Chapter - VII

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This study has been an experiment in enriching the analysis of survey data on drinking practices in an upcoming town, Chandikhole. What has been done, actually, has been to analyze answers given to a single open-ended question concerning the drinking occasion by classifying the obtained descriptions into categories of a context typology and illustrating these types of means of numerical information on the occasion, and continuing with a content analysis of the descriptions and the inspection of the contents of descriptions in various types of drinking contexts. The theoretical framework of the study has mostly concerned drinking as an indivisible whole, paying less attention to variation between subpopulations. The theoretical framework of the study was derived from the recent discussion, concerned with the problem of the persistence of an alcohol culture in changing living conditions. The general theoretical problem was two fold: first, to consider the relationship between culture and living conditions, starting from the hypothesis that cultural phenomena are relatively independent of living conditions, and second, to consider the nature and existence of a drinking culture. These problems are certainly relevant in any modern society facing rapid social and cultural change.

Indeed, the development of theoretical constructions and their operationlization remained problematic: this is not only due to the fact
that the data were collected only in one year. The first main result relating to the independency between culture and living conditions is that the cultural ideas widely differ from the actual occurrences of activities. The subsequent results bear eloquent testimony to the dictum that single minded pursuit of profits, money and supremacy, impoverishes the mind, shrivels the imagination and desicates the heart. Subsequently, they easily fall prey to alcoholism. The procedure, aimed to be a test of the independent hypothesis, or the comparison of content profiles for various contexts in subpopulations, provided more obscure results that were more easily interpreted against the hypothesis of cultural homogeneity.

7.1 CULTURE, LIVING CONDITIONS AND DRINKING CONTEXTS

The typology of drinking contexts was based on the distinction between everyday life contexts and non everyday life contexts, the former being a part of the weekly routines and the latter being exceptional occasions with respect to the ordinary weekly rhythm. The comparison of numerical indices of drinking in various contexts suggested that a tripartition would have also been adequate in everyday routines, ritual-disciplined contexts and entertainment. The hypothesis was that non everyday occasions were typical of 'traditional drinking, whereas modern drinking also occurs in everyday life contexts. This was supported to same extent by comparing the distributions of occasions by context type in various subpopulations, say the farmers, the closest potential heirs of traditional practices, favoured drinking in non-everyday contexts, occupational position appeared as the best discriminator with respect to context preferences. It was suggested that
a division into subpopulations that were based on age, sex, caste, education etc. and on the position in an occupational hierarchy would provide an adequate basis for considering. The effect of living conditions on the assertion of drinking context.

The suggested division into subpopulations has already indicated that the strict mutual exclusion of contexts and cultural meanings could not be maintained. The emergence of alcoholism is not only a matter of external living conditions, but of cultural rules, like those concerning the appropriateness of drinking. Moreover, there was some evidence that a subjective factor is also important, something like a personal involvement with drinking, or the role of drinking in a person's lifestyle, influenced the distribution of alcoholism. Still the fact remains that external living conditions also determine the access to various drinking contexts to a remarkable degree.

Approached from the perspective of social meanings of drinking, its impact on road-accidents, family ties, health, behaviour in working circles are noted and the hypothesis have been found correct that alcoholism has a pivotal role to play in the deterioration and degradation of all these fabrics of a healthy life. Some drinking contexts had a relative constant profile of expressions, whereas some others were evidently in the process of cultural transition. This suggests that the concept of alcoholism should be extended to cover not only the activity but also the context in which it occurs. This is not the same as to say that the context is an essential part in the repertoire of expressing meaning by an activity but the contexts should be considered in their own right as potential sites of various activities.
A typology of drinking that were to present drinking as determined by living contexts should reflect the necessities and the resources dictated and allowed by an individual's conditions; his life experiences, availability & structure of time, financial resources, work and social networks, housing conditions, availability of alcohol and so on. The typology of the present study does not only fulfill these requirements, but is intermingled with various elements. That also reflect the peculiarities. This is unfortunately, the ordinary course in much of alcohol research concerning modern societies, residing contentedly within the realm of alcoholism only and seldom leading to generalization. An overall typology of social situations, based on the objective living conditions in a modern industrial society, has been developed.

7.2 SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND ALCOHOLISM

An effort has been made in the foregoing discussion to locate the changes that had taken place in drinking patterns by studying the relationship between the changes in drinking habits and the social background of the drinkers.

When the drinking patterns of the population studied, various connections were found between, on the one hand, drinking habits and on the other hand, age, occupation and income etc. Youthfulness, low socio-economic status, an unstable marital and home life history and disadvantaged social groups like lower caste were all associated with high rates of problematic drinking behaviour and tangible consequences of drinking. Having an unstable work history was particularly associated with problematic drinking patterns. Broadly speaking it might be said
that variables associated with being poor or disadvantaged, or both were the strongest social differentiation predictors of tangible consequences among men aged 20-60, while disadvantage, urbanization, youthfulness all figure prominently in the multivariate prediction of problematic intake. If we confine the analysis to those who are heavy drinkers, disadvantage figures prominently among the predictors (low socio-economic status, work role instability in case of transport workers) and so does living in a relatively dry environments, that is, having been brought up in peripheral rural areas.

The investigation result conformed that the three major domains of variables (the social differentiation variables which would be ascribed at birth, measures of childhood history and indicators of the parents drinking patterns) made separate contributions to the prediction of adult drinking problems. Childhood unhappiness, disadvantages, social ethnicity and fathers' heavy drinking provided the best prediction of adult tangible consequences of drinking, while father's heavy drinking, disadvantaged ethnicity and youthful acting out behaviour provided the best prediction of adult problematic intake.

Dimensions of personality indicating a lack of ego-resilency (intrapunitiveness, alienation, affective anxiety) and indicators suggesting a lack of ego control (impulsivity and tolerance of deviance) showed some association with heavy drinking and drinking problems, with a lack of ego-resilency strongly associated with tangible consequence and a lack of ego-control showing a higher corelation with problematic intake.
The strongest prediction of problematic intake, and a strong prediction of tangible consequences was made by a score indicating the respondent's immersion in a context of heavy drinking i.e. frequenting liquor shops, having heavy drinking friends and drinking regularly in the course of socializing. Although the direction of causation implied by this association certainly moot, it does atleast suggest that the future studies would do well to study the broad phenomenon of the world of heavy drinkers as an important factor in the nurturance of alcoholism.

The community sentiment of three peripheral villagers that there was 'nothing good' about drinking was strongly associated with communities level of tangible consequences of drinking (particularly wife and job problems). The analysis here suggests that drinking behaviour itself plays a larger role in producing the tangible consequences in market area of the township while the social reactions to even quite modest behaviour play a larger role in the peripheral villages. It was also found that early environmental influences (including family instability) are highly important in the individual's subsequent susceptibility to drinking problems and that the peer group influences belonging to different ethnic groups appear to be about as important as the respondent's ethnic origins in the individual association with groups with relatively high rates of problem drinking.

7.3 METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Problems that result from employing data have become evident in many contexts above. This section summarized a few problematic solutions that were made in the course of the analysis. First, analyzing the set of drinking occasions as a whole and not by various sub population may have produced artefacts, plans for such studies have
been laid, for instances to study the differences in rural and urban drinking. Secondly to classify drinking occasion into multiple classification is often overlapping. Third, clustering procedure did not work too well with the sparse data that was generated for it from the verbal descriptions. Both the theoretical expectations and requirements of the clustering procedure exceeded the possibilities provided by the brief verbal descriptions.

In general, the analysis here was laborious and time consuming and it can hardly be recommended to be applied directly, without a thorough consideration of alternatives. The present study was experimental in many respects, but although some results were less satisfactory, the idea of employing verbal discriptions of drinking occasions to enrich the survey seems more fruitful. A promise for future studies would be true availability of systems for computerized content analysis, although they would require a complete vocabulary of drinking related expressions to be effectively employed in this kind of data. One problem that remains in data collection is whether drinking occasions are in all cultures regarded as such well defined units that the respondents may easily produce by verbal descriptions of occasions.

Common to much of alcohol research are the problems that result from surveying drinking practices without paying attention to other activities. In the present study a particularly interesting aspect would have been the number of drinking occasions compared with non-drinking occasions in each context. Now only rough estimates were arrived at. Showing the important result that drinking is relatively infrequent even in context that are commonly regarded as appropriate drinking contexts.
Another problem is the mechanical classification of all occurrences, without asking about the respondent's own interpretation of the situation. Even better, the analysis could proceed by starting with well-defined drinking contexts, searching for their occurrences and leaving a great number of occasions aside as "back ground noise" that tends to dominate the field when analyzed.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study of this thesis completes interestingly the views on the nature of and changes in drinking practices, usually obtained by studying aggregate alcohol consumption, the variation of consumption among populations or the occurrences of drinking related problems. It is clearly possible to obtain rich information on drinking occasions in interview surveys, both by fixed questionnaires and by open ended questions like the verbal descriptions analyzed in this study. Data like those analyzed in the present study already provide a number of alternatives. However, it is evident that the study of alcoholism is the proper field for more qualitative approaches. Extended thematic interviews and group discussions could be employed to avoid the worst deficiencies of a survey procedure: the concentration on drinking only, the omission of preceeding and following actions, and the atomistic separation of the individuals from his social and material surroundings. Moreover, not only real occasions are of interest, but even more so are those descriptions that are cultural products per se, or occurences of drinking as described in films and literature.
A time series approach, at least in foreseeable future, is evidently necessary to grasp the connections between changes in living conditions, culture and drinking practices. Another important line of comparison is cross cultural studies.

The study of alcoholism is a worthwhile research endeavour. It reveals the multitude of drinking practices that are easily buried under drinking problems, amounts and quantities in the mainline of studies. It also forces the alcohol researcher to consider drinking not in isolation but in relation to their activities and spheres of life, thus linking alcohol research with the more general issues of social research. Drinking occasions are not only occasions of ethanol intake, but acts in the play of social life, where the scenes, the actors, and their utterances by various means should be studied side by side.