



The Interplay of Colonialism and Indian Political Thought in Shaping Modern-days Alcohol Ban Policies: A Socio-Political Analysis

Ashish Kumar Ranjan

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bhupendra Narayan Mandal University

Contact: ashish0349@gmail.com

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16828634>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 25-07-2025

Published: 10-08-2025

Keywords:

*Colonialism, Political
Thoughts, Alcohol
Regulations, DPSP,
Mahatma Gandhi*

ABSTRACT

The legislative ban on alcohol in India presents a distinctive amalgamation of notions of nationalist ideologies, colonial political frameworks, and contemporary sociopolitical dynamics. This paper explores the historical foundations of alcohol regulation in colonial India, emphasizing the British policies' moral and economic justifications as well as its impact on nationalist temperance movements pioneered by leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. In keeping with the socio-political ideas of the day, prohibition had been codified as a Directive Principle in the Indian Constitution after independence. However, in addition to having important economic and public health implications, the contemporary enforcement of alcohol prohibitions has exposed complex dynamics including caste, religion, gender, and regional politics. This study examines how Indian political philosophy and colonial legacies continue to influence prohibition laws in modern-day India, highlighting significant gaps in understanding and providing insights into the wider Socio-political repercussions of alcohol regulation policies. This research paper employs a qualitative approach basically explorations of available contents including scholarly articles, books, journals and data available on internet are analyzed to provide context and support for the findings.



Introduction

The regulation and prohibition of alcohol in India embody a complex interplay of historical, political, and social forces. Alcohol consumption has long been a subject of moral and cultural debate in Indian society, with religious and social reform movements opposing its use for centuries. But during the colonial era, when British authorities established excise systems to raise money, the systematic regulation of alcohol came into being. These policies often clashed with indigenous traditions and fueled nationalist resistance, leading to the emergence of temperance movements as part of the larger anti-colonial struggle. In his vision of an independent and peaceful society, Mahatma Gandhi, a pivotal actor in the Indian independence struggle, defended prohibition as a moral and socioeconomic necessity.

Although these ideas have been codified in post-independence India through state-level legislation and constitutional provisions, the enforcement of alcohol prohibitions continues to remain complicated. In addition to an emphasis on how colonial legacies and Indian political philosophy have shaped its course, this essay aims to examine the historical causes and current repercussions of alcohol prohibition in India. The present paper seeks to present an extensive overview of prohibition's significance in contemporary India through exploring its sociopolitical, economic, and public health aspects.

Colonial Roots of Alcohol Regulation Policies

Alcohol was seen by the British colonial government as a source of income, a social control mechanism, and a possible threat to social order. Alcohol regulation was formally established with the implementation of the excise system, and colonial officials gave money collection precedence over public health issues. Alcohol excise taxes were a major source of colonial income, especially in Madras and Bengal provinces. However, economic factors were not the only factors that influenced colonial policies. In order to "civilize" Indian society, British officials frequently presented alcohol regulation as a moral obligation. Colonial administrators' views toward alcohol were impacted by temperance movements in Britain, which were driven by social and religious reformers. At the same time, the availability of affordable, distilled drinks among the laboring classes strengthened colonial hierarchies and enabled labor exploitation.

The Role of Indian Political Thought in Alcohol Prohibition

The issue of alcohol was a topic of significant discussion in Indian political philosophy during the nationalist struggle. Alcohol drinking was strongly condemned by leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, who saw it as a social and moral ill that threatened the foundation of Indian society. Gandhi's support for



temperance, which framed the prohibition of alcohol as an essential step toward national regeneration, was a continuation of his emphasis on swaraj (self-rule) and swadeshi (self-reliance). Gandhi's ideas were in line with larger social reform movements that connected temperance to the advancement of underprivileged groups, especially women, who were frequently the victims of domestic abuse brought on by alcohol. Because of his influence, the Indian Constitution's Article 47, which requires the state to protect public health and outlaw intoxicating substances, now includes prohibition as a directive principle.

Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi placed a strong focus on prohibition for both moral and practical reasons. In line with his larger idea of village-based economies, he maintained that funds used on alcohol might be diverted to the growth of rural communities. Because of his influence, prohibition was eventually included into the Indian nationalist program and made a Directive Principle of the Indian Constitution. Although Gandhi's opinions on prohibition had a significant impact, other leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, took a more practical stance. Nehru gave industrialization and state construction precedence over moralistic programs because he understood the economic difficulties of enforcing prohibition. Nonetheless, local authorities and movements persisted in supporting prohibition, frequently presenting it as a way to strengthen underprivileged groups and foster social cohesion.

Modern days Alcohol Ban Policies

Following independence, the government of India afforded states the freedom to impose alcohol prohibition as they deemed fit. While certain states, like Gujarat, enacted strict prohibition laws motivated by Gandhi's principles, others chose to restrict the sale of alcohol in order to strike a compromise between economic needs and public health concerns. Alcohol policies were also impacted by the sociopolitical environment. Women's movements were crucial in promoting prohibition, especially in rural areas, where they frequently pointed to the connection between alcohol and the continuation of poverty and domestic abuse. These grassroots initiatives emphasized the moral implications of prohibition laws and brought attention to the gendered aspects of alcohol use.

Since states have the authority to control alcohol policy under the statutory framework of the Constitution, alcohol prohibition in modern India is mainly enforced at the state level. As a result, there are notable differences in the country's laws prohibiting alcohol. While some states explicitly prohibit alcohol, others permit it under certain restrictions in order to generate income. The States having Alcohol Prohibition policies are as follows:



- Since 1960, when **Gujarat** became a separate state, alcohol has been completely prohibited in the state. Since Gujarat is the home state of Mahatma Gandhi, the prohibition policy is frequently credited to his influence. The emergence of illicit marketplaces and the prevalence of fictitious alcohol-related fatalities have revealed difficulties in enforcing the state's stringent regulations (Sharma, 2018).
- Since 1989, **Nagaland** has enforced a prohibition policy through the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act. However, reports indicate that alcohol is easily available through illegal channels, and enforcement has been patchy. The policy's inefficiency and failure to meet its stated social objectives have drawn criticism (Hardiman, 2006).
- Under the **Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act**, **Mizoram** imposed prohibition in 1997 as a result of lobbying from women's and religious organizations. Due to difficulties with enforcement and the state's incapacity to stop illicit booze sales, the program was overturned in 2014. The situation of Mizoram demonstrates how challenging it is to maintain prohibition in the face of administrative and financial barriers (Sharma, 2018).
- After independence, **Tamil Nadu** got engaged in a series of experiments with prohibition legislation on numerous occasions. Political considerations and fiscal constraints have compelled the state administration to repeatedly abolish and reinstate these prohibition measures.. State-run establishments currently oversee the sale of alcohol, managing distribution while making a sizable profit (Gupta, 2001).
- Under the aegis of the United Democratic Front (UDF) administration, **Kerala** instituted a graduated prohibition policy in 2014, aimed at the closure of bars and the reduction of alcohol consumption. However, in light of significant revenue deficits and the proliferation of unregulated alcohol sales, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government opted to revise this policy in 2017.. The conflict between economic demands and public health goals is highlighted by the example of Kerala (Batra, 2020).

The Role of Indian Reform Movements

Indian reform movements in the 19th century, such as the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, opposed alcohol consumption as part of their broader efforts to reform Indian society. These movements opposed alcohol because they believed it contributed to social decline and moral degradation. As part of their fight against British rule, nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak mobilized local populations against alcohol, making temperance a central issue by the early 20th century. Later on, Gandhi's ideology and the nationalist movement were reflected in the Indian Constitution's inclusion of prohibition as a Directive



Principle of State Policy (Article 47). Prohibition policies were tried by early post-independence governments, but their effectiveness was variable because of administrative and economic difficulties.

Continuity and Change in Contemporary Policies

Current laws forbidding alcohol are a continuation of indigenous moral narratives and colonial administrative structures. The excise system is still essential to controlling alcohol, and Gandhi's principles are frequently mentioned in discussions on prohibition. However, modern policies also face issues including the growth of illegal liquor markets, interstate smuggling, and the socioeconomic consequences of prohibition that were not anticipated during the colonial and nationalist eras.

The policy framework is further complicated by economic factors. Prohibition-enforcing states frequently experience large revenue losses, requiring other budgetary solutions. Furthermore, India's social and cultural variety makes it difficult to enact consistent alcohol legislation because regional perspectives on alcohol varies considerably.

Literature Review

(Batra 2020) Socio-Political Implications of Alcohol Prohibition policies are concerned *Batra* argues that, prohibition policies often intersect with issues of caste, religion, and gender. For instance, lower-caste and tribal communities, who traditionally rely on alcohol production for livelihoods, are disproportionately affected by bans. Similarly, women's groups have played a key role in advocating for prohibition, linking alcohol consumption to domestic violence and social instability.

(Chakrabarti 2019) The economic aspects and public health aspects are concerned *Chakrabarti* argues that, the economic impact of prohibition is a subject of debate, with adherents highlighting its potential to reduce public health costs and opponents pointing to revenue losses and the rise of illegal liquor markets. According to studies, prohibition may have unforeseen repercussions, including the spread of counterfeit alcohol and associated health issues .

(Mukherjee, 2010) In pre-colonial context in Indian civilization, alcohol has played a variety of roles, with usage and acceptance varying by social class, religion, and geography. According to Vedic scriptures, alcoholic drinks like sura and madira were drunk during celebrations and rites in ancient India . However, religious writings such as the Manusmriti, which reflected a moralistic viewpoint that shaped society attitudes, denounced alcohol usage among the higher classes, especially Brahmins. In a similar



vein, the introduction of alcohol restrictions by the spread of Islam in India strengthened the moral foundation of temperance in Indian culture.

(Hardiman, 2006) The arrival of British colonial rule in the 18th century marked a turning point in the governance of alcohol in India. The British administration prioritized revenue generation through the establishment of a liquor excise system, which taxed alcohol production and distribution. Excise policies often targeted indigenous industries, such as toddy tapping, disrupting traditional livelihoods and rural economies .

(Gupta, 2001) The primary goal of Britisher's was economic, colonial administrators used the justification of alcohol consumption as a social evil that needed to be regulated to justify alcohol regulations. By the early 20th century, excise taxes accounted for around 20% of total revenue, making a substantial contribution to the colonial state's budget . Indian groups, on the other hand, opposed these measures because they believed they were exploitative and culturally insulting. The foundation for temperance movements that eventually merged with the larger nationalist movement was created by this resistance.

(Gandhi, 1924) As a moral imperative and a way to combat poverty and social inequity, Mahatma Gandhi was one of the most outspoken supporters of alcohol prohibition in India. Gandhi thought that alcohol was a means of colonial oppression that took advantage of weaker groups in order to make money for the British government. Gandhi advocated complete abstinence as part of his goal for an independent and morally upright society, and he regularly connected alcohol use to poverty, spousal abuse, and social degradation in his works.

Objective of the Study

- To explores the historical foundations of alcohol regulation in colonial India.
- To explore contemporary alcohol ban policies in India are a product of a complex interplay between colonial legacies and indigenous socio-political ideologies.
- To explore modern days Alcohol ban policies across the sub-continent.

Methodology

This research paper employs a qualitative approach basically explorations of available contents which includes scholarly articles,books,internet,newspaper articles, social media blogs, are analyzed to provide context and support for the findings.



Research Gap

Rather than examining the similarities between British excise policies and contemporary prohibition laws, current study frequently treats the colonial and post-independence eras as distinct events. Little consideration is given to how caste, religion, and gender influence the implementation and outcomes of alcohol prohibitions; instead, the majority of the literature concentrates on either Gandhi's moralistic philosophy or current state-level regulations. Finally, while research has examined the economic effects of prohibition, interdisciplinary methods that integrate public health, cultural, and economic viewpoints are scarce. By filling in these gaps, we can gain a more thorough knowledge of how sociopolitical elements and historical legacies interact to shape India's current alcohol administration.

Findings and Discussion

The paper emphasizes how colonial laws and nationalist beliefs continue to shape contemporary alcohol prohibitions in India. Colonial excise systems established a structure that endures in modern governance by placing a higher priority on income generation than on the welfare of the populace. Even as contemporary states struggle with administrative and economic issues, Gandhi's focus on prohibition as a moral and socioeconomic need continues to influence policy discourse. More research is necessary to fully understand the sociopolitical effects of prohibition, especially how it affects underprivileged groups and how it is used as a political populist tactic. Furthermore, the growth of illicit liquor markets emphasizes the necessity of alternate methods of alcohol control, such as education initiatives etc.

Conclusion

The history of alcohol prohibition regulations in India demonstrates the persistent effect of colonial legacies and indigenous political ideas. While colonial governance focused income and social control, nationalist ideologies filled prohibition with moral and social aspects. These historical continuities are reflected in current policy, which also adjust to changing socioeconomic realities. This analysis emphasizes the necessity of a comprehensive strategy to alcohol regulation that strikes a balance between social welfare and public health as well as cultural and economic factors. Gaining knowledge of the historical interactions between colonialism and Indian political philosophy might help one better understand the chances and difficulties associated with developing successful alcohol policy in contemporary India.



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