CHAPTER III

ALCOHOLISM AND THE GANDHIAN APPROACH

Introduction

Alcoholism and increasing number of alcoholics, drunkards and the problems caused by these have been creating a seriously negative impact on the moral fabric of the nation. Today India is caught in the grip of various opposing forces. On the one hand we are attempting seriously for establishing a strong economy, which has triggered off various forces like liberalisation, modernisation and accelerated urbanisation, and on the other we are also attempting to keep alive the philosophy for which Mahatma Gandhi lived and died.

The forces of modernisation, not only bring the modern amenities, facilities and ways of thinking, but also the curses like life full of tension, insecurity and associated problems. Not finding a way out of this dilemma, people try to find the routes of escape. One such route is to keep oneself away from realities. What better way is there to do this than hitting the bottle or licking the brown sugar. The easily available to everyone, from common man to millionaire is the bottle of liquor.
India, a nation opening up widely towards economic liberalisation is almost on the verge of a moral collapse. Our religious teachings are gradually losing grip on the minds of people. The behaviour patterns, which were unthinkable during the last century, have almost been accepted as the order of the day though inevitably.

Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi has become all the more relevant to bring about a total change. It is only the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, which can enable us to cope with the tension filled world of liberalisation and modernisation. There are state Governments which argue in favour of being ‘wet states’ because of the excise earning. At the same time they tend to ignore the enormous funds being spent for the welfare of the sick, widows and children as a result of man’s drunkenness.

A study of social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, hence, should include his views regarding the problem of alcoholism in comparison with views of other eminent Indians to get a dialectical picture the alcoholism in India in recent years.

Alcoholism

Before entering into a discussion of the views and stand of Mahatma Gandhi towards the consumption of alcohol, it is
fruitful to know the history of alcoholism, the meaning of alcoholism and its various dimensions as a problem, social as well as human.

**History of Drinking in India**

India has a long history of the use of intoxicating liquor right from ancient times as there is sufficient evidence to show that the consumption of alcoholic liquor was looked down by Hindu scriptures and society generally people were sober and the use of liquor was confined to the lowest strata or residuum of society. During the mediaeval periods, kings and their courtiers set the examples. However, throughout that course of Hindu and Muslim periods, the masses generally remained free from the evils of drink and drugs – this is corroborated by foreign travellers including Fattien, Vasco Da Gama, Bernier and Tavernier who visited India at different times.¹ Many methods were used to limit and control the consumption of alcohol. However, there was at least no attempt to derive material revenue from the traffic because the consumption of alcoholic liquor was insignificant, quantity-wise.

However, with the establishment of the British rule, things started changing. British introduced alcohol to increase their
revenue through excise laws. The British Government in India did not make any attempt to discourage the increasing consumption of alcohol, and other kind of intoxicating liquor.

Independent India tried in the beginning to introduce prohibition through state Governments. In some states there was total prohibition, in some other, the habit was regulated and controlled through partial prohibition. The Directive Principles of State Policy advocates the introduction of prohibition for the welfare of the masses.

**Meaning of Alcoholism**

In general parlance alcoholism means, the habitual consumption of alcoholic liquor in increasing quantities, leading to a dependence on alcohol and creating problems for the individual concerned, his family and the society. It is almost similar to the problem of drug addiction because the disorganising effects of alcoholic liquor and narcotics differ, only in degree. World Health Organisation Expert Committee has defined it, 'as a state of periodic or chronic intoxication, detrimental to the individual and to society, produced by repeated consumption of a drug, either natural or synthetic. Its characteristics include, a) an overpowering desire or need
(compulsion) to continue taking the drug and to obtain it by any means; b) a tendency to increase the dose; and c) a psychic (psychological) and sometimes a physical dependence on the effects of the drug.²

**Alcoholism as a Problem**

There are certain people, who are of the opinion that alcohol, if used moderately, a) makes life in our highly tension gripped world more tolerable; b) is a valuable social lubricant; c) unlocks the door to a more vivid inner life; d) by relaxing the control of the higher brain centers it dulls the painful human feeling and promotes pleasurable ones; and (e) as a drug it is used in the treatment of the sick.

Surprisingly, there are doctors of medicine among those who support the above view. But it is too dangerous to handle this problem when such views prevail and are supported by the intellectual elites. As we know, alcohol consumption never remains moderate with an individual as the human beings have a tendency to transcend the limits of anything either good or bad. There is a proverb – 'Once a drinker, always a drinker'. 'The truth is that all hard drinkers start with moderate drinking and gradually increase the quantity to become addicts.'³
This argument is further strengthened by the following: As Mitra points out, 'the characteristic of such drugs (alcohol) is that the attraction of their effect, irrespective of whether they are produced by stimulation or by narcotism is of such a degree that people once accustomed will resort to them in utter disregard of the adverse effects produced on themselves either mentally, morally or physically'.

Among the alcohol consumers, two types of people can be identified: (a) moderate drinkers and (b) heavy drinkers. Moderate drinkers can be defined as those who consume liquor in limited quantities and who can hold their physical and mental balance properly in spite of a comparatively larger quantity of alcohol consumption.

Heavy drinkers are those who cannot limit the consumption of liquor to a moderate quantity and who cannot hold their physical and mental balance properly even when they consume a very small quantity of alcohol.

Durfee defines a problem drinker is one, 'if as a result of drinking, i) his health is endangered, his peace of mind is affected, his domestic life is made unhappy, his business
jeopardised and his reputation clouded, and ii) drinking has become his routine.Ⅴ

Causes of Drinking

Various researchers have given different reasons for alcoholism. Caltin-six Bonger and Janax are the leading ones among such researchers. The reasons given by them can be summarised as follows. Those are: (a) Misery drinking, (b) Occupation factors (Fatigue and exhaustion), (c) Bad housing and lack of recreational facilities, (d) Ignorance, (e) Inherent nervous defects, (f) God's curse or gift, (g) For companionship and fun, (h) Fashion, (i) Business reasons, (j) Urbanisation, (k) Sudden success in business, and (l) Social inadequacy.

Among these various causes Caltin has mentioned companionship as the thief cause of drinking, while Bonger states that misery drinking is the prime cause, but Jonet states that social inadequacy is the main cause of drinking.

Stages of Intoxication

Emil Bogen in his book, 'The Human Toxicology' has described the following stages of intoxication: (a) Sub-clinical stages, (b) Stimulation, (c) Confusion, (d) Stupor, and (e) Coma.
In the first and second stage, the alcohol does not inflict much. But the third stage is the most important and crucial one and leads to the subsequent stages. In this condition, there is an increasing difficulty in physical co-ordination. The hearing gets dulled, the speech is incoherent and the muscular co-ordination necessary for walking becomes increasingly difficult. At this stage the drinker cannot stand erect, nor can he walk straight. He reacts very little to the external environment and becomes increasingly unable to co-ordinate. He cannot stand up easily nor can he sit down. He is continuously on the verge of unconsciousness and collapse. In the last stage he becomes completely unconscious and is dead drunk. He breathes slowly and with difficulty. In this condition he is often close to death. However, the actual amount of alcohol, which will bring out such fatal results differs from person to person. The important fact, however, is that the alcohol taken in large quantity is poisonous and is likely to cause the death of the drinker.

Effects of Alcohol on Human Health

In addition to its social effects, alcohol has its physical effects too on human organisation. Taken in moderation in the form of wine or beer, it has no harmful effects and rather has a healthy effect. As Mr. Raymond Pearl suggests, on the basis of
exhaustive research upon animals, that 'a certain amount of alcohol actually favours the physical growth of organism'. Not even a periodic dose is permanently injurious to the physical mechanism. It is only excessive drinking of alcohol, as any other form of poisoning, which carries a train of ill effect. Chronic gastritis, cirrhosis of the liver, multiple or peripheral neuritis, gout and delirium tremors are the pathological effects of acute alcoholism. Besides these specific diseases, the resistance to all diseases is appreciably lowered by heavy and violent death due to accidents, quarrels and other causes than is the non-drinker.

There are opposing views regarding the consumption of alcohol. Those who favour the use of alcohol generally advocate that, (1) moderate use of alcohol with meals does not interfere with health or length of life, (2) its medicinal effects and (3) used in moderation does not cause intoxication.

Opposition to Alcohol

There are many who oppose the consumption of alcohol. There are various reasons for this opposition and those can be summarised as below. (1) Morbidity rate of drinkers is higher than that of non-drinkers, (2) its medicinal effect is not so important while it is a habit forming drug which is both
depressant and narcotic in its effects upon the human organism, and (3) even its moderate use causes intoxication. Some truth appears to be on both sides.

However, the harmful effects of alcohol far outweigh its beneficial effects. It will be an ideal exercise to consider the same.

(1) Alcohol consumption causes individual disorganisation.
(2) Alcohol consumption causes family disorganisation.
(3) Alcohol consumption causes community disorganisation.

The Prohibition Enquiry Committee (1954-55)

The Prohibition Enquiry Committee was appointed by the Planning Commission, Government of India in 1954 with Shriman Narayan as Chairman 'to examine the experience gained regarding measures adopted by state Government to promote prohibition with a view to assessing the extent to which these have been successful and analysing the practical difficulties - administrative, economic, social and other - which have come in the way of implementation of the programme of prohibition and to make recommendation for a programme for prohibition on a national basis'. The Planning Commission, while appointing the
Committee, pointed out, 'Article 47 of the Constitution lays down as a Directive Principle of State Policy that the state shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medical purposes of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health. Experience gained in a number of states in implementation of the programme of prohibition has suggested the need for further study of the problems connected with administration, co-operation and support from the community, financial aspects, co-operation between neighbouring areas, fulfillment, with wide public support, of the Directive Principle of the Constitution, it is desirable at this stage to review the difficulties encountered in recent years.'

The Committee after discussing the specific benefits accrued from prohibition and the difficulties encountered, came to certain conclusion and made its recommendations. The findings of the Committee may thus conveniently be discussed under four heads, i.e., (1) specific benefits accrued, (2) the difficulties encountered, (3) conclusions, and (4) recommendations.

(1) Specific Benefits Accrued

Among the specific benefits, which accrued in states like Madras, Bombay, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, they
mentioned reduction in consumption, economic benefits and social gains.

(a) Reduction in Consumption

In Madras most of the old addicts had given up drinking excepting for hard core which still remained to be dealt with. Out that out of twenty to thirty lakhs people, who used to consume arrack, toddy only 25 per cent remained to be reclaimed. More or less similar was the number in Bombay state and about 30 per cent of the previous addicts were still consuming liquor and drugs. In Andhra Pradesh no statistics were available, but it was noted that the decrease in the number of addicts was more marked in the case of arrack toddy, ganja, opium and foreign liquor.

(b) Economic Benefits

The money, which remained unspent on account of the non-availability of intoxicating liquor and drugs, found its use in fruitful directions. Debts incurred before were now being settled and the original clay vessels used for cooking were being replaced by copper and brass ones. They were now able to afford better food and clothing and could make even ornaments for their wives, buy toys to their infants and educate their children. Most of the
ex-addicts were able to improve their farm lands, purchase farm equipment and even livestock. Thus, prohibition brought about a marked change in the standard of living of the poor working classes. It was observed that the industrial labourers, on account of prohibition, were able to retain 20 to 30 per cent of the wage bill previously spent on drink. Some economic surveys to this effect conducted in Bombay (Ahmedabad) and Madras (Salem) have reaffirmed the same conclusions.

(c) Social Gains

Improvement in the condition of addicts had been a great asset to the society at large. The ex-addicts had now regained the lost social prestige and were looked upon as active and useful members of the society. They have become conscious of their rights and duties as citizens. They actively participate in social and political activities. Family quarrels and street brawls have been eliminated. The health condition of ex-addicts has considerably improved and the standard of living has also improved the social and physical health of the family as a whole.

(2) Difficulty Encountered

The difficulties that the state Governments had to face for complete prohibition were as follows.
(a) Administrative

The administrative difficulties arose due to (i) lack of proper enforcement staff and want of adequate facilities for transport, (ii) facilities afforded for smuggling by the peculiar geographical situation of some states and border problems created by adjacent wet states, (iii) absence of protection to witnesses and the lenient attitude of Magistrates in general, in prohibition cases, and (iv) the comparatively simple process of manufacture of illicit liquor and the easy availability of base material for such purposes.

(b) Legal

The legal difficulties were: (i) the inadequacy of punishment for grave offences and procedural difficulties, and (ii) the absence of control over inter-state trade in a spirituous and medicinal preparations and ineffective control over manufacture and sale of these preparations within the limits of states.

(c) Social

Under the social difficulties: (i) the absence of active support towards enforcement of prohibition and consequent
indifference towards prohibition offences, and (ii) lack of specialised institution dealing with addicts.

(d) Economic

In economic difficulties, there are: (i) the lucrative nature of smuggling and distillation which lure the unemployed to engage in such illegal activities, and (ii) unemployment created by the introduction of prohibition among toddy tappers.

Similar difficulties were experienced in the partial prohibition states, with further implications due to the area-wise introduction of prohibition, which gave stimulus to smuggling and illicit traffic.

(3) Conclusions

The Committee, after assessing the benefits and the difficulties encountered in these states where prohibition was enforced, came to the conclusion that the measure of success achieved in these states was by no means small. Consumption of liquor was considerably reduced and the quantity of illicit liquor now consumed by addicts who have not given up drinking was much smaller in comparison with the quantity of illicit liquor consumed in prohibition days. A distinct gain was that the
prohibition of toddy had been successful. In case of other liquors prohibition has succeeded in weaning away a large number of casual drinkers who were generally averse to breaking the law. The younger generation was saved from getting entangled in the habit of drinking. No doubt, there has been increase in the offences on account of illicit practices in prohibition states, but the extent of such malpractice is often exaggerated. In the partial prohibition state, the success of prohibition has been limited on account of the existence of wet and dry areas side by side, but the consumption of alcoholic drinks and intoxicants had been reduced to a considerable extent in dry areas. Despite all difficulties experienced in the working of prohibition, they were of the opinion that prohibition was not only a sound policy but also a practical proposition and thus recommended for nation wide prohibition programme. They also pointed out that in non-prohibition states the excise policy of minimum consumption and maximum revenue had, in reality, failed to achieve the objective from a helpless people exposed to continuous temptation and no tangible results has been secured in minimising consumption. The supply of liquor near at hand made for sympathetic drinking.

It is unfortunate to see that the drinking habit has been gradually spreading among classes hitherto not accustomed to it.
'In larger urban areas, almost every witness affirmed that the drink habit was steadily on the increase. For instance, the Excise Commissioner of West Bengal was positive that the evil of drink has spread alarmingly amongst the younger generation and even among some of the women folk of the upper classes in Calcutta. The Delhi State Government reports that students coming from well-to-do families, have picked up the habit of visiting hotels where liquor is served. Some women belonging to advanced families have also been noticed to have taken up the drinking habit though their number is quite small... We were informed that in the main industrial areas, such as coal mines, jute mills and the like, and amongst concentrations of labour in the Assam tea gardens and the large irrigation and other projects, liquor traffic is enlarging'.

Thus year after year the drinking was gathering new recruits. Liquor was habit forming and with the habit once formed it was hard to obliterate the craving.

With the above observations the Committee strongly recommended that prohibition should be regarded as an integral part of the Second Five Year Plan and a uniform national policy along will meet the requirements of the situation. The target date for complete prohibition was fixed as 1st April, 1958. They also recommended for the appointment of a Central Committee to
They recommended various steps to be taken in three categories of the states, viz., (i) states, which have not yet enforced prohibition, (iii) states where partial prohibition is in force, and (iii) states where complete prohibition is in operation.

(4) Recommendations

With regard to states where no beginning towards prohibition was still made, from 1st April, 1956: (i) there should be stoppage of drinking in hotels, bars, restaurants, messes, clubs, cinemas and in parties and functions except in hotels serving tourists and visitors which should provide separate room for serving liquors, and (ii) advertisements, relating to drinks should be stopped. Besides these two steps, (iii) the number of liquor shops in both rural and urban areas should be reduced, (iv) liquor shops should be closed for an increasing numbers of days in a week, (v) a proportionate reduction should be effected in the quantity of supplies to the shop, (vi) the strength of distilled liquor produced by distilleries in India, should be reduced, (vii) the closure of shops in and near specified industrial and other developmental project areas should be given high priority, and (viii) removal of liquor shops to places away from living quarters in villages and towns.
Such steps were also be taken in the states where there was partial prohibition and complete prohibition was to be enforced at once. They also recommended for complete prohibition in the armed forces and appealed to foreign embassies not to serve liquor at public receptions where Indian citizens were invited. The public servants should observe total abstinence as it was found to be one of the chief factors in the failure of prohibition policy in U.S.A. and some other countries. Those who lack faith in the policy cannot enforce prohibition laws and, therefore, abstinence should be made a rule of conduct for Government servants.

In the states where there was complete prohibition in force (i) no permits to obtain liquor should be issued on health grounds as they are misnomers, (ii) tourists and visitors from abroad may be allowed to have liquor privately in their homes on the basis of special permits, but they should not be allowed to indulge in drinking in public after the target date, and (iii) as in the prohibition states there was a tendency on the part of addicts to consume denatured spirits after these were rendered potable as a substitute for liquor and the abuse of industrial alcohol was one of the contributory cause for the repeal of prohibition in the U.S.A. satisfactory formula may be devised to render industrial
alcohol non-potable with a view to prevent its diversion, dilution and adulteration for drinking.

They also recommended various steps to be taken with regard to the manner and method of enforcement of prohibition laws taking in view the difficulties experienced by states where prohibition was already in force. The enforcement of prohibition had two aspects, viz., (i) legal and administrative, and (ii) the creation of public opinion. While law and proper administration were essential, prohibition also demanded public co-operation. For this the measures suggested were as follows.

1. **Appointment of Administrator**

   To achieve co-ordination between the two wings of the enforcement machinery, i.e., (a) legal and administrative, and (b) educative and preventive and Administrator of Prohibition should be appointed in each state. The administrator will have control over the two wings of enforcement, but he will have no powers to interfere with the normal administration of the Police Department. The educative wing will directly come under him.
2. **Prohibition Boards**

There should be a Prohibition Board in each state consisting of representatives of both the wings of the enforcement machinery as well as some representatives of high public opinion, who will consider the details of policy and review the progress of prohibition programme from time to time. Similarly, there should be Prohibition Committee in each district and even up to the village and mohalla level.

3. **Legal and Administrative Aspects**

There should be a Prohibition Act in every state on the model of Bombay and Madras Acts. Prohibition offences should be treated on par with other offences and the police should be made responsible for legal enforcement of prohibition. Within the police department, there should be a special enforcement branch for prohibition work consisting of trained personnel. Mobile squads of police be organised especially for attacking sources of illicit supplies of liquor land drugs.

4. **Education and Propaganda**

A regular organised campaign should substitute the sporadic propaganda. The educative wing should educate public
through all existing social organisations, which have experience of this kind of work. Among them may be included temperance boards, women's associations, trade unions, religious organisations. The education departments have a special function to perform in the matter of educating students and the young in regard to alcohol and habit-forming drugs. The press should be fully utilised to rally public opinion around prohibitions.

5. **Preventive Measures**

Recreation centers should be established on a large scale both by the states and non-official organisations. Special efforts should be made to persuade ex-toddy tappers to take up suitable cottage industries. Liquor contractors and vendors should be weaned off from their present occupations and encouraged to take up more productive lines of work.

6. **Persuasion of Habitual Drunkards**

It is of utmost importance to keep in touch with the families of habitual drunkards. Though drunkards offer hard resistance to persuasion, the force of persuasion even after many disappointments, will begin to make itself felt. Both the Government and non-official social agencies can co-ordinate their activities in this direction.
1. **Financial Aspect**

The loss from excise duties should be made good by stepping up of estate duties, rationalisation of rate structures and tightening up of tax collection. On the other hand, prohibition, if effectively enforced, will contribute to the general economic prosperity of the country by raising the purchasing power of the people, by stimulating and increasing savings and by improving their general standard of living.

**Gandhi’s Views on Prohibition**

Prohibition was a very important plank in the constructive programme of Gandhi. He carried on an extensive and an intensive debate over it for almost three decades. An indication of the impact of Gandhi’s movement for prohibition is its inclusion in the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India.

A study of Gandhi’s views on prohibition gives us an insight into his ideas on morality on which his ideal society stands and this in turn, is helpful in understanding his justification of prohibition. We find that the reasons he advances in favour of prohibition are not independent but inter-dependent, and it is this inter-dependence that brings out the nature of morality as understood by him. If we want to make our society a
Rainaraj, its base should be the moral base on which social, political, economic transactions take place.

Gandhi’s arguments for prohibition both for individual and social reasons have a moral basis. But the other reasons also—psychophysical, socio-psychological, economic and religious which he has put forth in a considerable detail, cannot be brushed aside. However, people have objected to the moral support to prohibition on the grounds that it curtails individual liberty to drink; and promotes illicit distillation and drinking, thus encouraging disrespect for the law.

The Psychophysical Aspects of Drinking

Gandhi considered the effect of drinking on the individual with particular reference to the poor in India and not to the comparatively few (and at that time much less than now) educated people who drank.

Gandhi claimed that drinking led to sexual excesses and that under the spell of drink people committed sexual crimes, which they would have never committed had they been sober. He says, ‘The drunkard forgets the distinction between wife, mother and sister and indulges in crimes of which in his sober moments he will be ashamed. Any one who has anything to do with labour
knows to what state the labourers are reduced when they are under satanic influence of drink'.11

The Tek Chand report has this to say on the consumption of alcohol.

Alcohol dissolves the checks to sexual impulses and dulls the inner warnings... Even in the current culture alcohol has a close connection with sexual orgies, illegitimate births, venereal diseases and sexual crimes.12

Once the drink habit becomes an organic need (somatic) it becomes pathological. In Gandhi’s idiom, drink becomes more a disease than a vice. He says, ‘Drink is more a disease than a vice. I know crores of men who would gladly, leave off drink if they could. I know some that have asked that the temptation might be put away from them. In spite of the temptation having been put away at their instance, I have known them to steal drink. I do not, therefore, think that it was wrong to have removed the temptation. Diseased persons got to be helped against themselves’.13

Gandhi’s contention that drink is a disease applies to alcoholics and is in accordance with the view of medical science, which holds that once a person becomes an addict, he cannot cure
himself. He needs prolonged treatment and help from others. Gandhi is surely right in saying that alcoholics have got to be helped against themselves.

The Socio-psychological Aspect of Drinking

Gandhi declared that indiscriminate drinking was a dire threat to the very existence of any society. After emphasising that drink was a growing social evil he gave the examples of Shri Krishna’s community and the Roman Empire. He maintained, ‘History records that empires have been destroyed through that habit. We have it in India that the great community, which Shri Krishna belonged, was ruined by that habit. This monstrous evil was undoubtedly one of the contributory factors in the fall of Rome’.14

The Economic Aspect of Drinking

Those who drink not only weaken their body and soul, but also take the road to greater and greater impoverishment. It is not known for certain whether the majority of the poor and in any case the non-poor is insubstantial in number in India - drink. But those who drink surely increase their economic misery. ‘The majority of the people are controlled by their environment’, says Gandhi. And in so far as the poor abound in this country, the
proneness to drink also is greater. 'It is the factory labourers and others that drink. They are forlorn, uncared for and they take to drink. They are no more vicious by nature than teetotalers are saints by nature'.

As for the non-poor, they should not drink because they set a bad example to the poor and thus indirectly contribute towards their impoverishment.

It is a well-known fact that revenue from drink is obtained mostly from labourers and peasants; by exploiting this revenue it appears the Government is indirectly encouraging people to drink. To make his case stronger Gandhi observes, 'The total excise revenue of the State Travancore in 1922 was Rs.46,94,300 against land revenue Rs.38,18,652 and out of a total revenue of Rs.1,96,70,130. Thus the liquor revenue is a terrific item. I was told that drink was most prevalent among the Christians and that it was decimating hundreds of homes and bringing poverty and disgrace upon thousands of men otherwise able and intelligent'.

Because of drink, people lose their physical and mental health thereby weakening their capacity to work. The introduction of prohibition may generate condition for better health leading to greater efficiency and productivity. Gandhi’s
view that prohibition leading to abstinence from drinking on the part of the people will increase their capacity for work with greater efficiency, needs to be qualified. Thus whether drinking actually (adversely) affects ability to work will be seen from the following.

This depends upon the pattern of drinking. Used in moderation, alcohol has no effect upon most people's day-to-day work performance. Heavy drinking and alcoholism do sooner or later, adversely affect the ability to work effectively. Many people do use alcohol to try to keep themselves going at their jobs.

Again, does alcohol interfere with the performance of routine mental and manual work? According to Hoff, 'This depends on the amount taken and the rate at which the alcohol level of the blood is built up, as well as on the personality of the individual. Some of the earliest effects of the alcohol are on judgement, insight, motivation and attention'.

**Objections to Prohibition Economic Aspects**

What are the actual and possible objections raised against Gandhi's reason for prohibition based on economic grounds?
One economic argument persistently brought forward was that the introduction of prohibition would cause a loss of a large amount of revenue. This revenue was to a considerable extent used for the educational expenditure of the State. Such an objection Gandhi rejected vigorously on many grounds. He pointed out that though prohibition may mean loss of revenue it leads to other economic benefits such as increased productivity. Again the loss in revenue could be made good by cutting down expenditure in certain directions and tapping other sources of revenue. To elaborate, 'Because of drink, people lose health of both the body and mind, thereby weakening their capacity of work. Introduction of prohibition may generate conditions for better health, leading to greater efficiency and productivity'.

Gandhi felt that it was possible to cut down military expenditure. He seemed to think that the Government was spending more money than necessary on defense. From the money thus saved he suggested the Central Government could give grants to the State Governments to make up for the loss of revenue on account of prohibition. Gandhi also believed in a programme of self-supporting education and proposed that Government cut down on the educational budget. He felt that it was possible to tap other sources of revenue for example, through increased death duties and enhanced taxes on items of consumption such as tobacco and
bidis, which are injurious to health. The loss of revenue on the part of the State Governments could also be made good, at least partially, through additional Central loans to States.

'Supposing that the measures to meet the loss of revenue do not succeed, Gandhi's reply was that even if such measures do not succeed, the collection of money from the sale of liquor is wrong, mainly because the revenue comes from the poor who can least afford to drink. Gandhi quotes 'Rev. W.L. Fergussion, who says that three-fourths of the drink and drug bill of India is paid by the poor and labouring class'.\textsuperscript{18} The excise revenue at that time was estimated to be around Rs.80 crores.

If you assume that three-fourths of the drink and drug bill in India is paid by the poor and labouring classes, some Rs.60 crores is the burden they are bearing.

It is not a matter of pride that our children are being educated by the Government out of this revenue. This revenue from drink is wholly unjustifiable. According to Gandhi, the revenue from drink is a degrading taxation as it makes people pay for their own corruption - moral, mental or physical. Whatever the financial loss, Gandhi firmly believes that the moral loss that
drink causes is greater. Finally, he claimed the health of the soul and body is more important than the revenue.

Another important economic reason put forward against the introduction of prohibition was the number of people who would lose employment on that account. It was said, for example, that many people were employed in the manufacture and trade of liquor and that they would all be thrown out of employment if prohibition were introduced. However, Gandhi was of the opinion that if there has to be choice between two evils the evil affects of drink and the loss of employment - we ought to choose the lesser evil of loss of employment. Regarding the excise staff he says the Government can employ them to check the violations of prohibition rules - illicit distillations, drinking and so on. In the case of other people, especially the Parsis, who were involved in the manufacture and trade of liquor, they should be helped by the concerned associations and their own community.

The Religious Aspects of Drinking

Regarding the attitude of different religions to the consumption of liquor, Gandhi says, 'Every religion has denounced it (drinking) with more or less vehemence. The emphasis is no doubt on denouncement, though particular
religions may differ as to the degree of permissiveness. The place of drink may vary from one society to another. As to the attitude of particular religions, drinking intoxicants is contrary to Islam and Hinduism. Trade in them is demonstrably sinful.\textsuperscript{19}

Again, Christians are not against prohibition. Prohibition has been preached from time immemorial by Roman Catholic Priests.

The use of wine in Judaism, however, is not a law but a tradition. Gandhi refers to Landous' letter: Orthodox Jews may use only specially prepared kasher wine for the sanctification of the sabbath and on the two eves of the Passover festival.

Further though some Parsis say that prohibition was against their religion, Gandhi did not agree with them.

But even in religions, which denounce drink vehemently, there is a limited place for drink. While performing certain religious rites, people do use spirituous liquors to propitiate their gods. Gandhi knew the necessity of this and agreed that for bonafide religious rites people could use spirituous liquors.
The Moral Aspects of Drinking

Drinking causes a feeling of helplessness, and thus brings about a weakening of the will. It stupefies a man’s soul and once this is so he loses the distinction between himself and an animal. According to Gandhi, ‘He who runs may see that opium and such other intoxicants and narcotics stupefy a man’s soul and reduce him to a level of lower than that of beasts’.

He also says that trade in them in demonstrably sinful. And when on account of drink a man is reduced to the level of beasts he will be without any moral sense at all. Then he commits all kinds of crimes – moral and otherwise. Gandhi argues, ‘The moral loss is even greater than the financial. Drinks and drugs degrade those who are addicted to them and those who traffic in them. The drunkard forgets and the distinction between wife, mother and sister and indulges in crimes of which in his sober moments he would be ashamed’.

Objections to Moral Aspects

Of the many objections that were raised against prohibition the most important, perhaps, one against Gandhi’s moral reasons for advocating prohibition Gandhi regarded as most important.
The objections employ that the balance of moral good is not in favor of prohibition.

In the imposition of prohibition many saw a direct threat to individual freedom and liberty because prohibitions would vest vast amount of authority in the hands of the police and the related administration. Also it would encourage illicit distillation, bootlegging and all the evils that go with them. If prohibition were introduced, only people possessing licenses to drink would be allowed to do so. This restriction would deprive people of their liberty to drink not merely the heavy or habitual drinkers but even the social ones. Hence, the feeling among the people is that their individual freedom would be curtailed.

Now, for Gandhi if the case of prohibition is essentially a moral one, then it might be felt that the economic and the other aspects are unimportant. Yet Gandhi does consider these aspects extensively. Why? One explanation may be that he wants to support the case for prohibition in every possible way; and the consideration of these other issues is to persuade people some way or other to accept prohibition. For there is no real difference between the other considerations and the moral one. In fact, the economic, psychological and religious factors support and are supported by the moral one. This relationship is not a contingent
relationship but a necessary one. It will detract from Gandhi's claim that for him it is a moral issue, unless the other aspects are intrinsically and integrally related to it.
References


6. Charles Durfee, *To Drink or Not to Drink*, 1937, p. 11.


8. Ibid., p. 40.

9. Ibid., p. 46.


17. Ibid.
