

CULTURE AND ALCOHOLISM:
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON CONSUMPTION



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Abstract

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Abstract

Alcoholism is a major social issue in the contemporary society, most of the alcohol users are influenced to use is due to socio-cultural practices and personal relationship and ironically alcohol also has latter effects on these practices and relationships. Alcohol consumption have increasingly become a trend ranging from adults to adolescent, in this paper we try to understand the influences of alcohol at a cultural level. Cultural practices have a huge impact, or some extend controls an individual behavior and their everyday life, rituals involving consumption of alcoholic beverage on the similar lines have effects at a societal and individual level.

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Culture and Behaviorism

Culture influences not only our language but also gestures we use when we interact. Culture plays a significant role in the values we consider most important and what we may impart to the generations ahead. Culture represents the beliefs, practices, and artefacts of a group while society is the social organization of the people who share those beliefs and practices. Culture is the base of society without which society will not exist, and nor can culture exist without society. Let's consider why greet someone with folded hands? Why younger generation touch elder's feet and not the other way around? These are some unwritten rules that people get accustomed to when practice on a daily basis or has roots to a ritual performed. Basically, our behavior is guided in part by a set of social norms about morality (morality refers to a system of beliefs about what is right and good compared to what is wrong or bad, these differ across time, place, and cultures) that forms the basic and important part of our culture.

To a large degree culture determines how members of society think and feel, directs their actions, and defines their outlook in life. It defines the accepted ways of behavior for members of society, so in order to survive individuals must learn the accepted way, and this process of learning society's culture is called socialization.

Across various societies and culture consumption of alcohol in rituals are mandatory, whether be the event is celebratory or ceremonies of death. In many tribal societies consumption of locally brewed alcohol is distributed to the members of the community as a part of rituals. Alcohol affects the brain hitting it hits at the chemical level in multiple areas of the brain, produces a sort of 'high' that individuals begin to crave, eventually they feel 'not normal' without consuming it. Drinking becomes habitual and more and more is consumed to feel better/good this the psychological addiction. Now, physical addiction occurs when an individual is unable to stop without experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

1.2 Alcohol Definition

Alcohol refers to 'ethyl alcohol' consumed in in diluted concentration of absolute EA. Alcohol is a liquid formed by yeast or other bacteria when ferments the sugar present in different food.

Standard alcohol beverage corresponds to 10g of absolute alcohol, however the quantity differs among the types of alcoholic beverages, most commonly consumed are wine which is made from sugar of grapes, beer is made from the sugar of malted barley, whiskey from sugar of cereal grains, rum is made from molasses/sugarcane, vodka from sugar of beets, potatoes or other plants and brandy from multiple fruit juices and the one that is locally brewed are made from multiple ingredients depending on which place it belongs to.

Alcohol effects the nervous system of the body that occurs within a few minutes of drinking, however it might vary depending upon the body weight, age, even weather. Alcohol use is widely prevalent in Indian society and consequently results in widespread losses in the form of injuries physical health outcomes along with various mental and behavioral problems. According to the NHP in 2005 17.4% (62.5 Mn) people have alcohol disorders where male proportion varied from 23% to 74% while women were 24% to 48%. 40% of the road traffic accidents occur under the influence of alcohol where majority of them are at the productive age from 20-50 years. 10-15% of people with alcohol related problem commit suicide which is considered high compared to general population. 35-40% women have a baby with defects if the women drink while pregnant, alcohol use during pregnancy results in foetal alcohol syndrome which is leading cause of intellectual disability in kids.

The objective of the research is to understand the relation or linkage of culture and ritual drinking of beverage of particular societies all over India. The aim of the study to understand that influence of culture of individuals into drinking among various societies and communities present in India.

CHAPTER II – ALCOHOL CONSUMING SOCIETIES

The history of intoxication in India is as old as its gods. Like the Greek ambrosia or nectar, Hindu texts mention *amrit* or *soma*, the divine elixir that gave Vedic gods immortality. Agni consumed it in copious quantities and Indra drank rivers of soma for strength to overcome *Vrittra*, the fearsome three-headed dragon. Alcohol has, since time immemorial, been an indispensable part of all celebrations.

2.1. Rice beer in Assam

2.1.1 Apong in Mising community of Assam

Rice is a staple food supported by wild vegetables, the alcoholic beverage referred as Apong is fermented from rice and is the common drink of the Mising people referred as Miri in Indian constitution. The significance of rice can be understood from the fact that almost every other festival that is celebrated in North-East Bharat is a tribute to the different varieties of rice which are sown during different seasons of the year. Apong acts as an integral part of social, cultural, and religious life of the community as it is used in cultural and religious occasions like Midang (traditional Marriage), Ui (rituals), Tani Siko (death ceremonies or rituals), and other festivals. It is considered a symbol of honour while receiving guests to pour a glass of Apong by the host family. There are two kinds of apong Nogin and Poro. Nogin has fermented rice and the starter cakes called E'pob made by crushing rice and medicinal plants providing a unique health quotient (and sweetness) to the drink. Poro is prepared with fermented rice and rice straw which leaves a dark brown color, an apong pitha yeast culture is made.

The Mising tribe ferments rice with dietary sincerity, in the olden days, so their ancestors claim, the intake of Apong (local rice beer) was restricted to the immortal gods. Misings often trace their geographical lineage, reveal how the mortals rescued the “secret ingredient”. Way before maps and clocks were invented, fearless Misings aspired for equality, and today, though the brewing of rice beer is considered sacred in ceremonies, they believe true holiness is achieved by coming together to sip rice beer, overcoming one's communal barriers, joys, and sorrows. There are folk songs stressing on the importance of apong by alluding to the taste of wooing women.

Additionally, Idioms and riddles, mention of apong mythical stories, which might contribute to more consumption of the drink.

2.1.2 Hor in Karbi Community of Assam

Horlang (rice beer) and Arak (distilled spirits) are produced by Karbi Community of Assam. The preparation of the beverage is passed down from one generation of women to the next from their childhood itself. The brewing methods are quite simple, they use only two main ingredients, i.e., cooked rice and locally prepared yeast culture called Thap, which the Karbis believes is a divine gift.

The many beverages that are essentially an integral part of the social and cultural life of the karbis, it is mandatory in almost all ceremonies including marriage, birth, and death rituals or any other community rituals where propitiation of gods, benevolent spirits, and ancestors are involved, and offering and consuming of traditional beverage is compulsory. Similar to the Mising community, it is unthinkable to welcome guest without offering of Hor.

2.1.3 Drinking Culture in Assam

All cultures around the world knew the use of alcohol as well as its abstention. In many societies, drinking behavior is considered for the whole social order and so drinking is defined and limited in accordance with fundamental motifs of the culture (Mandelbaum 1965). Assam is one of the states with highest rate of alcohol consumption in the country. A retrospect on some of the folk tales, idioms, and songs in the Northeastern region of the country tell us that the rice beer fermentation was in fact done by keeping in mind the bond between humankind and nature. It is remarkable how through the act of drinking local beer, the old teach the new; storytelling, indeed, begins here. From village to village, community to community, the knowledge of rice beer travels and so do stories, myths, and rituals where drinks perform a major role. In social life, this alcoholic beverage is consumed as refreshing drink by both men and women and is locally claimed as nutritious and energy drink. Main purpose of making liquor in their home was found as their traditional attitude but most importantly only female members are to be found in the process of preparing the liquor, also the people of these societies get to know and taste liquor from very teen age which sometimes turn them into alcoholic. Gradually they become highly addicted to liquor, and it often ruin their livelihood and family. Additional government of Assam

has announced its decision to promote traditional brews in the state as ‘heritage drink.’ Section 5.3, Part II of the budget stated: Heritage Liquor: Assam's strength is its colorful culture and diverse ethnicity. As a government, we are determined to build the economy deeply entrenched into the ethnicity of the State. There are several tribal brews which are healthy and of high medicinal values. The government proposes to conduct proper research on these brews to ensure the standardization, hygiene, and proper bottling in attractive package. Such products will be promoted as licensed items to be sold in permitted shops and establishments. So, if the government itself is promoting, is not it bound for the people to get more influenced to drink?

2.2 Handia in tribal communities of Odisha

In tribal areas of Odisha fermented rice-based drink called Handia is immensely popular in the regions and is used during marriages, birth, anniversaries, and festivals among the Keonjhar, Mayurbhanja, Sundargarh, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Balangir, Dhenkanal and Angul Districts of Odisha. The word Handia originates from the word Handi (a big earthen pot) probably because that is where the rice is fermented. The drink has importance in cultural, social, and economical role in the community specifically among the Munda and Santhal tribes. Like describe in the above tribes here as well Handia is offered to local deities and dead ancestors.

Handia is used for two purposes, one is for consumption: the tribal people consume Handia in all the meals of the day. The reason is the local claims that during summer handia saves the body from sunstroke, it makes them more energetic during work. Handia acts as a supplementary food compensating deficiency of food for as much as 10-15 days for tribal people who cannot get even one meal a day. Therefore, the drink has been commercialized. This brings me to the second purpose which is business, generating significant income for the households. Many of women are seen selling the brew under tree shade, thus the tribal women have been able to make economic gains

According to reports Odisha contributes 1% to the alcohol consumption rate to the country, however the contribution seems low but 30.2% people of the population of Odisha consumes alcohol which is higher than the national average where 22.2% people are from urban area. Mayurbhanj and its neighbors are seen to be ‘high’ in ‘spirits’ as they booze their way up to the topmost drinkers in State with around 1 litre country liquor consumption per month. Handia has 18-25% of alcohol content, like mentioned above alcohol directly affects the brain compelling

the body to drink more and imagine the tribals in Odisha who are drinking this day and night are bound get addicted.

However, the administration also conducted a study to know the impact of 'handia' on society. It found 'handia' was one of the prime causes behind domestic violence as well as falling interest of people in working. Officials found difference between the 'handia' sold in weekly market and the other one prepared in tribal households. The one sold in weekly market was found contaminated with fertilizers like urea and other toxic substances. District sub-collector R K Mishra said, "Handia is a traditional drink of tribal people. there is a restriction on open sale of Handia. Under Bihar and Odisha Excise Act 1915, one can only keep a prescribed amount of Handia for one's own consumption. The violator will be arrested under section 47 (A) of the said Act.

2.3 Feni in Goa

There are two variants of Feni, one that is made from coconut and the other is cashew. Coconut feni made from fermented toddy existed before cashew Feni and is considered pre-Portuguese but cashew Feni although is it locally brewed the main ingredient was not found in India. When Portuguese settled in Goa in the early 16th century CE, they brought fruits and vegetables with them, like potatoes, tomatoes, chillies, pineapples, and cashew nut. Initially cashew nut was planted for trees to stop the erosion of the topsoil caused by the strong Goan monsoons. Soon they realised Indian soil was better suited for for cashew plantations then compared to Brazil where it was originally grown. Then "proliferation of cashew nuts meant that ingenious locals soon used it to create local tittle or fermentation brew - the Feni. Feni is made from cashew apples that the Portuguese did not want. Due to its uniqueness Feni became the first Indian alcoholic beverage to get the coveted Global Geographical Indication (GI) registration, this puts Feni in the illustrious company of scotch, Champagne, Cognac, etc.

Feni has now become an integral part of Goan culture. Feni was considered to have medical uses and believed the brew could treat anything, from common cold to orthopaedic problems and rheumatism and once even for childbirth and childcare. Mac Vaz, founder president of Goa Cashew Feni Distillers and Bottle Association reasons Feni's wide medicinal use was due to the lack of western medicines during the greater part of Portuguese rule. "Natives wholly depend on natural cures. Skepticism to accept modern options, cost, and lack of trained doctors in rural

areas were other reasons,” Feni was also offered to “Devchar” or “Zagevoillo” the spirits that protects the villagers from all evil, in all occasions such as marriage, birth, death and everything in between.

Feni is now the “STATE DRINK” gaining popularity not only among locals but tourists as well. Armed with GI manufacturers wants to create a brand Feni and turn it into an international drink. In 2004-5 about 0.88 million bottled litres (BL) of Feni was brewed and 15liters (BL), the industry is largely home based however in recent years new labels are emerging involving a large of number of people working seasonally.

Chapter III – The Way Forward

Thomas R. Burke on his study on the impact of alcohol abuse and alcoholism, states that consumption of alcohol can begin very early, and it is not uncommon to witness children who haven't even reached the age of 12 begin drinking. Underage drinking affects children's development, affecting the nation's ability to respond to economic challenges in the future. Consumption of alcohol can affect work performances in several ways; there are instances seen that when individuals are dependent on alcohol, they tend to be on more sick leaves compared to other employees. It also rises the number of work accidents, in India 40% of work accidents have occurred due to alcohol use. Moreover, alcohol heavily impacts the productivity at work, heavy drinkers have lower performance, problems in personal relationships and lack of self-direction.

Now, to curb this problem government intervention is required in the areas of awareness, health services, marketing of alcohol beverages, strict monitoring, and surveillance.

3.1 Government's Role

The government plays a vital role when it comes to public health and policies regarding it. The government has made decision regarding the health policy in alcohol consumption in the country however, there have been obstacles to effective policy implementation. The first is low public awareness of the extent of alcohol harm. Here, the government can tie up with organizations working in the area and try to reach as many individuals as possible (both brewers and consumers) and spread the knowledge. Along with that government also requires to make infrastructural developments, like building facilities for treatment of any sort of substance use and abuse and along with the help of organizations identify individuals who need these facilities and try enrolling them into it.

Coming to these societies who brew local beers/alcohols the governments need to strengthen at the base level. These societies are marginalized (probably due to its remote locations) and development might have not occurred that a large extent. Now, government alongside awareness drive, opening health facilities, etc., they need to first educate people. Education can play crucial when trying to uplift an individual also the society at large. If the government manages to place

schools, colleges, institutions with qualified teachers and professors. Additionally, government should also implement an employment policy for these marginalized regions. These societies that we have discussed above lack in proper education and therefore decent jobs and therefore there succumbed to making, selling, and consuming these locally brewed alcohols. If the government build more educational institutions the youth will get the opportunity and access their right to education, the establishment needs to deliver these opportunities for the youth's development. Following that it also needs to implement job opportunities in those regions where these youth or any other qualified members of these community can have an opportunity to elevate their economic conditions. With the help of various organizations working in those areas, the government may directly or indirectly work alongside for the cause and provide an alternative way of generating income for the family.

At last, we cannot ignore the gender aspect, according to WHO, 55% of domestic abuse cases are related to alcohol use. What is most prevalent in these societies are that men are drunk and unable to work leaving the household with no income coming, this ultimately results women who already had the knowledge of brewery, sells these local brews to earn for the family. These societies require an establishment of an agencies that would help these women train them in skill enhancement and employment at a decent job in order to earn for the family and herself.

3.2 At the community level

Since here we are primarily dealing with specific societies community level interventions are vital. There is a reason why groups when at community level are strong as there is a sense of belonging to that ingroup, and like mentioned earlier individuals tends to follow the community and behave in a community appropriate manner. Sustainable action requires strong leadership and a solid base of awareness and commitment.

The community in large needs to have individuals or rather leaders who are willing to influence people to drive away from substance use and involve oneself in more productive work. Communities can be supported and empowered by governments and other stakeholders to use their local knowledge and expertise in adopting effective approaches to prevent and reduce the harmful use of alcohol by changing collective rather than individual behavior while being sensitive to cultural norms, beliefs and value systems. WHO identifies mobilizing communities to prevent the selling of alcohol to, and consumption of alcohol by, under-age drinkers, and to

develop and support alcohol-free environments, especially for youth and other at-risk groups are affective in battling alcohol use.

CHAPTER IV – CONCLUSION

Consumption of alcoholic beverage has existed from old ages though it has risen to prominence in the recent decade. Mythological writings, ayurvedic texts and Vedas mentions the use of alcohol in various forms and methods where alcohol was considered a drink of God and its elite worshippers. However, alcohol brewed earlier were low in alcohol content and during many dynasties rules it expanded to Indian sub-continent and consuming alcoholic beverage became a part of life for extremities in lifestyles.

In the above cases one to notice is all the societies mentioned finds that traditionally these alcoholic brews were seen as scared and connects it to either ancestors or spirits or deities offering them the drink in order to gain peace, welfare, or protection. However, as time went by people started consuming it more often, rather regularly. Since, alcohol affects the brain hitting its chemical levels, individuals find it difficult to get oneself out of its trap. Moreover, the government's policies acted as a fuel to the fire. It is understandable that the communities brewing these beverages are economically weak and requires a steady source of income, and these beverages seems to be a solution. In order to eradicate the problem without hurting the sentiments of the community. There requires government creating and proper implementation of policies along with community intervention and together it will help in curbing "Alcoholism".