

A STUDY ON THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE GOAN COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Alcoholic beverages form an integral part of the Goan Catholic culture. Alcohol is associated with major events concerning the individual as well as the community. Among the Catholics, drinking normally happens at family functions, social or community occasions and in the home. Consuming alcoholic drinks with food, at restaurants, with friends, peers and business associates is acceptable. Regular visits to bars are generally condemned. Those who deviate from the socially accepted norms with regard to alcohol consumption are labelled by the Goan society. A gender divide is noticeable with regard to alcohol consumption in Goa. The present study aims to understand the use of alcoholic beverages among the Catholics and Hindus of Goa. An attempt has been made to understand the role of alcohol in the social settings of Goa along with the social norms governing alcohol consumption.

Key Words: Alcohol, Events in Goa, Norms of Alcohol Consumption, Alcohol and Gender

I. Introduction

The Portuguese conquered Goa in 1510. They initially captured Tiswadi and in 1543 they added the territories of Salcete and Bardez. These are now grouped together and called 'Old Conquests'. The territories of Quepem, Sanguem, Dharbandora, Canacona, Pernem, Bicholim, Sattari and Ponda are collectively known as 'New Conquests', as they were added to the Portuguese empire only in 1791. This territorial division is significant while attempting to understand the socio-cultural differences existing in Goa today.

The 450 year long rule of the Portuguese introduced a change in several cultural aspects, especially with regard to food and drink consumption, in Goa. Today, this makes it is easy to distinguish between the two major communities of Goa- the Catholics and Hindus. The introduction of Portuguese laws and ways of life brought about major changes in the 'Old Conquests'. It marked the beginning of a new social system in Goa. A new community of natives began identifying themselves with the Portuguese and several were converted to the Catholic religion propagated by the Portuguese.

A number of socio-cultural changes came about as a result of Portuguese policies. Alcohol consumption became a part and parcel of the life of the converts to Catholicism. Alcohol plays an important role in the lives of most Goans, especially the Catholic community, as it is thought of as a social lubricant and is considered essential for hospitality. For the Catholic community, alcohol plays a significant part at rites of passage and community events. Serving alcoholic beverages is not a personal preference but a societal obligation at all social events and this is governed by a number of social norms. The use of alcohol is well defined by the occasion as well as by the social setting.

II. Review of Literature

Kim Bloomfield, Gerhard Gmel and Sharon Wilsnack (2006) conducted a multi-national study on gender, culture and alcohol problems which scrutinized differences in drinking among women and men in thirteen European and two non-European countries. The paper discussed drinking patterns and prevalence of alcohol-related problems among men and women. It also emphasized gender differences in social inequalities with respect to the use and abuse of alcohol, gender differences in the influence of combinations of social roles on heavy alcohol use and how women's and men's alcohol use and problems are predicted by societal-level factors on a regional and global scale.

Mohammed Peer and Hilda Rayappan (1996) studied alcoholic patients discharged from Mangalore's Prajna Counselling and De-addiction Centre where it was found that drinking is rampant across all sections of society including individuals from different classes and occupations. It also indicated that most people do not like attending dry parties and different

festivals have become excuses for indulging in alcohol, the money for which was saved well in advance.

David G. Mandelbaum (1965) conducted a study on alcohol and culture. Drinking is defined and restricted in accordance with essential motifs of culture and is considered significant in terms of the social order. This study made an attempt to understand how the form and meaning of drinking in a particular group tells about their society and culture as a whole. The study indicated that in a complex modern society made up of subgroups, the drinking patterns of each class or subgroup may reflect its special characteristics along with the entire cultural frame of society.

III. Objectives

1. To understand the use of alcoholic beverages among the Catholics and Hindus of Goa.
2. To examine the role of alcohol in the social settings of Goa.
3. To analyze the social norms governing alcohol consumption.

IV. Research Methodology

Keeping in mind the objectives of the topic under study appropriate research tools were employed. Two villages were taken up for the study. One village was selected from the 'Old Conquests' and one village was taken from the 'New Conquests'. The village of Shiroda situated in the Ponda Taluka of Goa was taken up for study from the new conquest area while the village of Benaulim from the Salcete Taluka of Goa was selected from the old conquest area.

Religion was an important variable for selecting the sample. The new conquest areas are very Indian in their culture as well as lifestyle and are predominantly inhabited by the Hindus. The Catholic population is a majority in the old conquest areas. The selected villages presented the typical characteristics that were needed for the study.

The sample was selected with a specific purpose. The villages and respondents were selected following a Purposive Sampling Method due to which relevant variables like religion, caste, class and gender could be covered. The Snowball Technique was used as it was compatible with Purposive Sampling. The Interview schedule was the principal instrument for the collection of data necessary to conduct this study.

Secondary data was taken from various authoritative books and research articles. Since the data collected was qualitative in nature and keeping in mind the purpose of the study, the data was analyzed through content analyses.

V. Data Analysis and Findings

1. Alcohol and the Goan Society

Alcohol consumption has been prevalent in Goa since the Pre-Portuguese period. However, this consumption was personal in nature. Alcoholic beverages were normally associated with hard labour and considered to be medicinal. In many parts of Goa, alcohol was even considered to be a part of the wages received by workers.

The 450 year long rule of the Portuguese, introduced a change in the consumption pattern of alcohol in Goa. Alcoholic beverages were incorporated into the social life of the people of Goa. Alcoholic beverages presently, are an important part of social functions and at all celebrations.

In Goa, alcohol consumption is more than noticeable. Alcohol has an important social function, particularly in Goan Catholic life. No social occasion is complete without alcohol. Goan society has socially sanctioned occasions for alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption is permitted as long as it is within socially acceptable parameters. This type of drinking is not to be taken as an indulgence or an obsession.

2. Use of Alcohol at Rites of Passage

Among the Catholic community in Goa important events in a person's life include age related milestones like the 1st, 21st, 50th, 70th and 80th birthdays. Weddings and wedding anniversaries, especially the 25th, 50th and 75th anniversaries are given special importance. These events are celebrated in a grand manner and alcohol has to be compulsorily served for these celebrations. Some other events like the first birthday of the bride in her marital house is also given importance. In addition, birthdays of family members are also celebrated at the family level. Every event or celebration is accompanied with the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

The engagement ceremony which precedes marriage and the return of the bride on the second day of marriage to her maternal home are also celebrations that are accompanied with alcoholic drinks. Other marriage related traditions like gifting the bride's in-laws on certain occasions demands the inclusion of an alcohol bottle among the other things.

The different religious sacraments or milestones achieved by Catholics are also celebrated grandly by serving alcoholic drinks. Funerals among the Catholics are held either before noon or in the late afternoon. Both men and women attend it. Alcohol does not have a strong social function at a funeral. But it is served to those who partake in lunch or dinner at the house of the grieving family. A bottle of local alcohol is set aside for elderly visitors who come to condole the grieving family or after the funeral.

Among the Hindus funerals are mostly attended by men. Alcoholic beverages are necessarily kept at the crematorium for the consumption of the workers involved in the cremation. This practice has been followed from times immemorial. It has been associated with the function of providing psychological strength to the consumer who has to see the corpse burning. The Hindus observe a ritual on the twelfth day after the cremation. On this day a meal is served in the name of the departed soul. A well-known person from the village is invited for the meal. If the deceased was known to consume alcohol, the person representing the dead soul is offered alcohol. A few families offer alcohol to the men present, but this serving is not done publicly and is not a regular custom among the Hindus.

A marriage celebration is the most grandiose of all celebrations among the Catholics as well as the Hindus. Many traditions and rituals are involved in a marriage celebration. For all the rituals involved in a marriage celebration, when guests are invited alcohol is expected. In fact, it is presumed that alcohol will be served at the celebration. If alcohol is not served for these occasions it usually invites social criticism. Among the Hindus, who form the majority of Goa's population, religious and social celebrations related to marriage and other big occasions, are usually held at a single venue, which is mostly a temple or a community hall. Although many Hindus also celebrate marriage with a grand meal, the serving of alcohol is a taboo among them.

Among the Catholics, no matter where an occasion is celebrated, whether at a church hall, an open air venue or at the home, alcohol is an accepted part of the celebration. The serving of alcohol has become a societal need and obligation. Failure to offer it is considered to be a serious breach of hospitality which attracts criticism. Thus, a host is pressurized to abide by the existing norm of serving alcohol at all celebrations. At such occasions alcohol is consumed openly with friends and family members with no stigma attached to such drinking. The consumption of alcohol also has a special social function during the toast, which is an important part of every Goan Catholic function. The toast is very obviously a western tradition which has been incorporated into Catholic celebrations.

In contrast, among the Hindus since the earlier times, alcohol found no important place in celebrations. At all celebrations, whether at the individual or community level, the serving of alcohol is not generally expected. However, it cannot be said that Hindu celebrations are totally devoid of alcohol use. In fact, some Hindu families have now started serving alcohol at certain celebrations which have no religious significance and are strictly social functions. However, a large majority of Hindu women do not consume alcohol. Most Hindu women don't even go into a room where men are consuming alcohol.

3. Norms Related to Alcohol Consumption in the Goan Society

Goan culture also has certain norms and attitudes towards the intake of alcohol. Alcohol consumption is rigidly defined with an expected pattern of behavior after drinking. As alcohol finds acceptability at events and occasions celebrated by the Catholics, norms are laid down by the society to monitor alcohol consumption. A large number of Goans consume alcohol, but only a few get addicted. This is due to social mechanisms that prevent them from overdrinking. For every event or celebration, drinks are available without restraint. However, drinking parameters are established to ensure that abuse is minimized. The most effective mechanism used by Goan society is the use of the term bebdo. Bebdo is a term used to penalize an individual who overdrinks and who has deviated from society's expectation regarding the amount of alcohol to be consumed.

The norms pertaining to alcohol use have gradually evolved in Goa society. These include the occasions and ways in which alcohol is to be served. The manner of serving alcohol points to the

adherence to existing cultural patterns. Over the years these manners have been intensely internalized and ingrained.

Some of the social norms that have been incorporated into drinking practices revolve around age. Generally, young people below 21 years and those who are not working are discouraged from consuming alcohol publicly. Due to this societal norm, young people are not found drinking openly at occasions. Any young person deviating from this societal norm faces tremendous pressure from his family as well as neighbours. Goan society has different drinking norms depending on the age of the person. For instance, it is accepted as a routine affair among senior citizens to have a drink after sunset or before supper. Similarly, for a labourer engaging in manual work, having a drink late in the evening is acceptable.

Over the years Goan society has developed its own code for alcohol consumption. Society considers the consumption of alcohol as normal and acceptable in the evenings. However, having an alcoholic drink after food is not appreciated. Therefore, it's very rare to see drinkers consuming alcohol after a meal at parties and occasions. If we compare this consumption attitude with that of western countries, consuming alcohol before, during and even after a meal is part of the culture. Among Goans, for a regular drinker, alcohol consumption is acceptable only before dinner, in fact even consuming alcohol before lunch is not acceptable.

Similarly, Goan society also has a set of attitudes towards women consuming alcohol. A woman consuming alcohol regularly is considered disrespectful. Societal conditioning takes place from a girl's childhood. A whole range of prohibitions, related to alcohol consumption, are internalized by young girls. Young girls are forced to observe that drinking is a part of male behaviour.

A woman consuming alcohol at public drinking houses, especially at bars which are normally frequented by males, is disapproved. She is portrayed to be brazenly flouting social drinking norms. With the fear of social ridicule a woman hesitates to even casually enter a bar frequented by men. Some women who are involved in hard labour like those working in fields or selling fish consume alcohol with the belief that it helps them relax after a day's work. This consumption happens only in the home and not at public bars.

Societal norms also do not permit teenage girls consuming alcohol either in private or at public places. Social mechanisms, thus, have made alcohol consumption a male activity. Today, modernization and occupational mobility have introduced a new trend among women involved in white collar jobs. These women visit upmarket bars and restaurants to celebrate events with their friends. They consume alcoholic drinks but the type of drink consumed by them is largely a light alcoholic beverage like a beer or a ready to drink alcoholic product like a breezer or a cocktail. 'Shandy' is a very popular drink meant for women in the Goan society. It is prepared by diluting beer with a soft drink and is considered to be an apt alcoholic drink for women. Women consuming 'shandy' at a public function do not attract many negative comments from bystanders. In this way social mechanisms work so efficiently that alcohol consumption has become a predominantly male activity. A distinction between masculine and feminine beverages with regard to consumption can be seen in the Goan society.

Thus, alcohol consumption is a part of the Goan socio-cultural milieu. Most alcohol consumption takes place in a group, at parties. Parties can be intimate, large and grand celebrations. Societal norms determine not only who should drink but also the amount of drink, the time and the place of drinking.

VI. Conclusion

Alcohol consumption among the Catholic community in Goa mostly takes place at weddings, birthdays and community gatherings. Celebrations related to the rites of passage and community events, like feasts and festivals, are incomplete without alcohol. It is mandatory to serve alcohol at all these functions. Failure to offer alcohol is considered to be a serious breach of hospitality which attracts social criticism.

Although the Hindu community in Goa generally does not condone the use of alcohol for most social and religious occasions, some Hindus have now started serving alcohol at celebrations without religious connotations. The non-acceptance of alcohol and the strong sanctions against its entry in Hindu culture, prevents them from making alcohol a big part of their celebration.

Though social mechanisms restrict alcohol consumption by women, the modern generation of young women, especially those belonging to the higher socio-economic group, have broken

away from this societal prescription. Goan society is also slowly changing its attitude towards women consuming alcohol and is not as critical of it. However, a woman consuming alcohol alone is not accepted. As compared to Catholic women very few Hindu women consume alcohol. They don't even go into a room where men are consuming alcohol. In contrast, catholic women even join men in having an alcoholic drink.

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