2022).

health payments and it spent Rs. 1147.48 crores in hospital costs along. Thus, the social costs of alcoholism far outweigh the benefits arises from the sale and taxation of the alcohol.³⁰

Thus, some of the social researcher has mentioned alcohol as the road of destruction and reason for fragmentation of social fabric. Prolong use of the alcohol is one of the reason for perpetual domestic violence in the family sphere.³¹ Tobacco, alcohol and all other substance uses are responsible for economic downfall and disturbance of social harmony.³² Alcohol is one of the factors for the marriage brake down in the recent times.³³

VII. Analyzing the data

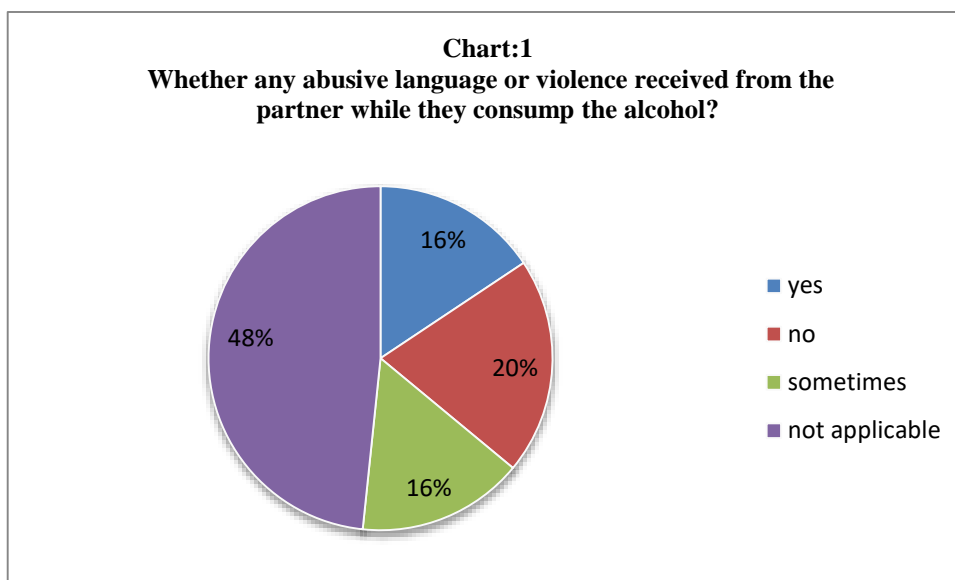
The researcher has designed questionnaire to find out the data from the specific sample area. The target group was basically College or University students and house wives. The main objectives were to find out the intimate partner violence caused by the alcohol consumption. The research hypothesis leads that alcohol works as a catalyst to the domestic violence and mood enhancer and therefore it increase the chances of domestic violence. Therefore, the researcher has asked the question whether the participant received any abusive language, misbehaviour or physical or mental violence while their partners consume alcohol. Among the responses 16% specifically mentioned that they have received misbehavior or physical or mental violence while their partners consumed alcohol. Again, another 16% women response they have often received violence or abusive behaviour from their partners while they are drunk. Finally, if we sum up both types of responses it will be 32% altogether that either experiences regular violence or irregular violence from their partners while they have consumed alcohol. Again, 20% of the total responses are negative regarding the partner violence or abuse. They said that they have no experience of intimate partner violence while they are drunk or intoxicated. Therefore, the presumption that alcohol works as a catalyst to increase the violence in the domestic relationship and intimated partner violence is to some extent true. Thus, the initial hypothesis that alcohol works as catalyst to the domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

³⁰ V.Bengal & A. Velayudhan *et al*, "The Social Cost of Alcoholism: A Karnataka Perspective", NIMHANS Journal, 18 (1 & 2) p.3.

³¹ R.V. Bhatt, "Domestic Violence and Substance Use", International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics 63 Suppl. 1 (1998) pp.26.

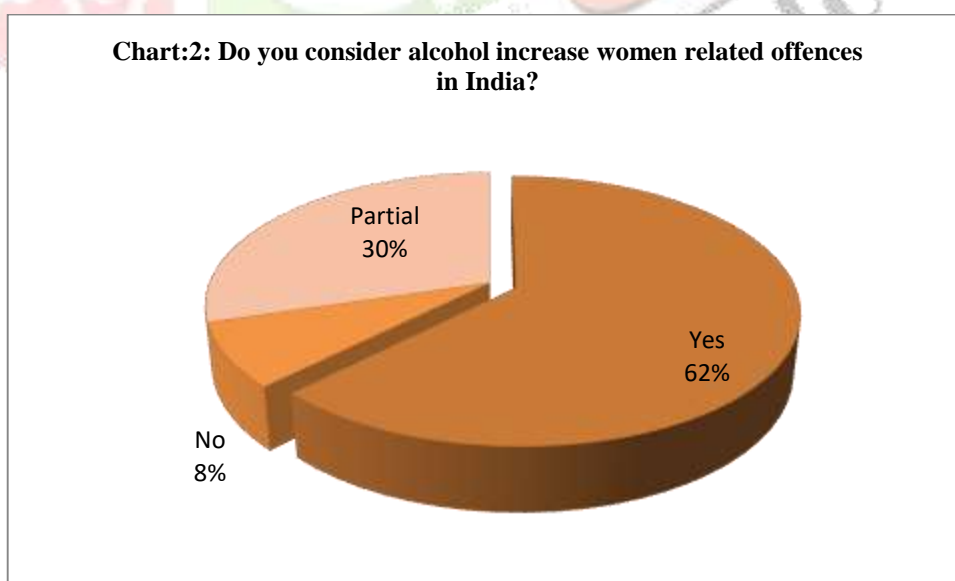
³² *Ibid*.

³³ V.Bengal & A. Velayudhan *et al*, "The Social Cost of Alcoholism: A Karnataka Perspective", NIMHANS Journal, 18 (1 & 2) p.5.



Secondly, the researcher asked do you consider alcoholism increase the domestic violence in the society? In this question 79.8 % responses affirmed that they consider alcoholism increase the chances domestic violence in the society. Further, 16% of the responses said that maybe it is a cause of domestic violence. Thus, women belief alcoholism is one of the causes of increasing domestic violence. During the Covid-19 pandemic sale of alcohol has been increased as well as numbers of cases of domestic violence also increase.³⁴ It shows that there is a casual and direct proportionate relationship between the two variables.

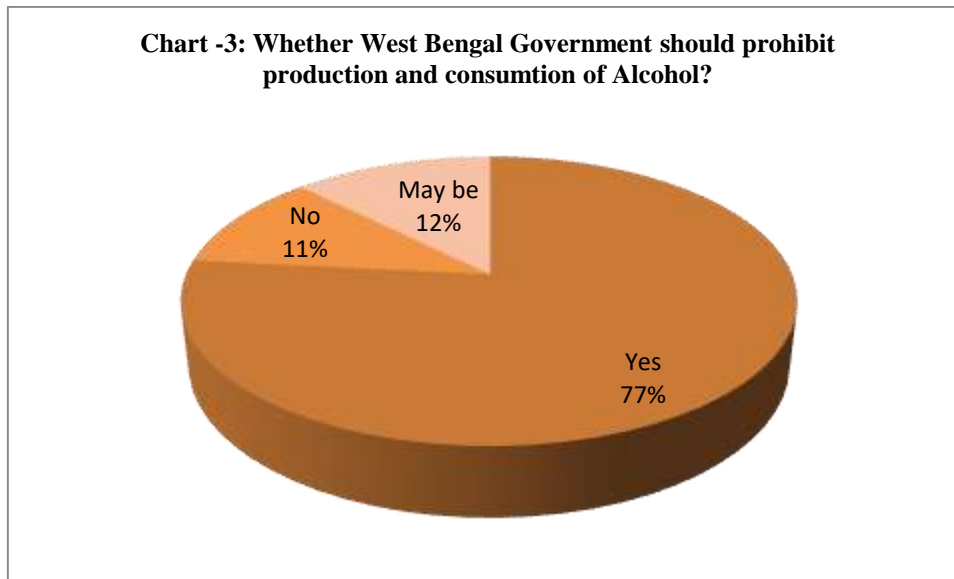
Thirdly, researcher asked whether they consider alcohol increase women related offences in India. The responses are affirmative from the maximum women, almost 62% women belief that alcohol increases the chances of the women related offences in the society. Moreover, 29.7% women belief that it has the partial effect on the women related offences. In the other words, 29.7% women consider that alcohol may not have any direct effect to the women related offences but it has the indirect or partial impact on the women related violence.



Fourth and most interesting question researcher put forward to the sample population whether they consider the West Bengal Government should prohibit the production and consumption of alcohol as like the state of

³⁴ Akshaya Krishna Kumar & Shankey Verma et al, "Understanding Domestic Violence in India during COVID-19: a routine Activity Approach, Asian Journal of Criminology, (2021) 16 p. 33.

Bihar, Gujarat, Mizoram and Nagaland? Although it definitely reduced the revenue of the state government but increase the quality of the social and economic life of its inhabitants. And definitely it will reduce the women related violence and offences in the state.



Off course, this answer presumes to be affirmative. Certainly, it reveals that 77% of the responses are the affirmative towards the ban on the alcohol in West Bengal. It is a huge number of responses which belief that alcoholism should not be promoted in the state. On the other hand, 12% of the responses state it 'may be' prohibited in the state of West Bengal. Probably, this segment of the population thinks that the government would have lost revenue from the sale of alcohol or there may be some other reason. There the researcher should have impose another filter for those responses who states the West Bengal Government should not prohibit the consumption and production of Alcohol in the state that to mention what is the reasons behind their responses. As we see in the Chart No.3 that 11% of the women responses that state government should not ban or prohibit alcohol in West Bengal. There must be some reasons that must be recorded but the researcher has failed to give another filter / questionnaire that what are the rationale not to impose ban on the alcohol. However, some assumption can be framed that 11% of the responses may consider about the revenue generated by the government from the sale of alcohol.

VIII. Limitations

There are certain limitations of this research article. *Firstly*, there are limited numbers of participants i.e. 64. Further, most of the participants are selected from the College or University students so the women from the other section of the society that been excluded. If the women from the other sections of the society have been taken the result would have been different. There may be some biasness among the participants regarding the consumption of alcohol that may reflect in their responses.

Secondly, the study collect the data on domestic violence in general sense but intensity or gravity of the offences and nature of the offences has not been considered. This is one of the major limitations of this study.

IX. Conclusion and Suggestions

No state government consider about the social cost of the alcoholism in India.³⁵ During the pandemic it has been seen that number of complaints of domestic violence has been rapidly raised. In 2019 the numbers of complaint were 2,960 it increases to 5,297 in 2020.³⁶ At the time of lockdown maximum population was restricted within four walls, but domestic violence and intimate partner violence were increased vividly. Further, according to the National Commission of Women received complaints for violence against women more than 23,722 in 2020 which were 19,730 in 2019. That shows the total number of complaints has been increased more than 20% within one year.

After careful analysis of the above data following recommendation can be given:

1. It may be suggested that regarding any policy decision on alcohol state government must analyze socio-economical cost of alcoholism. Therefore, in regards to the alcohol policy setting the revenue centric persuasion must be set aside and social cost of the alcoholism should be taken into consideration.
2. There should be a uniform policy in regards to the alcoholism. We have seen one state prohibits and another states promote the policy therefore people export the alcohol from the other states and there is no bar on consumption. Such activities futile the entire welfare measures, advocated under the Article 47 of the constitution of India.
3. Alcohol policy and legislation in India is based on political compulsions rather than the interests of public health. Part of the reason is that there has been little attempt to examine the economic and social burden generated by alcohol misuse to provide a sound guide for policy makers.
4. The opinion of the women should be taken before setting up any policy regarding alcohol because they suffer most in domestic frontiers. In recent times we have seen women have protested against liquor shop in villages but state aided police force protects the liquor shops. Thus, the feminist movement against alcoholism has been precluded and diminished by the government force which is not a sign of good governance. The feminist view point should be considered before fixed any policy by the state government regarding the alcohol.
5. There is no national level survey regarding the percentage of the alcohol consumption and hospitalization cases due to the alcohol consumption. There should be a record of hospital admission due alcohol consumption and the death due to alcoholism. So, that the government which promotes the alcoholism can measure the social cost of it. Certainly it will fade away the revenue earned by selling alcohol.

³⁵ Murthy, P.J.N.V. & Bengal, V.(1995) Alcoholism in women. Paper presented at 47th ANCIPS Patna. Singh, G. (1986) Epidemiology of alcohol abuse in India. In the Proceedings of the Indo US Symposium on alcohol and drug abuse, (ed) Ray, R. & Pickens, R.W. NIMHANS Publication No. 20, Bangalore.

³⁶ PTI, "Complaints of domestic violence against women spiked in year of lockdown: NCW data", Times of India, 23rd March, 2021. Available at:

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/81687915.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

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