



Drinking Sensibly: A philosophical perspective on consumption of Alcohol

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ABSTRACT: In this paper Alcohol's positive and negative effects are discussed. The safe limits of alcohol are already established and approved by various sources. The comparative study of alcohol's advantages and disadvantages reveals that if taken in moderate quantity alcohol has many benefits. The study also reveals that a high alcohol intake implies an increased risk of a large number of health hazards, such as dementia, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, cirrhosis, upper digestive tract cancer and also leads to alcohol dependency.

This paper presents an argument to show that for the harmful effects of alcohol the person who consumes alcohol beyond what his/her anatomy allows should be held responsible. There have been many experts who have worked in this field scientifically and collected data regarding the effects of alcohol. In this paper we try to look at it more from philosophical perspective and thus the definitions and origins of various liquor have been discussed along with the major intentions with which the same were made i.e. mainly for medicinal purposes, soothing and to overcome fatigue.

INTRODUCTION

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world” Albert Einstein

In today's world the need for education on alcohol consumption is required at the Consumer level and also for the policy decision maker more than ever. This is particularly relevant to India as after Gujarat, Kerala & Bihar too have imposed ban on alcohol. Positive results of ban on alcohol in the State of Gujarat is yet to be seen as there is no shortage of Alcohol for people who drink, but the State is losing a lot of revenue in terms of Excise duty & various taxes. The illegal activities of smuggling Liquors from other bordering states & Union Territories is an accepted menace, also the parallel industry of Hooch is always booming in spite of Hooch doing greater harm than

legally available Liquor or Country Liquor available in other states. Legal enforcement bodies seem to give it a blind eye or work in hand in glove with the Liquor Mafia as their coffers are getting filled with corruption money. A similar fate awaits the other states, namely Kerala and Bihar who have recently imposed a ban on Liquor. This particular aspect of Alcohol consumption directs us to study the effects- both good & bad and also how the society needs more awareness about alcohol and its consumption in moderation.

The definition of moderate drinking is something of a balancing act. Moderate drinking sits at the point at which the health benefits of alcohol clearly outweigh the risks. It is made quite evident by other researchers that age, gender, genetic factors and drinking pattern with regard to frequency and type of alcohol both have an influence on its positive effect on health.

The suggestions in this article about sensible drinking limit should not be taken as advice to drink.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A BMJ journal's paper on "Moderate alcohol intake and lower risk of coronary heart disease: meta-analysis of effects on lipids and haemostatic factors" after various tests and quantitative review found strong and consistent evidence linking moderate alcohol intake with higher concentrations of high density lipoprotein cholesterol and apolipoprotein A I and lower concentrations of fibrinogen. They also found a weak association between moderate alcohol intake and increased triglyceride concentration. On the basis of published associations between these biomarkers and risk of coronary heart disease they calculated an overall predicted 24.7% reduction in risk of coronary heart disease associated with an intake of 30 g of alcohol a day owing to changes in these markers. These data support a causal interpretation of the association between moderate alcohol intake and lower risk of coronary heart disease and suggest that the benefit is mediated in part through several known biological markers of coronary heart disease.

"Review of moderate alcohol consumption and reduced risk of coronary heart disease: is the effect due to beer, wine, or spirits?" also suggests that from observational studies, where alcohol consumption can be linked directly to an individual's risk of coronary heart disease, provide strong evidence that all alcoholic drinks are linked with lower risk. Thus, a substantial portion of the benefit is from alcohol rather than other components of each type of drink.

M. Grønbæk from the Centre for Alcohol Research, National Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark, in his work “The positive and negative health effects of alcohol- and the public health implications “stated that Health researchers and laymen have, for centuries, known the serious consequences of a high alcohol intake for both body and mind. However, the latest thirty years of research has shown that alcohol has a more complex influence on health than, for instance, smoking and physical inactivity. Smoking and physical inactivity are straight forward. Smoking is bad for health – increasingly bad with an increasing consumption. Physical activity is reversely good for health – the more the better. Whilst for alcohol it is different; in small doses, there is a beneficial effect, at least for some outcomes – and in higher doses, it is detrimental to health. Alcohol is an organic solvent, which in high doses has both direct and indirect harmful influence on a large number of organs, and a high alcohol intake during a longer period of time implies an increased risk for developing alcohol dependency syndrome. But a light to moderate alcohol intake is also for many people a natural part of the diet, which increases pliability of and adds calories to the food. The picture of alcohol as an important risk factor for morbidity and mortality is therefore to some extent complicated of the known positive somatic effects as well as the beneficial mental and social influence of a light to moderate alcohol intake.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To bring awareness to people at large about the ill effects of alcohol.
2. To make people aware about the beneficial effects of alcohol in moderation.
3. To suggest education on alcohol consumption to minimize or eliminate the risk attached with excess consumption of alcohol.
4. To make people aware that Alcohol was invented with noble intentions and thus lots of the spirits' names were derived from the words meaning “water of life”.
5. To recommend strict legal action and increase in the punishment for people involved in illegal production, marketing, selling or any trade of illicit alcohol.

DEFINITIONS & ORIGINS OF FEW ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Alcohol is a volatile mobile fluid obtained by fermenting a liquid containing sugar, the strength of which can be further increased by distillation. The name is derived from the Arabic *al-kohl*. *Kohl* is a black, very fine staining powder which is used cosmetically - once for staining the eyelids of harem beauties. Later the name was applied to highly refined chemical powders and essences and then to spirits produced by distillation and rectification.

An **alcoholic beverage** is a drink which contains a substantial amount of the psychoactive drug ethanol (informally called alcohol), a depressant which in low doses causes euphoria, reduced anxiety, and sociability and in higher doses causes intoxication (drunkenness), stupor and unconsciousness. Long-term use can lead to alcohol abuse, physical dependence, and alcoholism.

Ethyl alcohol (C_2H_5OH), sensibly consumed, is a beneficial alcohol. Although alcohol must be treated seriously, it is only a problem to those who abuse it. It is not the direct cause of any disease nor will it, on its own, cure any. But it is often used medicinally as part of the treatment for certain physical conditions. There is a very small proportion, 0.003%, in the blood of each human being - yes, even in life-long abstainers - and (after the urine of a healthy person) it is regarded as the world's second oldest disinfectant.

Alcohol consumption is the drinking of beverages containing **ethyl alcohol**. **Alcoholic beverages** are consumed largely for their physiological and psychological effects, but they are often consumed within specific social contexts and may even be a part of religious practices. Because of the effects that alcohol has on the body and on behaviour, governments often regulate its use.

Water of Life

Whisky- derived from the Gaelic word “*uisge beathe*” meaning water of life.

Akvavit- a Scandinavian alcoholic beverage is derived from Latin *aqua vitae*, "water of life."

Certain Fruit brandies are also called “*eau de vies*” i.e. French for water of life.

The origin of Wine may date back to some 6000 years BC. The following fable throws light on the probable cause of invention of Wine:

King Jamshid of Persia was very fond of grape juice and ordered his staff to store the juice in jars so that he could enjoy it throughout the year. When winter arrived, the king tasted the juice, but found it had become quite bitter and horrible. He marked the jars 'poison' and dispatched them to a store. A lady in his court, finding herself out of favour with the king, became so depressed she decided to end her life by drinking this poison. She became drowsy and all her cares and anxieties disappeared. Returning later to the comforting liquid, her conduct became so remarkable she was once again noticed by the king and he too tasted the juice which had now fermented to become wine. He was so impressed he called the new drink 'medicine for kings'.

Medical science created *Gin*. Credit for its discovery goes to a Dutch Professor of Chemistry, Franciscus de la Boe (1614-72), who became known as Sylvius when he adopted the Latin form of his family name. Dr Sylvius had long recognised the diuretic properties of the oil of the juniper berry. Using a distillation from rye, he rectified (re-distilled) it with the flavour of the juniper berry as he perfected his medicine in the laboratory of the famous University of Leyden in Holland. The apothecaries sold it as an infallible cure for ailments such as gout, kidney trouble and rheumatism. The medicine was first sold under the name *Genievre*, the French word for juniper. Later it was called *Genever* and then *Geneva*!

Bitters which were also known as “*elixirs*” are spirits flavoured with herbs, bark roots and fruits resulting from both the infusion and distillation process. They all have stomachic qualities, i.e. can be drunk as an *aperitif, digestif or correctif*.

Vermouth is an aromatised wine which has been fortified. The name originated Germany where, in the sixteenth century, it was common practice to flavour some local wines with wormwood. These concoctions were used medicinally in the belief that the combination of wormwood and wine had therapeutic and digestive properties.

Benedictine liqueur was first created for medicinal purposes at the monastery at Fecamp in Normandy in 1510 by Dom Vincelli of the Benedictine Order. Alexandre le Grand updated the recipe in 1863. Today Benedictine is made from double-distilled brandy and 75 different herbs, including hyssop, angelica, balm, coriander, cloves, cinnamon, saffron and nutmeg. The initials DOM on the bottle are the Benedictine motto '*Deo Optimo maximo*', 'To God, most good, most great'.

Chartreuse liqueur's basic recipe was given to the Carthusian Order by Maracel d' Estrées in 1605. By 1764 it had been perfected by the monks in their monastery at Voiron near Grenoble in France.

Vieille Cure herb liqueur has Cognac and Armagnac brandy base. It was originally made as a medicine at the Abbaye de Cenon in the Gironde, Bordeaux.

Thus, it will be safe to interpret that when men first distilled alcoholic beverages they had considered only its beneficial aspects and thus called ethyl alcohol “water of life”. The fact that Monks and Doctors prepared certain liqueurs also points to the medicinal benefits of these liqueurs.

Benefits of alcohol

When taken in moderation, alcohol can be good for you. It can even be considered as a food because it creates heat and is a source of nutriment and energy. In the form of a variety of drinks it can be an appetiser, an accompaniment to and an enhancer of food flavours and an aid to digestion. It accentuates sensory perception, sharpens memory and gives some protection to the heart and blood vessels by raising the level of good cholesterol. It also depresses centres of anxiety, relieving tension and stress. It exhilarates the spirit and can, on occasions, produce a magnificent glow.

Abuses of alcohol

Alcohol should be treated with great respect. (Long-term heavy drinking can lead to serious illness, including liver cirrhosis, the hastening of age and the deterioration of the nervous system. Heavy drinking impedes the speed and quality of performance and can lead those who indulge to become a danger to themselves and others, especially when driving or operating machinery. In extreme cases, people who become addicted to alcohol may undergo personality changes and become extremely unpleasant and unreliable. Sometimes they will be unfit for work and become an embarrassment and a general burden to their families and friends.

Safe, sensible drinking

Most of the alcohol consumed passes into the bloodstream and is rapidly absorbed. The absorption will be slowed down if drink is accompanied by food. Almost all the alcohol is burnt up by the liver and what remains is discharged in urine or perspiration.

The liver is like a car with one gear; it (can only burn up one unit of alcohol per hour and if it has to cope with too much alcohol over a very long period it will suffer damage. If we are to avoid damage to our health, expert medical opinion suggests that our alcoholic intake should be within prescribed limit.

A working party of the Royal College of Psychiatrists recommended an upper limit of 56 units of alcohol a week (one unit is equivalent to half a pint of beer, one measure of spirits(25ml), or a glass of wine(125ml) or fortified wine(50ml) but made no comment about different consumptions for men and women. The recent campaign of the Health Education Council advised consumption of under 21 units a week for men and 14 for women, implying that consumption beyond this was harmful

Justifying the consumption of Alcohol in safe limits

Wheel and Fire are supposed to be the two main inventions by mankind for the civilization and if we study history it would be safe to say that Alcohol too has played a significant role towards making man a social animal.

Discovery of late Stone Age jugs suggest that intentionally fermented beverages existed at least as early as the Neolithic period (cir. 10,000 BC).

Chemical analysis of jars from the Neolithic village Jiahu in the Henan province of northern China revealed traces of alcohol that were absorbed and preserved. According to a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, chemical analysis of the residue confirmed that a fermented drink made of grapes, hawthorn berries, honey, and rice was being produced in 7000–6650 BC. The results of this analysis were published in December 2004. This is approximately the time when barley beer and grape wine were beginning to be made in the Middle East.

Wine's first appearance is thought to date from 6000 BC in Georgia. The earliest firm evidence of wine production dates back to 5400 BC in Iran.

Evidence of alcoholic beverages has also been found dating from 3150 BC in ancient Egypt, 3000 BC in Babylon, 2000 BC in pre-Hispanic Mexico, and 1500 BC in Sudan.

The medicinal use of alcohol was mentioned in Sumerian and Egyptian texts dating from about 2100 BC. The Hebrew Bible recommends giving alcoholic drinks to those who are dying or depressed, so that they can forget their misery (*Proverbs 31:6-7*).

By the time the Europeans reached the Americas in the 15th century, several native civilizations had developed alcoholic beverages. According to a post-conquest Aztec document, consumption of the local "wine" (*pulque*) was generally restricted to religious ceremonies but was freely allowed to those who were older than 70 years.

The natives of South America produced a beer-like beverage from cassava or maize, which had to be chewed before fermentation in order to turn the starch into sugar. (Beverages of this kind are known today as *cauim* or *chicha*.) This chewing technique was also used in ancient Japan to make sake from rice and other starchy crops.

Babylonians regularly used both beer and wine as offerings to their gods.

Alcoholic beverages were widely used in all segments of Chinese society, were used as a source of inspiration, were important for hospitality, were considered an antidote for fatigue, and were sometimes misused.

Brewing was probably stumbled on by accident. Very likely some nomadic tribes in the Middle East, once they decided to stop roaming, would cultivate some land with corn. In some years they would be rewarded by a bumper crop and would store the surplus grain, keeping it in reserve for the occasions when the harvest would fail. Inevitably the crude stores would allow moisture to permeate and the grain would start to sprout and germinate. In order to salvage something from the spoilt grain porridge would be made. By natural occurrence, enzymes would be released and these would convert the starch in the porridge into maltose, resulting in a sweet-tasting porridge. If this was stored in the open, yeasts from the atmosphere would soon

settle to feed on the sugars, converting them into alcohol and carbon dioxide. We can presume that this accidental, crude brew was enjoyed, leading to experimentation and more rewarding results.

Alcoholic beverages in the Indus valley civilization appeared in the Chalcolithic Era. These beverages were in use between 3000 BC - 2000 BC. *Sura*, a beverage brewed from rice meal, wheat, sugar cane, grapes, and other fruits, was popular among the Kshatriya warriors and the peasant population. *Sura* is considered to be a favorite drink of Indra.

The Hindu Ayurvedic texts describe both the beneficent uses of alcoholic beverages and the consequences of intoxication and alcoholic diseases. Ayurvedic texts concluded that alcohol was a medicine if consumed in moderation, but a poison if consumed in excess. Most of the people in India and China have continued, throughout, to ferment a portion of their crops and nourish themselves with the alcoholic product.

In ancient India, alcohol was also used by the orthodox population. Early Vedic literature suggests the use of alcohol by priestly classes. Madira and Somras are also mentioned in lot of Hindu scriptures.

Throughout the first 1,800 years of church history, Christians consumed alcoholic beverages as a common part of everyday life and used "the fruit of the vine in their central rite—the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. They held that both the Bible and Christian tradition taught that alcohol is a gift from God that makes life more joyous, but that over-indulgence leading to drunkenness is sinful or at least a vice. The Bible indicates wine as a symbol of joy while "strong drink" is a euphemism for drunkenness.

Social Aspects

- Champagne is considered to be the celebration drink.
- Red wine is often used for Toasting in Christian weddings.
- There is tradition of drinking on birth and to departed soul in various culture.
- Armed forces are given a certain quota of Liquor at subsidized rates as it helps them to overcome fatigue, loneliness, boredom, monotonous work schedule and soothes the body in certain weather conditions.

Social drinking is tolerated in many cultures around the world. It is accepted as a legitimate way to celebrate special occasions or just to relax after a hard day at work. There are a number of benefits that people obtain from social drinking. This is why the activity has been popular for thousands of years. Alcohol is often described as social lubricant. People tend to feel more relaxed after a drink or two and a bit less self-conscious. The effects of alcohol make it easier for people to shake off inhibitions a few hours. There are many social occasions that are based around alcohol consumption and these can be great fun. Some studies even suggest that drinking in moderation may bring certain health benefits. It is these beneficial aspects of alcohol that ensure its continued popularity.

It is possible to define a *social drinker* in a number of ways. A definition could be based on the amount the individual drinks or their relationship to alcohol. One way to describe a social drinker would be to say that these are individuals who:

- Only drink occasionally.
- Do not feel the need to drink alcohol in order to have a good time.
- Never get into trouble because of alcohol.
- Don't do or say things they regret while drinking.
- Do not spend a lot of time thinking about alcohol.
- Feel no need to control their intake. Such individuals never drink enough to worry about having to cut back.

CONCLUSIONS:

Laws against making wine were enacted and repealed forty-one times between 1100 BC and AD 1400. However, a commentator writing around 650 BC asserted that people "will not do without beer. To prohibit it and secure total abstinence from it is beyond the power even of sages. Hence, therefore, we have warnings on the abuse of it. Problems commonly associated with industrialization and rapid urbanization were also attributed to alcohol. Thus, problems such as urban crime, poverty and high infant mortality rates were blamed on alcohol, although "it is likely that gross overcrowding and unemployment had much to do with these problems." Over time, more and more personal, social and religious/moral problems would be blamed on alcohol. And not only would it be enough to prevent drunkenness; any consumption of alcohol

would come to be seen as unacceptable. Groups that began by promoting the moderate use of alcohol instead of its abuse- would ultimately form temperance movements and press for the complete and total prohibition of the production and distribution of beverage alcohol. Unfortunately, this would not eliminate social problems but would compound the situation by creating additional problems wherever it was implemented.

“*Ati sarvatra varjayet*” an old Sanskrit shloka meaning excess of anything should be avoided.

Prohibition

Blaming Alcohol for its ill effects would actually be insulting the intelligence of sane human beings as it has always been evident from mankind's history that all things good were abused through either excessive indulgence or finding the alternate negative use. History has shown that Prohibition or ban on Alcohol has never worked in countries like USA and it has been an utter failure in India too and imposing heavy penalties for bootlegging is, at best, an ill-conceived treatment of cultural symptoms and at worst, a tool for the mafia to expand its criminal activities. One only needs to follow the money trail to find who are drumming up support for prohibition in India. Unfortunately, all such masterminds get a clean chit from supine corrupt Indian courts and get to live long lives. Indian judicial system is geared towards punishing the poor end-executors of a crime, and many a times trapping completely innocent scapegoats.

Drunken Driving

In India the punishments handed out for Drunk Driving are suspension of driving licence for at least three months in cases of drunken driving or using the phone when behind the wheel. Further, driving under the influence of liquor or drugs can also lead to jail terms of six months, even for the first offence.

You could be imprisoned, banned from driving and face a fine if you're found guilty of drink-driving. The actual penalty you get is up to the magistrates who hear your case, and depends on your offence.

You may be able to reduce your ban by taking a Drink-Drive Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS) course if you're banned from driving for 12 months or more. It's up to the court to offer this.

Under Section 185 of the Motor Vehicles Act, a person driving in an inebriated condition or under the influence of drugs to such an extent that he is incapable of exercising proper control over the vehicle can be jailed for six months for the first offence. The jail term can extend to two years for subsequent offences.

Ohio State in USA requires a mandatory 72-hour jail sentence for a first offense conviction; however, the jail time component is satisfied by attendance of the Ohio A.W.A.R.E. Program, which is a 72-hour alcohol-education program.

It is recommended in India also punishment should be as severe as that in U.K. Following punishments should be levied for various offences as under.

For Driving or attempting to drive while above the legal limit or unfit through drink

- 6 months' imprisonment
- an unlimited fine
- a driving ban for at least 1 year (3 years if convicted twice in 10 years)

For refusing to provide a specimen of breath, blood or urine for analysis

- 6 months to 1 year imprisonment
- an unlimited fine
- a ban from driving for at least 2 years

For Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink

- 14 years' imprisonment
- an unlimited fine
- lifetime ban from driving

It is also suggested that people involved in illicit liquor trade should be dealt with severely and legal system should ensure that not only the foot soldiers but also the top notch of the trade receive the due punishment. It is therefore recommended that

- Manufacturing and selling of illicit liquor- 7 years rigorous imprisonment.
- Involved in smuggling of Liquor – very heavy fine, and / or 5 years rigorous imprisonment.
- Deaths caused to persons consuming Hooch- lifetime imprisonment.

Further, it is also very important that the masses should be provided with wise and sane advice on important aspect of consumption of alcohol- i.e. benefits of moderate drinking, harmful effects of excessive drinking and to avoid consuming illicit liquor.

Sir Winston Churchill definitely had thought before making the following quote, “I have taken more out of alcohol than alcohol has taken out of me”.

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