

**ALCOHOL: THE INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY AND THE GOAN SOCIETY****Dr. Biula V. Pereira**

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**Abstract**

In Goa, among the Catholics, alcohol has an important societal function. No social function is complete without the serving of alcohol. On the other hand, Hindu celebrations in Goa do not call for the serving of alcohol, especially when they have a religious significance. Currently, some Hindu families do serve alcohol at certain celebrations, which are strictly social in nature and have no religious connotations. Today, there is little difference in alcohol consumption, at the individual level, between the two communities. The consequences of alcohol consumption are related to a complex interaction of diverse factors. They are associated with the personality and attitude of an individual as well as one's socio-cultural setting. A particular community might consider a certain type of alcohol related behavior problematic, while the same behaviour might find acceptance in another community.

In Goa, frequent alcohol consumption is a problem that can destroy a family and a marriage. Individuals who drink excessively can exert pressure on their family's economic capacity, have heated temper tantrums and conflicts with people in their neighbourhood affecting its general quality of life, neglect their children and impair the health and happiness of the people they love. Excessive alcohol consumption can thus disturb the family and societal peace. The present study attempts to explain the effect of alcohol addiction on an individual, vis-à-vis society's attitude towards this individual. It also aims to analyse the effect of alcoholism on the family system and society as a whole.

**Key Words:** alcohol, family, individual, society

**I. Introduction**

Alcoholic beverages are an important component of Goan culture. All individual events as well as community events feature alcohol. The use of alcohol in the Goan community is well defined by the social setting as well as the occasion. The consumption of alcohol in Goa can be traced back to the pre-portuguese period. However, at this time, alcohol consumption was more personal in nature. Alcohol consumption was acceptable among workers involved in hard labour. Alcohol

was also consumed by the elderly as an appetizer. Alcoholic beverages were even considered to have medicinal functions.

A change in the consumption pattern of alcohol was seen during the 450 year long rule of the Portuguese. During this period, alcoholic beverages were assimilated into the social life of Goans, especially the Catholic community. Thus, alcohol became an integral part of the social and religious life of Goans. The personal example set by the Portuguese with regard to alcohol consumption, together with their policies of Conversion, Lusitanization and the Inquisition introduced attitudinal changes towards the consumption of alcoholic beverages among Goan Catholics. However, the Hindus in Goa continued to celebrate occasions sans alcohol, as most of their functions revolved around religious rituals associated with a deity.

With this permissive attitude, among the Catholics, a number of norms got introduced into the practice of alcohol consumption. These norms dictated who should drink, when, at what time etc. Despite these alcohol related norms which dominantly exist in Goan society, there is a percentage of Goan population which is extremely dependent on alcohol. The members of this section of society, cannot function without alcohol. Alcohol has assumed principal significance in their lives and they are often found consuming alcohol frequently, without regard for the social setting. Thus, they consume alcohol without boundaries, in the work place, home or in other social environments. These addicts whose main driving force in life is to get intoxicated, will consume any type of alcohol. They will beg, borrow or even steal for a drink.

An alcoholic's wife and children experience a number of problems that stem out of the conduct of an alcoholic. They are seen to experience neglect as well as physical and mental abuse. Society at large is also disturbed because of the behaviour of an alcoholic. It is interesting to note that some of these frequent consumers of alcohol may drink heavily, but will not be regarded as addicts by Goan society, as they know how to supposedly hold their drink.

## **II. Review of Literature**

N. Y. Dhupdale, D.D. Motghare, A.M.A. Ferreira, Y.D. Prasad (2006) examined the pattern and prevalence of alcohol consumption in rural Goa. The study indicated that the prevalence of alcohol consumption in the study population was 49%. It was observed that the light-drinking pattern reduces with advancing age while heavy drinking increased with an increase in age and showed a peak around age 40. The subjects who have or had alcoholic fathers are almost 2.9 times more likely to pick-up a similar habit than others. Males are four times more likely to develop the

drinking habit than females. Children of alcoholic fathers indicated a higher proportion of drinking.

Gladstone D'costa , Irwin Nazareth, Deepali Naik , Raj Vaidya , Gus Levy, Vikram Patel and Michael King (2007) studied harmful alcohol use in the state of Goa and its associations with violence. The study indicated that most women are abstainers. The study also aimed to understand and provide evidence on the role of the general practitioner in identification of harmful alcohol use. It also indicated the role of harmful drinking to the perpetration of physical violence from the perspective of the alcohol user.

Morten Gronbaek( 2009) examined the negative and positive effects of alcohol on health.The study points out that a high alcohol intake implies a high risk of a variety of health outcomes, such as dementia, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, cirrhosis, upper digestive tract cancer and alcohol dependency. It also explained that alcohol has beneficial effects for some individuals, especially with regard to prevention of thrombosis of the heart. The study indicated that a broader public health message of the advantageous effects of alcohol is not of concern in Western societies, where only a very small portion of the population do not drink and may have very good reasons therefore.

### **III. Objectives**

1. To explain the effect of alcohol addiction on an individual, vis-à-vis societies attitude towards this individual.
2. To analyse the effect of alcoholism on the family system.
3. To understand the effect of an alcoholic on society.

### **IV. Research Methodology**

Keeping in mind the objectives of the topic chosen for study, appropriate research tools were employed. The village of Verna, situated in the Salcete taluka, was taken up for this study. The sample was chosen with a specific purpose. The respondents were selected following a Purposive Sampling Method. The Snowball Technique was used to select the respondents as it was compatible with Purposive Sampling. The Interview schedule was the principal instrument for the collection of data necessary to conduct the study. Interviews and discussions were also conducted with owners of bars and senior citizens.

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**

Non conformation to social norms of drinking has a strong impact on one's physical as well as social life. The social, psychological and physical consequences of alcohol abuse surpass any possible financial damage. These effects are also noticeable on the family and community of an alcoholic.

### **1. The Effect of Alcoholism on an Individual**

An individual who consumes alcohol excessively is not in a position to work, as his efficiency is reduced. He is affected psychologically as well as physiologically. An alcoholic's body and mind gradually start deteriorating. The most common sickness associated with alcohol consumption is liver cirrhosis. It has taken the lives of several alcoholics in Goa and reduced the quality of life for many others living with this condition.

Most alcoholics also complain of memory loss. As an alcoholic is often seen to forget things, including his own words, many members of society believe that he forgets his words under the influence of alcohol. In the Goan society, if a person is verbally abused by an alcoholic, he is urged by others to forget the incident as people collectively think that there is no need to feel upset over the words of a 'drunkard'.

If an individual has become known for his alcohol addiction, members of society try to maintain a distance from him. Family members feel a sense of uneasiness and embarrassment in the presence of their alcoholic kin. Thus, the alcoholic faces a sense of rejection from his family and society. Family members tend to isolate their alcoholic kin and don't allow them to participate in any decision making with regard to family matters, as it is assumed that an alcoholic would have a diminished mental capacity. Family members assume that an alcoholic would not be able to contribute effectively to important decisions like choosing a prospective spouse for his child.

Among the Catholics an alcohol addict will generally exclude himself from attending mass or other religious ceremonies. However, an alcoholic will most likely turn up to a celebration where alcohol is being served, even if he is not invited. This can be seen in alcohol addicts belonging to both major religious communities, the Hindus and the Catholics, in Goa. An alcoholic in the

Hindu community, avoids visiting the temple, but he may be present at a cremation ground where alcohol is normally served as per tradition.

## 2. **The Effect of Alcoholism on the Family**

The deteriorating quality of family life is the principal fatality of the existence of an alcoholic kin member. An alcoholic's wife and children bear the brunt of abnoxious behavior caused by alcoholism. An alcoholic's wife in Goan society is observed as having a miserable life. The alcoholic could abuse her verbally as well as physically. An alcoholic tends to spend a major portion of his earnings on the purchase of alcohol. In many cases he does not provide financial support to the family. Many such families have to depend on the woman of the household for their primary income, who despite having no skill or experience might be forced to take up this responsibility. In such situations, the older siblings have to take up the charge of caring for younger siblings, especially when the mother is working to try to provide for the family.

In several cases in Goa, alcoholics depends on their wives to pay for their alcohol consumption. An alcoholic in Goa finds it hard to keep a job due to his perceived unstable condition by members of the society. Unemployed or unable to earn an income, these alcoholics often demand money from their wives. Some even go to the extent of stealing from their homes to pay for their addiction. There are several instances in Goan society where an alcoholic has pawned or sold his wife's jewelry inorder to pay for his alcohol. In several cases alcoholics are known to have stolen and sold expensive household items for money to buy alcohol. Due to these reasons, many families don't fully trust their alcoholic kin.

Many husbands in Goa who are addicted to alcohol are involved in domestic violence. There are many cases in which husbands return home in a drunken stupour and turn violent towards their families. An alcoholic's wife suffers from social ostracism and constant humiliation. An alcoholic's children are also affected because of unending social ridicule and criticism . An alcoholic's wife in Goan society is often labelled as being a 'drunkard's wife'. The children of alcoholics, especially those who belong to the lower strata of society, often drop out of school. Due to the constant physical and verbal battering faced by an alcoholic's family, the members of his family cannot lead a normal life. Children who come from homes afflicted with alcoholism often isolate themselves and are detached from their peers. Some children of alcoholic parents resort to aggression and violence to deal with the pressures faced by them. The frustration and helplessness of having an alcoholic parent is converted into anger towards the larger society.

These children often grow up to be rebels and social outcasts. In Goa, the children of alcoholic fathers find it difficult to find spouses when they reach marriageable age. This is because it is often assumed that the daughters of alcoholic parents will not be able to bring good dowries to their marital homes and therefore these girls are often rejected.

A surge in the number of bars being opened in Goa has introduced an element of competition in the alcohol business. It has now become common for bar owners to provide alcoholic beverages to consumers and even alcoholics on credit. Many consumers pay off their dues on a monthly basis. In case a person like this dies, the bar owner sends persistent reminders to his family to settle his dues. The family members thus suffer embarrassment at the hands of the bar owner and in some cases they struggle to complete payments to the bar owners, as an alcoholic may have racked up a mountain of debt.

It is interesting to note that even though several families face alcoholism, endure constant drunken brawls and have to deal with several problems related to alcohol abuse, including physical abuse and social ostracism, divorces are rarely sought from alcoholic partners. A wife tolerates an alcoholic husband. In many cases a wife may get involved in an extra-marital affair in her search for financial security. This behaviour is largely overlooked by Goan society.

### **3. The Effect of Alcoholism on Society**

The excessive consumption of alcohol is responsible for a number of deaths of young people in Goa. Riding or driving under the influence of alcohol has become the cause of a number of road accidents in Goan society. The injuries and deaths caused by these accidents affect society, as society loses its young and productive population. Alcohol addicts also put the life and safety of others at risk. Thus, excessive alcohol consumption affects an alcoholic as well as society at large.

Very often an alcoholic disturbs the peace and security of a neighbourhood as he often gets involved in drunken brawls. This reduces the quality of life of people in the neighbourhood. Situations like this often occur when alcoholic husbands come home in a drunken state and begin domestically abusing their family. This compels their wife and children to take shelter in a neighbour's home. These alcoholics are then even seen abusing the neighbours for shielding and protecting their families from their bouts of violence. This leads to a strain in the family's relationship with their neighbours. The family is caught in a vicious cycle of violence and fear due to the uncertain behaviour of an alcoholic which many times happens in public situations. These loud brawls also often disturb the peace of a locality.

## VI. Conclusion

When alcohol is consumed excessively, it affects the life of a person. Many individuals battling addiction have physical health issues like liver disease. The personal relationships of an alcoholic are often damaged.

The consequences of alcoholism are reflected in the health and family life of an alcoholic. The excessive use of alcohol and an addiction to it has damaged family relationships in the Goan society. Families of people affected by alcoholism often struggle to create strong bonds with their family members as well as society at large.

The children of alcoholic parents are at a higher risk of developing mental, behavioural, and emotional problems. Some of the problems experienced by the children of alcoholics include academic issues, anxiety, depression and poor emotional development. The family members of alcoholics often struggle with feelings of guilt and shame. Alcoholism drains away the finances of a family and when an alcoholic husband is unable to contribute to the finances of his family, his wife has to shoulder the responsibility of singlehandedly providing for the family.

One of the most dangerous consequences of alcoholism is domestic abuse meted out to a family by an alcoholic kin member. Some of the forms of emotional or physical abuse inflicted on family members by alcoholics in Goan society include verbal insults, domestic violence and public humiliation.

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