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# UNIT 7 PROHIBITION MOVEMENTS

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## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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Historically prohibition has occupied an important place in the agenda of Gandhians in India, neo-puritans in the West and many religious groups across the world. Gandhi's commitment to prohibition was total and derived from his personal experiences within India and abroad and his deep reflections about the condition of the Indian masses. There have been efforts by advocates of prohibition to push prohibition into the agenda of mainstream political parties and even to get legislation passed. However, all such efforts were short-lived. In the contemporary scenario, one of the main concerns of policy makers, in India in particular, is to maximise revenue from liquor production and sale, even at the point of neglecting the public health concerns of morbidity and mortality. We will look into these and several other related issues in detail in this Unit.

## Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The meanings of the terms prohibition and temperance.
- The evolution of anti-liquor movements and attempts at prohibition.
- Gandhi's views on various aspects of prohibition.
- The problems and issues associated with prohibition and liquor addiction.

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## 7.2 PROHIBITION: CONCEPT AND EVOLUTION

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### 7.2.1 Definitions

The term prohibition refers to legal prevention of the manufacture, sale or transportation of the alcoholic beverages with the aim of obtaining total abstinence through legal means. Another term used in this context is temperance. It refers to the goal of promoting moderation in the consumption of intoxicating liquor, or more often total abstinence on a voluntary basis. The terms prohibition and temperance are used interchangeably in this Unit.

### 7.2.2 Prohibition in History

Prohibition and temperance have had an overlapping history in many countries. Some attempts at prohibition were made in Aztec society, ancient China, feudal Japan, the Polynesian islands, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Canada and India. But only a few Muslim countries were able to sustain prohibition. At one time in the past, liquor was deified in India. However, it became less and less respectable due to the influence of Buddhism. Intoxicating liquors were almost given up, except perhaps by the lowest stratum of the society. Most countries that have introduced prohibition had withdrawn the measure.

The anti-liquor movement in the West is nearly two-centuries old. The religious revivalism of the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century led to a wave of movements for state and local prohibition in the western countries. An abstinence pledge was introduced by churches in the United States as early as 1800. The earliest temperance organisations were founded in Saratoga, New York, in 1808, and in Massachusetts, in 1813. The movement spread rapidly and led to the emergence of about 6,000 local temperance organisations in various states of USA. The earliest European temperance organisations were formed in Ireland, in 1829. It became a movement and spread to Scotland and Britain and also to Canada, South American Countries, Australia, Japan, India, South and West Africa. The church played a catalytic role in the movement. The chief objectives of the temperance movement consisted of education and lobbying for legislation on prohibition in various countries. Besides combining moral and political action on an international scale, the movement attracted the support and involvement of women's groups.

One of the landmarks in the internationalisation of the movement was the organisation of the World Prohibition Conference in London, in 1909. It was instrumental in the formation of the International Prohibition Confederation, embracing the United States, the European countries and a few other industrialised countries of the world.

### 7.2.3 Prohibition as a Political Demand

With the spread of temperance movement in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, political pressures were exerted by supporters of prohibition on various state governments in USA to introduce legal prohibitions. Massachusetts introduced some regulations with regard to the sale of liquor, in 1838, while the State of Maine in 1846 enacted the first prohibition law. The Prohibition Party, founded in 1869, in USA, provided a direct political platform for those clamouring for legislation on prohibition across the country. The Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1906, also galvanised support for legislation in favour of prohibition. During the First World War, a temporary war-time Prohibition Act was passed by the US Congress with the intent to save grain for use as food.

Following the First World War, by 1920, prohibition was in effect in 33 states, covering nearly two-thirds of the country's population. The US Congress passed the National Prohibition Act, in 1919, providing enforcement guidelines. However, later Federal Government wavered in its support to prohibition enforcement. Consequently, the illegal manufacturing and sale of liquor went on in USA on a large scale. Prohibition was enforced wherever the local population was in favour of it; elsewhere, the illegal sale of liquor became quite common and the supporters of prohibition got disenchanted with these developments. In 1933, the National Prohibition Act was repealed.

Northern Europe too aimed at the prevention of alcoholism. Finland experimented with the prohibition law during 1919-1933, but it exempted the drinking of beer. Sweden experimented with a system of liquor ration cards with the objective of limiting the consumption of liquor by individuals. Japan has introduced prohibition regulations, which prevent the drinker from harming himself or others. New Zealand had strong anti-liquor movements for over a century, backed by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches and women's groups. They also brought in legislations relating to restrictions of liquor consumption. Due to these measures, the liquor consumption in New Zealand is said to have steadily fallen by 22 percent during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In most countries of the world, where legislation on liquor consumption was liberalised or prohibition was lifted, a number of policy and regulatory measures have been introduced. They include the levy of taxes and duties on production/sale of liquor; prescription of a minimum age for drinking; restrictions on the sale of liquor on specified days and hours; controls on liquor advertising; laws designed to reduce the incidence of drunken driving and violent behaviour of addicts, particularly at home. Higher duties on liquor, which were originally conceived as a disincentive to consumption, have now become an important source to raise revenues for the state.

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## 7.3 GANDHI AND KUMARAPPA

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Mahatma Gandhi and Bharatan Kumarappa were the most articulate and fervent advocates for the introduction of prohibition in India. Not only do they summon arguments, but also pin them to the cultural and socio-economic context of India. For them, prohibition also represents a moral awakening of India.

### 7.3.1 Gandhi on Prohibition

Prohibition has a pride of place in the Gandhian vision of the world. To Gandhi "drink is more a disease than a vice" (Young India, 6-7-1921, p. 210). "I would hold drink to be more damnable than thieving and perhaps even prostitution." (M.K. Gandhi,

Prohibition At Any Cost, p. 10). Gandhi recalls that many empires were destroyed through the drink habit of their rulers. This monstrous evil was undoubtedly one of the contributory factors in the fall of the Roman Empire (Young India, 11-4-1929, p. 115). Gandhi cites the case of his eldest son who became an addict despite the fact that he was intelligent, brave, patriotic and capable of sacrifice.

Drink and drugs sap the moral well-being of those who are given to the habit. Only those women who have drunkards as their husbands know what have the drink evil works in homes that once were orderly and peace-giving. (M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 10-4-1930, p. 21.)

“Liquor ... is an invention of the devil. Liquor not only robs the drinkers of their money, but also of their reason”, asserts Gandhi. He further observes that when they are in a conscious state, most addicts are ashamed of their habit. Gandhi narrates the harrowing experiences of drunkards in South Africa, Britain and other countries and how they led lives without grace. The situation is equally pathetic in India, he observes, from princes and rich people to labourers who are addicts.

Gandhi became a staunch opponent of alcohol because of the bitter episodes associated with alcoholics. “In a nutshell, alcohol ruins one physically, morally, intellectually and economically.” (M.K. Gandhi, *Key to Health*, pp. 35-36, Education, 1956). Gandhi states:

“If I was appointed dictator for one hour for all India, the first thing I would do would be to close without compensation all the liquor shops, destroy all the toddy palms...” (Prohibition At Any Cost, 1960, p. 9). To him total prohibition is prohibition of sale of intoxicating drinks and drugs, except under medical prescription by a medical practitioner licensed for the purpose and to be purchasable only at government depots maintained for this purpose.

While recommending legislation in favour of prohibition, he attempts to demolish the arguments against it based on accrual of revenue. Gandhi attacks the argument connected with loss of revenue in the following words:

Revenue from liquor is a form of extremely degrading taxation. All taxation to be healthy must return ten-fold to the tax-payer in the form of necessary services. Excise makes people pay for their own corruption, moral, mental and physical. It falls like a dead-weight on those who are least likely to bear it. The loss of revenue is only apparent. Removal of the degrading tax enables the drinker, i.e., the tax-payer to earn and spend better... it means a substantial economic gain to the nation. (*Harijan*, 31-7-1937, p. 196.)

To compensate for loss of revenue due to prohibition, Gandhi suggested exploration of alternative sources of income, as also cutting down defence expenditure. When governments talk of the revenue deficits, they are driven by the ‘bania’ spirit, Gandhi observes. According to Gandhi nothing short of total prohibition can save the people from the drink evil. The policy should begin by preventing any new shop from being licensed; closing some that cause nuisance to the public; and licenses that lapse should not be renewed. He rules out partial prohibition since innumerable human beings cannot be kept under discipline. Gandhi made a fervent plea to congressmen in authority in provinces to have the courage and resolute determination to impose total prohibition, both on moral and pragmatic grounds. Prohibition, he observes, adds to the moral and material strength by bringing a new life to millions. “Our freedom will be the freedom of slaves if we continue

to be victims of the drink and drug habit.” (Prohibition At Any Cost, p. 15). He cites the success of the Salem experiment in the erstwhile Madras Presidency in support of his contention for total prohibition.

Illicit distillation would weaken the chances of prohibition, Gandhi argues, and that its prevention would not cost more than the control of other crimes. No soft and easy-going policy can tackle this tremendous evil, he observes. Drink should be made a heavily punishable offence backed by the enforcement of tough measures. Stringent penal action against those who manufacture liquor and those who are addicts to it would have salutary results, he notes. The people, especially the poor, would not think of liquor if it is not within their reach.

Gandhi opts for supplementing legislation on prohibition with the constructive programme initiated by him. Indeed, he made abolition of drink an integral part of the constructive programme. Gandhi also gave a clarion call that the articulate public, especially voluntary organisations, with the support of women and students, should consider temperance as the greatest moral movement and launch comprehensive educational campaigns against liquor. The causes behind the drink habit in areas prone to heavy consumption of liquor should be carefully analysed and dealt with. In their crusade against liquor the voluntary organisations and prominent individuals should undertake peaceful, silent and educative picketing with the object of establishing personal rapport with the addicts and they should make every conceivable effort to educate them to give up liquor and to convert the liquor traders to move into other trades to earn money. Gandhi concludes that mere voluntary effort at education will be doomed to failure if it is not preceded by total prohibition. Legislation and voluntary effort, in his view, should play mutually supportive roles. By implementing the series of pro-active and punishment-centric measures suggested by him, Gandhi felt that we could create a win-win situation for the society as well as the victims of the drink habit (Prohibition At Any Cost).

Though Gandhi was passionate about his opposition to intoxicating drinks, he was sensitive to the fact that people of various cultures differ considerably in their attitudes toward drinking as well as the response patterns of the lawmakers toward anti-liquor legislation. Some cultures may show high acceptance of drinking as a social custom with the norm of moderation. Referring to the American experiment, Gandhi does not think of the experiment as a failure. It would be far easier to have prohibition in India because it is only a small minority that drinks. Moreover, drinking is generally considered disrespectable in the Indian culture.

### **7.3.2 Kumarappa: Why Prohibition?**

Bharatan Kumarappa was one of the most articulate exponents of Gandhian ideals on prohibition. He published a collection of essays in his book, **Why Prohibition?**

Kumarappa addresses the issue of individual freedom in relation to intoxicant drinks. He argues persuasively that prohibition be conceived in India primarily in the interest of the poor. The suffering experienced by the male addict’s wife, children and other dependents should be a matter of social concern, more so when the man earns a pittance, hardly sufficient to meet the basic needs of himself and his family. Thus the man’s drinking habit leaves his dependents practically destitute. The ill-treatment meted out to family members due to intoxication has an anti-social dimension. Under the influence of liquor, the human being is enslaved. Considering drink as an anti-social habit, the state has to intervene and

curb the freedom of the individual. Kumarappa also cites the examples of many western countries imposing restrictions on individual freedom in the case of narcotic drugs. Alcohol is also a narcotic. The western countries have been unable to deal with drink by law because it has become entrenched in social customs, whereas in India only a small minority are liquor addicts, and “where public opinion is definitely against it, it should be possible to prohibit liquor just as easily as drugs in the West”. He draws our attention to the fact that both Hinduism and Islam, major religions of India, ban drink.

When drink is sold freely in the open market, non-addicts are attracted to it, thereby spreading the drink evil. Prohibition is, therefore, concerned not merely with the drink addict, but also with the non-drinker, observes Kumarappa. Citing Prof. Edwin Lemert of the University of California, Kumarappa notes that excessive drinking is like other forms of criminal behaviour (eg. sexual immorality, disturbance to peace, destruction of property, misuse of credit, etc.) which run counter to the normal expectations of a sober community.

Hence, the state has to legislate against drink and protect by law the interests of the average citizen and the non-drinker. According to Kumarappa educative propaganda against drink is without question very essential; this is after all the permanent non-violent way of dealing with the problem. Propaganda must be carried on with or without prohibition.

Public opinion in the West is predominantly in favour of moderate drinking rather than for total abstinence. Kumarappa argues that the regular moderate drinker is worse off than the one who gets drunk once in a while, but does not drink regularly. More over, all alcohol addicts start off as moderate drinkers. Therefore, if liquor is an evil, there is no point in permitting moderate drinking. One has to ban drinking of liquor altogether, both moderate and excessive, for the two go together and are inseparable.

Both Gandhi and Kumarappa were of the firm view that one of the reasons why men drink is economic. Amelioration of the socio-economic conditions coupled with provision of social amenities like clubs, playgrounds, parks and other recreation and entertainment facilities would help to wean away from liquor those with idle time, the labourers in particular.

Kumarappa considers liquor taxation as unjust and iniquitous. It helps the contractors who bid for licences and who are encouraged to sell the maximum. Also much of the liquor revenue is collected from the poor. The government could impose or increase other taxes which will be spread out evenly among all strata of society. Prohibition should not be given up on the ground of obtaining revenue. Kumarappa musters statistics to show that the period of prohibition registered a big spurt in savings, investments consumption and public health indices besides improvement in production efficiency. He observes that the costs of enforcement and loss of liquor revenue is outweighed by the gains to the consumer in multiple ways. It means better living conditions, better health and education to the consumer and greater efficiency for the economy. On the debit side of liquor are immorality, crime, family squabbles, hungry children and broken homes.

Social legislations like prohibition cannot succeed without public cooperation, notes Kumarappa. He states: “... prohibition will remain a dead letter so long as the people do nothing about it...” An evil like prohibition cannot be wiped off by mere legislation.

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## **7.4 EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

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There have been many scientific studies, especially in the western countries about the impact of alcohol on social interaction, social costs, and the relationship between liquor addiction and various types of crime. This section summarises some of these research findings.

### **7.4.1 Alcohol and Social Interaction**

Liquor connects and disconnects people. It affects the processes of social interaction in manifold ways. The sign of intoxication on gait, speech, eye movements, and facial expressions often lead to negative responses from others in the interaction process. Interaction may also be disrupted by 'rude' behaviour. Even the drinker's positive feelings, expressed through excessive or indiscriminate affectionate behaviour may produce negative reactions in some social contexts. The effects of alcohol are manifold. It acts as a 'social attractor' by bringing people into each other's company or proximity. It may also incite obnoxious and provocative behaviour in interaction situations, which would often lead to aggression, escalating into conflict and physical violence. Conversely, drinking could be used as an excuse for deviant behaviour or claiming lack of responsibility. Offenders often claim that they use drink in order to steady their nerves. In this sense, alcohol gives an impetus to risk-taking and rebellious behaviour as in the case of vandalism or property thefts (house break-in or car theft) or deviant behaviour (spouse abuse or rape). A recent example is the war crimes committed in former Yugoslavia (now Serbia) attributed to the influence of alcohol.

### **7.4.2 Alcohol-related Social Costs**

The social cost of alcohol has been a subject of extensive investigation and rigorous research by a number of social scientists in the West. The greatest alcohol-related costs to society are due to mortality and morbidity and lost productivity due to death and ill-health. Recent studies carried out in the United States, Australia and United Kingdom estimate that over 80 percent mortality and morbidity costs induced by alcohol are borne by society. By comparison, the share of total costs attributed to alcohol-related crimes is less than 10 percent. Although the extent/degree of involvement of alcohol in crime and violence seem to differ between countries, there have been no doubts about the potential social costs of alcohol. But the share of these crimes in money terms is considerable. Overall, it is admitted that the intangible costs of alcohol-related crimes to victims of rape, robberies, assaults and murders are enormous. Both property crimes and crimes against person cause fear in large segments of society, and the pain, suffering and trauma associated with them negatively affect the quality of life of the victims. For many families the consequences are hard to bear. It also leads to criminal behaviour and undermines the consensual normative foundation which any society needs in order to function.

### **7.4.3 Alcohol and Crime**

Evidently, a high level of relationship exists between liquor addiction and the propensity to commit crime. US studies place the proportion in the share of murders in which either the offender or the victim had been drinking is about 65 percent. The figure is much higher (80 percent) for Greenland. Studies on family violence and child abuse also show high levels of alcohol involvement in several countries. In the United States, which is at

the median, alcohol accounts for about 50 percent of the robberies and rapes. The highest share of drinking is shown by arsonists.

Traffic offences are a major segment of the alcohol-related crimes. Alcohol affects the judgmental capabilities and risk-taking tendencies of those behind the wheel, releasing their aggressions and feelings of power.

The evidence of a statistical association between alcohol consumption and the incidence of criminal behaviour is compelling. However, many studies point out to the issue of under-reporting of minor crimes, and rape, the latter due to the stigma felt by the victim or the influence executed by the perpetrator of the crime.

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## **7.5 TAX LEVIES AND SOCIAL COSTS OF LIQUOR ADDICTION**

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Neo-puritans argue that consumers of liquor do not bear the full costs of their unhealthy choices, but impose costs on the rest of society. To meet the burden of these 'social costs' or the alleged spillover harms from drink addiction government intervention through heavy taxes and levies/license fee on vendors is sought to be justified.

As William Shughart puts it: "The mix of social cost economics and neo-Puritan political correctness is a potent brew, as deliberating as it is addictive" (1995, p.2).

Short of banning consumption of liquor outright, high excise levies and other duties on politically incorrect behaviour, it is argued, would raise liquor price, which discourages consumption. Moreover, the incorrigible individuals who continue to buy liquor at the higher prices are thereby forced to help pay for the costs they allegedly impose on society.

But 'selective' excise levies are selective only on taxing products like liquor; they are indiscriminate in taxing consumers. Individual consumers who drink in moderate quantities face the same marginal tax rate as those who drink excessively. The vast majority of moderate or responsible drinkers, for example, are punished to pay for the external costs generated by a small minority of binge drinkers.

Consequently, public policy toward illicit liquor has been locked into a regulatory cycle of tax and taboo. Moral indignation leads to prohibition which provides satisfaction to those involved in anti-liquor movements and monetary benefits to the bootleggers, the latter shifting transactions to the underground economy, the widespread disobedience of law, besides the shrinking tax base, which invite calls for repeal of the prohibition law, and the cycle begins anew. Thus the tension between prohibition and tax maximisation is an enduring theme in most countries of the world.

### **Effects of price increase on alcohol consumption and its consequences**

This section analyses the effects of price increases on alcohol consumption and its adverse consequences. Researchers report that alcohol use and abuse are sensitive to price. Studies by Grossman and his colleagues (1998) and others found consistent evidence that increases in the price of alcohol significantly reduced alcohol consumption, especially among youth and other young adults. A subset of heavy drinkers – the upper 5 percent – appears to be unresponsive to price increase. Further, adult addicts are found to be less sensitive to price increase.



Several studies also focus on the incidence of alcohol-related problems. In the United States fatal motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of people below the age of 35, and alcohol is involved in more than one-half of these fatal crashes. Besides minimum drinking age restrictions and stricter laws, heavy penalties for drunk-driving would have contributed to a reduction in fatalities by 8 to 12.5 percent.

Researchers also report that price increase of alcohol might reduce adverse health effects. For example, more than 20,000 deaths take place annually in USA, due to the effects of alcohol consumption on liver cirrhosis. A 10 percent increase in the price of alcohol would reduce liver cirrhosis mortality by 8.3 to 12.8 percent. The increases in the price of alcoholic beverages would reduce various death rates related to motor vehicle crashes, homicides, suicides, cancers or deaths from drowning, falls, and other injuries besides sexually transmitted diseases. Increased prices of alcohol would significantly reduce the rates of child abuse, spouse abuse and other violent domestic crimes. Analysts on prohibition conclude that policies, in addition to tax increases, must be pursued to curtail alcohol consumption or its abuse.

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## 7.6 INDIAN SCENARIO

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Gandhi's views on prohibition found an echo in the Indian Constitution. One of its Directive Principles (Article 47) envisages that the State would pursue prohibition as a policy. While many other Directive Principles found their way into concrete policies of the Union and state governments, prohibition did not find favour with them. The erstwhile Madras Presidency/State, under the stewardship of C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), introduced prohibition but was given up subsequently.

As of now Gujarat is the lone prohibition state in India. A debate has been going on in this State as to whether this land of Gandhi must stick steadfastly to its decades-old policy of total prohibition or whether it is time to review in view of the substantial loss of revenue, the flourishing of illicit liquor and the tragic deaths of many of its victims. Time and again, there are suggestions from various quarters to find ways to relax prohibition.

Haryana and Andhra Pradesh, the two states that experimented with prohibition gave it up due not only to financial reasons but also because they were unable to control illicit distillation and bootlegging. Haryana made several attempts at prohibition, but it finally gave it up. Women's organisations that had spearheaded the campaign for the ban on liquor themselves supported the lifting of prohibition because they found that men, denied their drink through legitimate channels, took to illicit liquor. This resulted in a spate of spurious liquor tragedies. Andhra Pradesh introduced partial prohibition in 1994 through a ban on illicit liquor. It was preceded by protracted agitation and a major social movement for prohibition.

### 7.6.1 Case Study: Anti-arrack / liquor movement in Andhra Pradesh

The anti-arrack / liquor movement started in Dubagunta, a remote village in Nellore (now Potti Sriramulu–Nellore district) of the State, through Rosamma, an elderly woman who was inspired by the lessons of the adult education programme. Protests by women of the village spread to neighbouring villages. It was a revolt against familiar happenings of liquor addicts, spending women's wages, selling away household goods, and indulging in drunken brawls and domestic violence of various sorts. Information about protests spread through word of mouth and through established social networks. Spontaneous actions by women

in many communities in other districts also occurred, breaking the pre-existing social norms i.e., patriarchy and non-participation of women in the public domain.

### 7.6.2 Participating Organisations

Though the anti-arrack agitation in Andhra Pradesh was built on the initiative and participation of women, a multitude of organisations which involved in the anti-arrack movement helped to mobilise women across the State. The participating organisations supported women to sustain the struggle for a ban on liquor and arrack. The organisations ranged from national, regional, grassroots women's units and issue-based informal groups to political parties with different ideological orientations, priorities and political motivations. They came together to fight against liquor/arrack, the habit as well as State policy. It was considered necessary first to change the policy of the State in favour of a ban on arrack and liquor.

In the initial stages of agitation, many women were *lathi* charged and some were arrested by police. They were threatened by the arrack and liquor contractors, few women activists were beaten up by hooligans employed by the arrack contractors. Women overcame many such hurdles thanks to the support from the print media and the opposition political parties and their front organisations.

Endowed with cadres and resources, the participating organisations played an important role in building the anti-arrack movement to a crescendo, thereby converting an emotion-ridden movement by disparate *ad hoc* groups at the grassroots into a broad-based movement. With this, the movement gained unprecedented momentum. It soon became a political movement, sending shock-waves to the political establishment. The latter, which reacted with police action in the initial stages, was forced to give in, change its earlier stand and come up with a time-bound programme in favour of prohibition.

The societal support came in various forms. An association was formed against liquor/arrack as *Sara Vyathireka Karyacharana Samiti*, organising dharnas and protests demanding prohibition, picketing liquor shops and burning of liquor sachets and destroying liquor bottles. There were many spontaneous actions such as villagers or slum dwellers, imposing fines on drunken persons. As a result of the intensity of the agitation, some contractors and traders voluntarily closed their liquor business and liquor shops.

### 7.6.3 Campaigns and Communications

The symbolic realm is important for carrying the message across various heterogenous segments of the society. Besides formal meetings and a sustained campaign in the print media, demonstrations, strikes, rallies, dharnas, poster campaigns, distribution of pamphlets, writing letters, stories and articles in newspapers and periodicals and submission of memoranda to government functionaries occurred almost every day. Alternate ways to send messages were invented. Spilling or burning of arrack sachets at public places, preventing the movement of arrack vehicles into the villages, burning of arrack shops and stopping arrack auctions of government became an almost everyday occurrence. Traditional media were effectively employed to communicate the ill-effects of arrack and liquor. Street plays, skits, *burrakathas*, puppet shows, singing of traditional songs, backed by the music of drums, etc., were organised on a large scale.

The print media played an important role as a catalyst in the prohibition movement. The largest circulated vernacular daily, *Eenadu*, gave maximum publicity and coverage in reporting events regarding the anti-arrack agitation. Other Telugu newspapers too joined

the mission. One of the important reasons for the quick spread of the anti-arrack agitation was the wide coverage, communication and reports of the movement in the vernacular print media. Word spread quickly and more innovative forms of protests followed. In some villages, many men, hitherto arrack addicts, went one step ahead and took an oath not to drink arrack, or not to allow arrack sales in the villages concerned.

The anti-arrack movement (1993-1994) of Andhra was a roaring success for a number of reasons. It centred on a simple and transparent issue i.e., prohibition, which could be understood by all. Women from the lower strata participated in large numbers. The movement gained momentum and sustained because of support from the vernacular media and a large number of voluntary organisations and political groups. The movement gained strength as it was able to manage the available resources (people, material, ideas and organisation) effectively. Once the movement gained popularity and received a bandwagon effect, it became explosive and unstoppable, diluting resistance from those in authority.

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## 7.7 CURRENT SCENARIO

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Notwithstanding the assessment of Gandhi that only a small minority drink, the proportion of those who drink in India had multiplied several times during the last eight decades. Today liquor is different things to different sets of people: A benign vice for the affluent, an acceptable leisure activity for the middle class, and a veritable curse for the poor. For cash-starved states, saddled with populist programmes, revenue from liquor is the new mantra of political correctness. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh hold a monopoly in the sale of liquor to retail outlets, running it as a state enterprise.

While there has been a steady increase in the production and consumption of liquor manufactured in the organised sector, a much larger proportion consists of 'country liquor', a brew made up of local farm produce, illicit alcohol and harmful chemicals. The low cost of the spurious liquor, coupled with its 'speedy kick' attracts the poor. A profitable cottage industry of spurious liquor thrives in India thanks to improper regulation, often aided by corruption. From Gujarat in the West to Tamil Nadu in down South and Assam in the North-East spurious liquor disasters have been chronicled frequently, with pathetic stories of mortalities and blindness. Each disaster is followed by a sudden spurt of regulatory activity not to speak of rhetoric laced with homilies by those in authority. The problem itself remains serious and chronic.

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## 7.8 DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

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- One of the critical pieces of the puzzle of prohibition in the current Indian scenario is loss of a sizeable chunk of revenue to the state governments. Protagonists of prohibition contend that practising meaningful austerity and downsizing of the government, cutting defence expenditure, etc., would make up for the loss of revenue and further, the Union Government may compensate, at least partially, the state governments opting for prohibition.

As one analyst observes:

Extreme policies of prohibition and the current permissive strategies are both counter-productive. There is a need for a nuanced approach integrating both the regulation of alcohol production and sale on one hand while rigorously enforcing public health regulations on the other. The goal of sustainable and effective alcohol policy can only

be achieved by coordinated action by multiple stakeholders ... While complete prohibition has been shown to be a failure, the current permissiveness without the enforcement of regulations also represents a lack of responsibility... (K.S. Jacob, "Alcohol politics, policies and public health", *The Hindu*, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2009, p. 10.)

- The very nature of alcohol is such that the potential for misuse is always present. It leaves scope for chronic public health problems in a country like India. Government has to evolve rational policies for interventions based on public health approaches that would have a great deal of impact on alcohol-related morbidity and mortality.
- In the western countries there are a number of campaigns involving behavioural counselling to help people understand the health problems due to excessive liquor consumption. Such campaigns, if launched in India, would help people to make individual choices about their lifestyles.
- A mandatory code for alcohol retailing and implementation of tough measures, which would curb irresponsible ways of expanding retail outlets, popularly known as belt shops, would reduce the risks associated with liquor consumption, by restricting new entrants and by preventing excessive consumption by habitual drinkers. It is also necessary to prevent the location of liquor shops in the proximity of religious and educational institutions.
- There are many laws in the statute books of state governments with regard to illicit distillation and sale of spurious liquor. Their effective implementation calls for commitment on the part of those in authority.
- Expansion of the number of dry days, covering pay days and festival days besides public holidays, and restriction of hours of retail liquor outlets would help to reduce liquor consumption.
- Rigorous enforcement of the anti-liquor laws during the week prior to each election and nabbing those who are drunk during election campaigns would curb liquor consumption, and also contribute to healthy political campaigning.
- There has been considerable research of a rigorous nature in the western countries about estimates of the social cost to the nation of the consumption of alcohol and how this cost should be treated to taxes and duties by the government. India is lagging far behind in such endeavours, which would provide inputs for rational public policy making.
- In many states in India, women's groups have been demanding devolution of power to local bodies in controlling access to liquor, licensing of vendors, and provision of treatment services to alcoholics. If this demand is conceded, communities will have the right to decide whether to have or not to have liquor/ arrack shops, regulate the days and hours of retail liquor shops. Communities may also decide various issues relating to liquor through referenda in the specific areas. A related suggestion is on community participatory approaches: government regulation be supplemented by community-based participatory approaches, especially through women's self-help groups, in dealing with alcohol misuse.

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## 7.9 SUMMARY

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Prohibition is defined as total abstinence from alcoholic drinks through legal means and temperance as abstinence from liquor on a voluntary basis. Although there were attempts at prohibition in the ancient and medieval periods, the anti-liquor movements in the modern era are less than two centuries old. Most of the countries that have introduced prohibition had also withdrawn the measure. They have introduced a string of policy and regulatory measures, the most important of them being taxes on the production and sale of liquor. Though the manifest function of liquor taxation is to discourage consumption its latent function is to raise revenues.

Prohibition has an important place in Gandhi's vision of India. He felt that alcoholism is an unmitigated evil and when it becomes a habit multiple pathological consequences follow. Gandhi suggested a three-pronged approach in dealing with the problem of drink: Take legal steps against illicit distillation and follow them up with effective enforcement through a special agency; provision for punishment of those who are found drunk in streets or other public places with a substantial fine, and imprisonment in case of repeaters; and finally, propagation by voluntary organisations, especially led by women, in slums and in areas inhabited by labour with a view to wean the addicts away from the habit. Bharathan Kumarappa elaborates the basic ideas of Gandhi with regard to the effects of the drink habit of men on their families; the importance of public cooperation in sustaining prohibition; and differentiation of the Indian context from that of the West.

The case study on anti-liquor movement in Andhra Pradesh describes the efforts at grassroots from women of the lowest social stratum, the victims of liquor addiction of their men folk, in initiating the movement and how it was sustained by voluntary organisations, political outfits and the print media. The movement was able to force the political regime to change its liquor policy and to come up with a time-frame for the introduction of prohibition.

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## 7.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Define the terms Prohibition and Temperance. Trace the evolution of prohibition movements.
2. State Gandhi's views on liquor taxation.
3. How does Kumarappa analyse the Indian situation with regard to anti-liquor legislation? Compare his views with that of Gandhi's.
4. What are the problems related to measurement of social costs of alcohol addiction?
5. Outline the major concerns of liquor policy and public health related issues in contemporary India.

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