Chapter VI

IMPACT OF THE LIQUOR POLICY
The British liquor policy was psychologically unsound, economically disastrous, socially disruptive and racially poisonous. It had created evil effects on the physical, moral, economic and social aspects.

**Physical Impact**

Alcohols spoiled the people. It affected the health of the people. It had a degenerative effect on the structure and functions of the human body, especially on the brain cells. Self-control was one of the important functions of the brain. Alcohol weakened this. The drinker was not able to value events properly. A slight affront or a trifling matter may appear to his unbalanced judgment a matter of great gravity. Alcohol incites the basic instincts of combativeness and licentiousness. These effects were mistaken for courage and increased vitality.¹

When taken in sufficiently large doses would kill either by paralysis of the heart or of the nervous centers controlling respiration. In fatal doses, it either would kill immediately by shock or usually within 24 hours. The action of alcohol varied according to –

a) the dose taken;

b) the degree of alcoholic concentration;

c) the age of the person;

d) individual susceptibility;

e) whether tolerance had or had not been established by its more or less frequent use; and

f) by the character of the spirit.

The fatal dose varied according to the age and constitution of the person, e.g., a boy of three died after drinking 75 grams of gin; another boy of seven after 100-200 grams of brandy; another boy of twelve after 100 cubic centimeters of brandy; and an adult man after 330 grams of alcohol contained in two bottles of port consumed in two hours.\(^2\)

The first result after the consumption of a small amount of alcohol was a sense or pleasure and well being, it was this, that gives alcohol its power over men. Alcohol diminished the feelings of hunger and wearings, and sends an increased flow of blood to the skin causing a feeling of warmth. But its real effects were to depress the nerves, which fail to register true conditions. The depressant effect of alcohol upon the higher centers of the brain produces a lessening of restraint and a lowering of standards and a slackening of checks upon the animal nature. This was the reason why speech becomes ready confidence grows as efficiency declines.\(^3\)


\(^3\) C.Rajagopalachari, op. cit., pp 14-15.
Alcohol hinders digestion, by coagulating foods and precipitating solutions. It permanently dilates the blood vessels, inflames the tissue of the liver, poisons the heart-muscles, and causes accumulation of fat therein. It prevents proper nourishment of muscles by robbing them of their oxygen.\(^4\)

Concentrated alcohol had increased the muscular activity of the stomach, produced a large secretion of mucus, but diminished the secretion of digestive juice (gastric and pancreatic). When well diluted or in small amounts, these actions do not occur. Its retarding influence on digestion when concentrated and in large amount was very marked but it was so rapidly absorbed from the stomach that moderate quantities probably did not continue long to act in this way for it was found that when the alcohol becomes lessened in amount the digestive retardation-action ceases. The 'dilution' of alcohol in the stomach was relatively increased by the fact that water was not absorbed by the stomach, while alcohol very rapidly was. A stronger solution of alcohol was absorbed much more rapidly than a weaker one.\(^5\)

Its 'fattening' action was accompanied by very grave disadvantages such as the replacement by fat of muscular tissue in the heart and of glandular tissue in the liver, kidney, etc., thus leading to fatty degenerations of the heart, kidneys, liver, etc.

On the nervous system, it first acts on the higher functions and the action was a more or less brief initial stimulation followed by a depressant

\(^4\) Ibid., p 16.

\(^5\) CAL, p 98.
effect, which was in reality a more or less mild condition of temporary paralysis of nervous function.

It was that, 'sedative' action of alcohol and the sense of contentiment associated with it that forms its chief attraction to the average consumer. It was thus strictly speaking incorrect to describe the action of alcohol as stimulant: at first it certainly was so for a brief period but the bulk of its action was just the opposite stimulant.6

Alcoholism was a term denoting acute alcoholic poisoning. It occurred as a result of overdoses taken by habitual drunkards. There was also sub-acute alcoholism, from which the habitual taker of moderate doses suffered. The symptoms were carelessness of dress, habits, desires, welfare and family affection, which were all subordinated to a craving for drink.7

In short, alcohol appears to be a 'protoplasmic poison' and one of its most obvious actions as such was its more or less pronounced paralyzing action on the functional activity of the brain-cells. This might perhaps be regarded as the central fact of the action of alcohol.8

MORAL IMPACT

Alcohol in excess resulted in death. Due to the liquor policy of the British in Tamil Nadu, people resorted to illicit distillation.9 The arrack so distilled was not of good quality. It caused death of many people in Tamil

6 Ibid., p 99.
7 C.Rajagopalachari, op. cit., p 16.
8 CAL, p 100.
Nadu every year. In spite of that, the British continued to follow the same policy.

The drinking habit destroyed the soul of man and tends to turn him into a beast. He was incapable of distinguishing between wife, mother and sister. The drink and the drug evil was in many respects infinitely worse than the evil caused by malaria and the like; for whilst the latter only injure the body, the former spas both body and soul.

Alcohol injured good morals. Moderation in the use of alcoholic drinks was no solution, because alcohol was a habit-forming drug. In due course, the victim wanted larger quantities.

Majority of the crimes were committed under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol taken in excess might produce criminal outbursts of violence, etc. among some men. A group of five men in Salem, after consuming country liquor, attacked three brothers of their neighbouring house and killed them. There was no concrete reason other than a quarrel that arisen during fetching water in the common well. Hence the murder was committed under the influence of liquor.

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10 NMPR, Lokopakari, Madras, April, 1929.
13 CAL, p 99.
A group of villagers in Namakkal, after consuming arrack, attack their neighbouring village and set fire to many houses. In that incident about hundred houses were destroyed and many people lost their precious lives.\textsuperscript{15}

In Namakkal in another village a youngster of twenty-five made a rape attempt towards a girl of fourteen. The villagers caught him. He was found in excessive drunken stage.\textsuperscript{16} Hence it was clear that the drink devil in him was responsible for the criminal attempt.

When, by drunkenness, the people lost their income, they went to any extreme to make money. Many cases of smuggling, illicit distillation, possession of and sale of illicit spirits, illicit transport, illicit manufacture of toddy, unlicenced sales, possession of liquor without licence, dilution, use of false measures, breach of licences etc. were registered every year.\textsuperscript{17} People lost their moral values and indulged in crimes to make money. They were ready to go to any extent.

In Salem a ‘zamindar’\textsuperscript{18} employed about twenty youths in his estate. The duty of the youths was to collect, interest and capital advanced by the zamindar to the poor villagers. Usually the villagers were not able to repay the money due to high rate of interest. When the collection was impossible, the zamindar forcibly seized the house and household articles of the villagers, with the help of the youths. During this act, at initial stages, some of the youths hesitated. Hence, the zamindar administered liquor to them

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p 8.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p 9.
\textsuperscript{17} ABK Report for 1890-91, p 71.
\textsuperscript{18} Landlord.
and employed them in the operation. After that, there was no hesitation among the youths. That clearly indicates that, the youth had done the act under the influence of liquor.

There was a custom among the Harijans, which reflected the loss of moral value in the society, under the influence of liquor. When an unmarried girl died, she would not be buried immediately. According to their belief, the soul would not reach the heaven if it were buried immediately. After the union with a boy alone the soul would reach the heaven. Hence they asked a boy to have intercourse with the dead body; which did the boy usually reject. But after taking ‘arrack’ the boy was ready for the action; the evil custom was done with.20

Another important evil of the period was ‘sati’.21 When the wife refused to jump into the funeral pyre of the husband, some liquor was administered to her. Then she walked slowly and jumped into the fire.22

When a person was affected by alcoholism, he would go to any extent for getting alcohol. Many incidents took place in Tamil Nadu regarding this. In Nagapatnam and Tirunelveli, the alcohol addicts used to steal toddy from the tree tapped by other persons.23 Hence, the alcohol made men to lose their original character.

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21 ‘Sati’ system means the suicide of wife in the funeral pyre of the husband.
23 Ibid., p 10.
The women drunkards suffered from many mental and moral disorders. Many suicides of women addicts revealed the impact of liquor consumption by women.\(^24\)

In Tamil Nadu, there were many women coolies. In the evening some of them used to consume liquor. During the off-season they were not had sufficient money. But they could not stop the drinking practice. They approached landlords for money. The landlords who gave money exploited them on many ways. Sexual exploitation was the most important evil. The women also succumbed to that due to want of liquor.\(^25\)

It was the duty of every government to protect its people from evil habits. To afford facilities for the acquisition of evil habits, which were destructive of life was suicidal. It was most essential that the people should be saved from the slavery of drinking. The government might have to introduce prohibition in all districts. In spite of the repeated cries of the people for the abolition of toddy shops and liquor shops, the government allowed them. That was unjust on the part of the government. Instead of the morality of the people, the government was more interested in revenue.\(^26\)

**Economic Impact**

Alcohol and poverty were close companions liquor had been found, at all times, an enemy of affluence. The enslaving stranglehold of liquor spares


\(^{26}\) NNPR, Dharmasadhani, dated 10-10-1923.
neither the individual nor the nation. The well to do had been made paupers through addiction to the drink habit.

The low-income group of people of Tamil Nadu resorted to liquor consumption traditionally, customarily or habitually. The drunkenness had effectively devasted the people generations after generations. It would not be an exaggeration to say that drink had been one of the principal causes of poverty, and it had impoverished individuals, families, class and the community.\textsuperscript{27} The money spent for drinks did not return any wealth to the man who spends it.\textsuperscript{28}

In Madras town, the following was the earnings of toddy consumers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult male coolie</td>
<td>6 to 8 annas per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult female or boy coolie</td>
<td>3 to 6 annas per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant class</td>
<td>Rs.7 to Rs.10 per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jhitka drivers</td>
<td>Re.1 per diem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullock cart drivers</td>
<td>Annas 8 per diem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Hindu females worked as coolies, but not Muhammadan women. Those who worked as coolies or under masons or husk paddy get three to four annas per day. For carrying a load, within one to one-and-a-half miles, the rate was one anna each trip. The rate for boys was the same as for women.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Tek Chand, \textit{op.cit.}, p 111.
\textsuperscript{28} C.Rajagopalachari, \textit{op. cit.}, p 12.
\textsuperscript{29} ABRT, p 53.
In the Madras town male coolies generally spent two to four annas in toddy every day. The price of a *pori*, three-fourth seer (a bottle), of coconut toddy was two to two-an-a-half annas. Palmyra toddy was sold at one to two annas per seer, and date toddy one anna to one and a half annas per seer.

In Arcot circle, a workman earns two and-a-half to four annas per day, a female earns one and-a-half annas, and a child nine paise to one anna per day as wages. Most of their earnings were spent on toddy. Toddy was generally drunk in the evening, but some people drink it during the day. The consumers, sometimes paid the price of toddy in kind, i.e., paddy, ragi, wheat; this was against the conditions of the licence and is an offence.\(^{30}\)

Liquor was usually sold for ready cash. When the poor people did not have money, they used to mortgage their household items and obtain liquor. In Salem district it was a common experience that jewels, clothes, household utensils, sheep, grains, etc. were exchanged for toddy. The craving in these cases was so acute that sundry articles used to be sold to buy toddy. The drunkenness was an important reason for indebtedness among the poorer sections of the rural folk.\(^{31}\)

The occupation of the rural people of Tamil Nadu was seasonal. They did not develop any saving habit. All most fifty per cent of the income was spent for liquor. Maintaining the family with the balance fifty per cent was

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p 54.

\(^{31}\) Tek Chand, *op. cit.*, p 117.
difficult. During the off-season the matter was still worse. They depended on the landowners for their livelihood. It made them as bonded labour.\textsuperscript{32}

The British liquor policy further made the condition of the poor people into worst situation. The Government policy was revenue oriented. They did not worry about the economic condition of the people. Although prohibition was declared to be the goal of the Government, the means adopted by them to carry out that into action were diametrically opposed to those adopted elsewhere.\textsuperscript{33}

Only after the ascendancy of Congress Ministry in Tamil Nadu in 1937, prohibition was implemented. But it was not for the whole of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{34}

The partial prohibition itself had little success. Very large percent of people had been saved from drunk. They became prosperous. Their purchasing power had increased and they were buying quality goods.

The labourers as a class had greatly benefited from prohibition since a very large section of the urban coolies and village field workers had been addicted to drink. Apart from the economic advantages there were other interesting features of the effect of prohibition on labourers in general. In some cases there was a marked improvement in strength and vigour.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} P.Ethirajulu, \textit{op. cit.}, p 18.

\textsuperscript{33} NNPR, Kodagu, Mercara, 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1929.

\textsuperscript{34} Excise Report for 1939-40, p 5.

\textsuperscript{35} Tek Chand, \textit{op. cit.}, p 107.
There was another interesting tendency amongst the coolies after the closure of liquor shops. Before prohibition, the addict coolies used to visit on the payment of wages at the weekend and straight away spend a portion of the wages on drink. Some coolies, who were employed for a particular piece of work, used to strain themselves and finish the work in a hurry in order to be able to visit the toddy shop. Masons had also found it sometimes difficult in settling accounts with the coolies who urged immediate payment at inconvenient hours. After prohibition those ex-addicts took the due leisure, allowed their mothers and wives to receive the wages due to them. One could see some mothers directly receiving the wages of their sons from the employer. The workers were sober in the evenings, did not roam about the town under intoxication, but retire to their homes early at night. The family life of the coolly was definitely better. Many of them were saved from *Kandu* debts\(^{36}\) of the drift into debt and deterioration was then arrested.\(^{37}\)

The ameliorative work had great effect on the people. It improved their standard of living.\(^{38}\) There was noticeable improvement among the weavers. Their economic condition greatly improved.\(^{39}\)

But it was only short lived one. Prohibition was lifted within years. Once again the people of whole Tamil Nadu including Salem and North Arcot districts came under the clutches of alcohol. It weakened their

\(^{36}\) *Kandu* debt means money borrowed for high rate of interest.

\(^{37}\) Tek Chand, *op. cit.*, pp 107-108.


\(^{39}\) Tek Chand, *op. cit.*, p 108.
economic position greatly. In short alcohol ruined their economic position.

SOCIAL IMPACT

All persons, except Brahmins and some other high caste Hindus, drink toddy. The high caste people, seldom drunk it. The lower caste people, such as Pariahs and the working classes and cultivators, were the principal consumers. Toddy was considered to be the beer of the country, and it was drunk by common labourers, cultivators, brick-layers, Oddas (coolies working on repair and construction of roads and buildings), lower classes of Muhammadans (employed as coolies and workmen), coachmen, cart-drivers, Dher (generally employed as cooks and butlers by Europeans), Telengas, Chetikara (poorer classes of Eurasians), fishermen, Korchowars (domes) employed for watering the streets and who weave baskets for sale, chamars and mehters. One-third of the women and one-fourth of the children of most of the above classes also drink it. The Telenga and Muhammadan women were not food of toddy. The Korabar, Lambardi, and Enadi women of the lowest caste go to the shop and drink equally with the men of their caste if they could afford to do so. 40

The Adi-Dravidar was also fond of drinking. 41 The drinking habit was also widely prevalent among artisans and working classes especially handloom weavers, factory workers, stoncutters, earth workers, railway and municipal labourers, scavengers and sweepers. A large proportion

40 ABKT, p 53.
41 NNPR, India, Madras, 20th July 1931.
among those classes habitually resorted to drink but they formed only a small portion of the total population.\(^{42}\)

The labouring classes work from 6 to 12 in the morning and again from 2 to 6 in the evening. They ate cold rice in the morning and begin work; at noon they ate hot rice, and in the evening they go to the toddy shop, and after drinking return home. The women do not generally drunk in the shops; those whom did were looked down upon. The women sometimes got intoxicated. Dherni (Dher women), Odda women, fish-women (Korar), Korchower women, chamar and mehter women generally drunk much, and they also drink in public. Excessive drinking leads to drunken brawls and quarrels. Very low caste women such as Pariahs, and common coolies frequently visited toddy shops. In Madras town, after drinking, the men sometimes become unruly and were then taken to the thana.\(^{43}\)

Two-thirds of the total population, including three-fourths of the working and cultivating classes, drink toddy. In the mufassal all working and cultivating classes including half the males, one-fourth of the females, and 10 per cent of the children drink toddy. The poorer classes made a meal of it. Toddy was mixed with rice and then drunk.

Twelve ounces of coconut toddy produced very little intoxication, and less than 8 ounces produced no effect on the system. Twelve to 16 ounces of palmyra toddy slightly intoxicate a person. Less than 10 ounces produced no effect. One bottle was sufficient to intoxicate a child. Three bottles or half a

\(^{42}\) P.J.Thomas, 'Economic Results of Prohibition in the Salem District' (1937-1938), Madras, 1939, p 5.

\(^{43}\) ABKT, p 53.
gallon was sufficient to intoxicate a person of ordinary strength. As regards intoxication, much depends on the nature of one's constitution. A man of bilious temperament got intoxicated after taking a small quantity. Some men drank half a gallon and spend all their earnings in toddy and were always in debt to the toddy shopkeeper, which was never cleared. This was the only reason of certain customers always purchasing from the same shop. 

Toddy and arrack had done untold damage to scheduled tribes, the Harijans and others. Their food products, particularly rice were being burned into fermented decoction. That diversion of food grain into intoxicating drunk left them under-nourished, ill-fed and ill-clothed, and made them lazy, neglectful of their occupational pursuits, and careless of their future. These under-privileged classes, because of the use of alcohol always lived in the same position.

The stories of women, who were not drinkers themselves but their husbands and off springs were liquor consumers had something more to reveal. It played havoc with the family peace and stability.

In many houses husbands under intoxication beat women. The alcoholic quarrel on many occasions resulted the death of wife or suicide by husband. In Salem many such cases were reported.

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44 Ibid., p 54.
45 Tek Chand, op. cit., p 123.
46 Dr. Bhim Sain, op. cit., p 98.
The condition of the children of alcoholic parents was pitiable. They rarely escape the quarrel. They were not sent to schools. Later they were also became ordinary labourers. Their position was low in the society. It continued for generations.\textsuperscript{49} When a husband spent all his money for liquor, his wife and children were also forced to work as coolies. It affected the future of the children.\textsuperscript{50} The British liquor policy also affected the life of the people who were engaged in the alcohol industry. Here, special mention should be made about the toddy drawers.

Toddy drawers belonged to a distinct and separate class, called Shanars or Gramanis. Their profession was drawing and selling toddy. People of no other class would tap trees or sold toddy. All of them, without exception, were low in the social scale. They were not usually allowed to mix with the better classes of Hindus. Their social position was on a par with that of the other labouring classes.\textsuperscript{51}

They were divided into five sub-classes –

1) Nadar or Shanars – The southern districts of the Madras Presidency claim them as their aborigines. They were especially skilled in drawing toddy from coconut trees, and their profession is to tap such trees. Among their own class they occupy a higher position and were considered richer. The Shanars had migrated into the districts close to Madras, and under the tree-tax system they hold a considerable number of shops. They stick to the same shop from year to year at any cost.

\textsuperscript{49} Dr. Bhim Sain, \textit{op. cit.}, p 99.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, p 100.
\textsuperscript{51} ABKT, p 55.
They had taught the local Shanars and Edigars to tap coconut trees in these parts.

2) Sudras – These people adopt tree tapping as their profession after serving a brief apprenticeship under hereditary tappers.

3) Mupens,

4) Graminis – Those people speak Tamil, and generally tap palmyra and date trees. They live in villages where there were a large number of such trees. They were not numerous in any village. They generally hold pattas for the trees. They were generally poor, and were also employed by the renters as transport coolies. They had no capital and could seldom compete with the toddy renters. The Gramanis were also Shannars, but they called themselves Graminis, as their forefathers happened to be the ‘Maniams of Graminis’, meaning money collectors in villages, who were now known as village Maniams. Their manner of tapping coconut trees was different from that of the southern Shannars. The southern Shanars climb up the trees and sit comfortably on the branches until the spathes were fully tapped. The Gamanis consider this as an offence. They use two ropes, one for the waist and the other for the feet, for climbing, and do not sit on the branches.

5) Edigars – these people speak Telugu; they generally tapped palmyra and date trees, and were also employed by the toddy renters in transporting toddy. They lived in the northern districts of the Presidency. They were seen in the Ceded districts and in all other Telegu-speaking localities. Some of these people were rich and do not resort to tapping trees themselves. They could not tap coconut trees,
while the southern Shanairs and Graminis were equally ignorant of tapping date trees.

Pariahs and people of other castes also sometimes drew toddy, but this was the exception and not the rule. The toddy drawers form a separate class from the rest of the population, and were not allowed to enter sacred places of pilgrimage or temples in the southern districts; but in the northern districts no such restriction prevails.

Hence, alcohol made the condition of lower castes in a pitiable position. Some Christian missionaries tried to change their position. They converted them to Christianity and gave education to their children. They taught the evils of drinking. As a result of that, the new converts gave up drinking country liquor and toddy. The conversion also helped them to improve their social status and life styles. They learned to dress well. They even gave up certain traditional occupations, which were responsible for their degradation and soon switched over to new employments of life.\(^2\)

But that did not produce permanent results, because they were able to convert only a limited percentage. The others remained in the same position.

Contrary to the Missionary activities, the Government encouraged drinking. At Rajapalayam, the Adi Dravidas were taken by the Police to a toddy shop in a motor-lorry and were persuaded to drink.\(^3\) Hence, the Government, which was supposed to take care of the people, kept them in ignorance and spoiled their future.


\(^3\) NNPR, India, Madras, 20\(^{th}\) July 1931.