

# Alcohol Fest or New Year's Celebration

**Source: Paropkari February 1, 2014**

An interesting piece of news on doordarshan piqued my interest. It said that this New Year's eve the alcohol consumption in the cities of Delhi and Mumbai was worth Rs. 270 crores. Based on this it is safe to assume that on one single night of 31<sup>st</sup> December thousands of crores of Rupees were spent entirely on consumption of alcohol. Who says that India is a poor country? According to the estimates of various newspapers the approximate expenditure on alcohol is bound to increase from 50700 crore Rupees in 2011 to 1140 thousand crore Rupees. This means that the sale of alcohol is increasing at the rate of 30 %.

There are three kinds of alcohol sold in India: the locally produced, the foreign brands producing liquor in India and lastly the imported ones. The average consumption of these varieties is 48%, 49% and 3% respectively. Out of the total amount of alcohol consumed in India, the four southern states account for 49 %, Northern India contributes to about 12%, Western India about 30% and Eastern India consumes about 9%.

When India achieved Independence, we envisioned to have a liquor free nation. Once Mahadevi Varma had commented that there could not be a greater irony than the fact that the Alcohol Prohibition Department of the Government of India being run by the money obtained from the sale of Alcohol in India. Mahatma Gandhi was trying to reduce alcohol consumption, while his own Government is making a mockery of the same by encouraging the alcohol consumption in the country. The most favored argument given by those who drink is, India always had a tradition of consuming liquor and it was called the

SOMRAS. Even Rishis used to drink it and it was even offered in the HAVAN. Drinking and offering of Somras has been a tradition in India since times immemorial. Though this argument has been refuted time and again, it suffices to say that SOMRAS was used to improve/enhance the power of mind whereas alcohol causes a complete loss of senses. Hence, it is foolish to compare Somras with alcohol. In Indian/vedic culture, the consumption of alcohol has been considered a sin and a crime. Therefore equating somras as alcohol is a flawed argument.

When we talk about culture, it means collection of thoughts and behaviors of our previous generations which benefitted individuals and society as a whole. Today drinking alcohol has become a status symbol. Liquor is a lucrative industry. When a businessman tries to expand his business; advertisement is the easiest way to do that. Though alcohol advertisements are banned in India they keep appearing through proxies. The parties in the glamour world and cinema are advertisements of liquor. Today, the liquor companies are specifically targeting the youth. An individual who does not consume alcohol starts doing so in college hostels and universities. He is taught that drinking alcohol is a symbol of progress and modernism and those who do not drink are considered regressive and backward. Alcohol consumption is not only restricted to boys but is also widespread among girls in big cities and metros. The adverse effects of these trends are slowly becoming visible in our society. Those who oppose the ban on drinking often argue that drinking alcohol is a matter of personal choice/freedom, and its prohibition as a violation of their personal right or freedom. What they fail to

understand is that there is a defining limit to personal freedom. If personal freedom is detrimental to oneself then this personal freedom cannot be acceptable to the society as a whole. By drinking alcohol, not only does one destroy their own health, wealth, potential and strength but also harm their family and society. The people who consume alcohol mainly fall in one of these categories

1. The capitalists who encourage consumption of alcohol in society, they loot the government and public and gain enormous amount of wealth and power. They unscrupulously throw grand parties with a free flow of liquor.
2. The second category is that of politicians. They also gain wealth from corrupt government and businessmen. They suffer no loss by either throwing liquor parties or consuming liquor themselves.
3. The third category is that of civil servants from a senior bureaucrat like a chief secretary to a low level clerk. The corrupt officers take bribes and spend the money on alcohol and other vices.
4. The last category has been created by the Government. It is the labour who gets wages without work and gets food without having to pay for it/ earn it. He also uses the ill-gotten money, the ill-gotten way, spends it on alcohol
5. Then there are others too who deprive their children of proper food and education to drink alcohol. These people do not contribute to the family income, take away whatever their wife earns, and deprive their children of food, clothes, education, medicine and other necessities. These children are then forced to work as labors or get involved in crimes at a tender

age. Some small farmers are known to have sold off their lands because of their addiction to alcohol.

6. Seen in any light (From any perspective?), alcohol is a wasteful expenditure and is the root cause of poverty, weakness and immoral behavior.

Alcohol is found to be the main cause for most crimes against women. A person thinks of crime when he is drunk and commits crime under the influence of alcohol. According to Government statistics, everyday almost 10,00,000 women suffer at the hands of men in one way or the other. Most of the crimes are never reported. If the crimes are committed by the father, brother or uncle a woman often has no one to go to. Those who misbehave with women often try to persuade the women to drink.

In the light of all this, even the argument justifying the drinking of alcohol as an expression of one's enthusiasm, success and joy and matter of personal choice sounds ludicrous and calling it a personal right is an absolutely far-fetched thought.

Our Government considers the revenue from the sale of alcohol very important. Amongst the larger states of India, Gujarat is the only state that has a complete ban on alcohol. It is argued, that the ban encourages an illegal consumption, bribery and smuggling. This is a totally misconstrued argument. If this argument justifies an open sale of alcohol, then gambling and prostitution should also be legalized under the same pretext as they would bring even more revenue to the Government. The people who say that prohibition encourages theft should understand that there is no law in the world that has not been

broken. But we don't stop making laws for the fear that they might be broken. Instead we create strict counter measures as deterrents against those who break it. Imposing a ban helps most an ordinary citizen who can escape peer pressure or who attempts to drink to be socially acceptable. He also does not dare to break the law. Therefore it is incorrect to say that Gujarat should remove the ban of consumption of alcohol. States like Haryana and Andhra Pradesh introduced the ban on alcohol and later removed it. But Mizoram and Nagaland still have the ban in place. Therefore stating revenue or tribals as an excuse to encourage alcohol consumption is ignoring the welfare of the country and its citizens.

We are a very hypocritical society. We don't want to ban alcohol but we want to stop all crimes that happen under its influence. We want to legalize gambling but don't want the poor to become poorer due to that. In the name of rights we want full fledged personal freedom but want to stop atrocities and crimes against women. The fundamental reason for this mentality is the economic benefit that arises from it. There is no immediately visible benefit either for the practitioner or for the preacher of good habits and moral values. If we start advertising against smoking, drinking alcohol: who will get revenue from such advertisements. There might be expenditure of course, but certainly no economic benefits. In contrast advertisement for cigarettes, wine and beer promotes sales. The amount received by sales is many times more than that invested in its advertisement.

It is ironical that we want our children to stay away from these addictions but don't mind the benefit that comes to us by promoting their

sales. It is not just advertisements, these businesses do not shy away from using other deceptive and psychological means to influence the youth. Small or big all those involved in the business of cigarettes and alcohol addiction have no scruples in adopting force and illegal means to protect their interests. From the village vendor to the bigger liquor barons, all make use of force and pressure tactics to achieve their end. It is difficult to put a stop to these ills. However protecting the public, its health, its wealth and its culture, is the duty of the well-wishers of this society and nation. Under no circumstance should we give up protesting against the wrong. The result of goodness and righteousness is permanent and long term. It affects the soul. The Geeta says:

**- Dharmveer**