

Review of: "Alcohol Consumption in Ancient India and the Contemporary Challenges: A Study of Socio-Economic Implications and Anti-Liquor Protests in Tamil Nadu"

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The article provides a unique perspective on the history of alcohol use in India along with a commentary on various social and political issues related to alcohol use in the Indian society, and particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu. The article condenses information and accounts from a variety of sources to provide a comprehensive picture of issues related to alcohol use. As one of the most widely used licit substance in the world and in India as well, the issue of legal status of alcohol is often a complex one considering that it is responsible for a range of negative health consequences, as well as huge social and economic costs. It is a topic that has huge scope and articles such as these are vital in informing the general public and raising issues for State and other stakeholders to consider. Nonetheless, there were some parts of the article that could be improved to make the narrative better. The article is also quite lengthy (at 11,000 words) and a number of sections could be shortened for better readability. That can be a consideration during publication in journals as most journals have word limits of 5k-6k on average for review articles. Below are few of my comments (in no particular order).

- The first part of the article before the Methods under the heading of 'Alcohol Consumption in Ancient India: A Socio-Cultural Exploration' is quite fragmented and does not set up the rest of the article very well. It is made up of random snippets that go back and forth between historical/mythological anecdotes and current practices/evidences. It appears more like an attempt to showcase the list of various anecdotes of alcohol in Indian-Hindu history, rather than elaborate on what those accounts say. Since there is already a larger section in the latter part of the article on 'Historical accounts from Ancient India', this part in the Introduction seems unnecessary (and also inadequately referenced). Rather, it would have been better to talk about the rationale of the topic, in terms of why it is important to focus on Tamil Nadu and the issues related to alcohol sale and consumption in TN.
- Related to the previous comment, there are not enough justifications given in text regarding why the review moves towards specific analysis of TN's issues in the context of the entire country's alcohol situation. It is not at all wrong to focus on a specific state, but there has to be clear rationale and justification for why this specific state was chosen for study. The article moves back and forth in terms of text specific to India and other parts focusing only on Tamil Nadu.
- The Methods part is not very appropriate for an article of this nature. The article is a narrative/holistic review at best and the primary data part of the 'proposed study' is not represented in the rest of the text. It is more of a review of academic literature, historical texts and periodicals/news. It would be a stretch to call the article as a 'original research

article'. Thus, the Methods chapter could be reworked to reflect the same, and describe the main goals and strategies for review rather than the listed points.

- The text under the heading of "Alcohol Consumption in India: Trends, Consequences, and Illicit Production" does not provide the full picture of the state of alcohol use in India. First, the data for alcohol use in India is a bit outdated as the most recent nationwide household survey was conducted in 2019 (https://www.lgbrimh.gov.in/resources/Addiction_Medicine/elibrary/magnitude_substance_abuse_india.pdf). The text regarding global rates of alcohol use and increasing female users could be shortened as it does not add more value to the rest of the section. Instead, state wise differences and peculiarities could have been discussed in context of the most recent official statistics, in order to draw comparisons between Indian states. This would have made the narrative's transition towards TN smoother. The parts from page 14 regarding alcohol prohibition in Indian states following independence would have been better fit here to elaborate on why a number of states (including TN) banned alcohol at first.
- The main priority of the article has to be reassessed, particularly in the middle sections. Is the focus on direct effects of illegal (unsafe/homemade) alcohol on human health? Or is illegal production/sale just a byproduct of the primary issue at hand, that of legal status of alcohol? The parts in page 7 make it seem that illegal production of homemade alcohol is the main issue at hand. However, what is not discussed properly is the reason why alcohol (in general) is considered bad. Of course, alcohol is implicated in domestic issues and often used more by people from low SES. But the more concerning reason that alcohol is considered bad is because of its direct health effects on an individual; that is causes dependence/addiction and there are serious physical/psychological consequences of prolonged alcohol use, which reduced individuals' productive capacity and increases need for resources for healthcare. The other negative consequences are secondary and not direct effects of alcohol use. While alcohol affects more people from low SES, it only means that the effects are more apparent on low SES and that people from all walks of life can use alcohol. Thus, some consideration is required about what the primary argument of the current article is. The elaborate quotes in paged 9-11 do not add value to the points already stated.
- Similar to previous point, a number of points and arguments have been exaggerated. For example, there is one part of the article, *"As a consequence of these oscillations in government policy, a significant portion of the state's population, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, has developed alcohol dependence. Furthermore, a substantial number of adolescents have also succumbed to this detrimental habit"* (p.13). It makes it sound like the State Government is directly responsible for alcohol addiction among people, which is untrue. Alcohol is probably the most widely used licit substance in most societies. There will always be a small proportion of people who develop dependence symptoms; however, it is not logical to blame the society's alcohol laws for the addiction since there were majority of people who also live in the same society (with no restriction on alcohol) and who did not develop alcohol dependence. Substance abuse/dependence is an intricate dynamic of individual dispositions and various risks at multiple levels and not the result of laws/regulations alone. Contemporary research on substance use etiology has moved towards a trans theoretical approach, and political/legal aspects are one of the many risk factors.
- The final part of the article related to the political history/situation of alcohol in TN has some issues. While it is appreciable that a lot of events in the past have been detailed, there are only a few outstanding points that emerge. It

can be stated that alternative State governments have gradually moved back and forth on alcohol prohibition policies in response to issues faced by citizens and also alcohol's roles during elections. The detailed timeline of various protests and events do not add much value to the main points and could be condensed further. Since political parties have been directly named and chastised, this very article could be misconstrued as a political statement or criticism of existing State Government. In that regard, the article must be as objective as possible. Recommendations based on scientific evidence can be made, but it can become problematic to provide straightforward solutions. The issue of alcohol is a complex one with no easy fix. While some parts make it seem like proliferation of alcohol sales directly benefits few individuals in power, it is often not the case. States which rely on revenues from alcohol sales for their budgets struggle in pulling back alcohol due to its direct economic implications. This is true of a number of states in India already. A few middle ground approaches could be considered too.