

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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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

General comments

The topic is a very interesting one –both the description of the more ancient context of India's attitude to alcohol, and the description of the more recent oscillating laws on alcohol supply in Tamil Nadu.

Length: At over 9000 words, the paper felt long to me. There is scope for increases in conciseness or some shortening. For example there could be less detail on international literature on alcohol's harms; and some shortening of discussion and conclusions (though also see comments on discussion section below). Another potential area for shortening: the alcohol riots are largely described one-by-one – some summarising may be possible, which can be illustrated by examples.

Clarifying sources: For an undertaking of this type, a wide range of sources was reasonably used, but there are some paragraphs, where it is not clear what material was the basis for the statements - e.g. the literature, consultations, or direct observation? For example, there are some strongly worded paragraphs on the effects of alcohol on families, and on rising rates of addiction, without reference to data or sources.

Terminology: At various parts of the terms paper 'addiction' or 'alcoholism' are used interchangeably with any alcohol 'consumption', or 'harmful' use of alcohol. E.g. "relevant literature on alcoholism" (page 2). In most countries there is a spectrum of consumption, including non-dependent and dependent consumption (as per WHO ICD-11 descriptions).

I would suggest you avoid the term alcohol 'abuse' (e.g. page 5), as it previously had a diagnostic use, but has acquired a pejorative tone. 'Misuse' is an alternative

"habitual drinkers" is not a standard term. Suggest define it – e.g. does it just refer to a certain minimum frequency of consumption? Or some evidence of harms or dependence?

English expression: The paper could do with a careful edit for English expression – e.g. the first sentence of the introduction. Some further examples are below.

Abstract: "For total prohibition to be successfully implemented..." This seems to assume that prohibition is the ideal approach for this region. As you point out later in the paper there are also challenges with prohibition. The phrasing could

be more nuanced. It is fine to note benefits and challenges or prohibition. Or to make the point that the transitions back and forth from prohibition to non-prohibition in Tamil Nadu, may be politically driven.

Specific comments:

Here are some examples of where sources need to be identified (e.g. by using a citation +/- data on prevalence, by saying 'consultation suggests' or 'personal communication' or 'by observation'). The list is not exhaustive:

- page 2: "the consumption of alcohol was largely forbidden among higher caste groups, primarily the Brahmins, while being permissible within middle and lower caste groups."
- page 2: Anthropological studies across cultures highlight the influence of cultural values:
- Page 9, second para: describing that a rise in alcohol problems is linked to a rise in child labour. Similarly, the paragraphs on violence in marriage or on effects on family income are strongly worded but the source of the observation is not clear (p 10-11).
- Page 6: "the "family drinking" phenomenon in Kerala, India, acts as an encouraging factor."
- "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." Data plus citation needed

The language is very emotive and 'black and white' in parts. For an academic paper, then a slightly more objective and measured tone might be appropriate - even though the topic is a sad one.

- E.g. to rescue a significant portion of the population from the clutches of alcohol addiction"

Page 2: "These values persist not only in folk and tribal communities but also in modern times," tribal communities also exist in modern times. Do you mean in general communities (in Tamil Nadu) ? (or similar)

Page 2-3: the second para of page 2 (introduction) duplicates some of the content in the second para of page 3.

Help readers outside India: It would be good to consider readers who are outside India, and make it easier for them to understand e.g.

- 'the city of Ayodhya', rather than just 'Ayodhya'

-Non Indian readers may not know what a 'Varna' is (page 5)

Methods; (page 4 etc) – the description of methods could be tightened:

e.g. "comprehensive review" perhaps doesn't tell us much about the approach you used. Also, given that you are searching literature written over a period of more than 2000 years, it may not have been possible to do a 'comprehensive search' of all the literature over that time. Below are two other examples, where a similar breadth of literature was reviewed, to give you ideas for how to describe the search.

1. Al-Ansari B et al.. Extent of alcohol prohibition in civil policy in Muslim majority countries: the impact of globalization. *Addiction*. 2015;111(10):1703-13.
2. Al Ansari M et al.. Alcohol: from Mesopotamia to modern Iraq. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* [Internet]. 2019: [1-23 pp.]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2019.1657541>.

Interviews: it is not clear how many people were interviewed, or were these structured or semistructured interviews or discussions? If 'interviews', normally you would have ethical approval for interviews, a consent and information statement, and there would normally be an outline of questions or topic areas. Or are you referring to informal conversations (i.e. personal communication)? Or were they consultations?

"Mixed methods" is a term more often used to describe the collection and analysis of original data, rather than for a review of published qualitative or quantitative data. Similarly, you are not doing quantitative analysis – just describing quantitative data. Hence the 'analysis' section may not be needed for this paper. You are doing more of a narrative synthesis.

Section on Limitations: some of the material under the subheadings, e.g. "Ethical considerations": seems to have been pasted in from another source, e.g. "Presumably adhered to ethical guidelines" (underlining added). Some thoughtful consideration of the limitations of this paper would be useful. Also, the limitations section often goes in the discussion.

page 6: before you mention illicit alcohol consumption in Tamil Nadu, it would be good to mention what the current legal status of alcohol is in that region.

page 5: it would be helpful to give an approximate date (or date range) for the Puranaanooru

Page 7: you mention "the use of harmful chemicals in the distillation process" as a cause of deaths from illicit alcohol. Is this correct? (if so, needs a citation). Or is it that imperfect distillation results in production of methanol, or that methanol is added to the finished product? See this cite for information on methanol: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8303512/

"violence stemming from drinking habits." Might be better as violence associated with" drinking habits. As there can be violence in a relationship anyway, but alcohol makes it worse.

P9/10 the quote: I don't feel that the graphic description of a single case of severe marital violence adds much. Such violence, sadly, can occur around the world. I'd delete this.

In contrast, the next longish quote (on page 11), is more useful, as it is more distinct to the setting.

The conclusion (page 17) comes before the discussion. Usually the conclusion is at the end of the paper (before declarations and references)., and it is often only a single paragraph (though can be slightly longer).

The discussion is rather general. It could be enhanced by comparing with one or more countries with similarly complex or varying relationships with alcohol or which have effectively put in place promising solutions . e.g. Thailand or Iran.

(optional)

Minor grammatical issues:A few examples of

page 5: “ But in his treatise Manusmriti (11: 55)”: needs a comma after treatise

page 5: “They were typically served during social gatherings, and chieftains and kings would offer them to honored guests”, the subject is plural here, but (as per the previous sentence) alcohol (in the (collective) singular is being referred to). If you prefer it plural, you can make it ‘alcohol beverages’ in the previous sentence.