

## **Forced Temperance or Self-Control? Understanding Gandhi's idea of Prohibition and Its Relevance in Post-Independent India**

*Amrita Mondal*

### **Abstract:**

*The Gandhian anti-liquor movement imprinted a long-lasting legacy on the Indian psyche. Despite the ingrained legacy of the Gandhian movement, alcoholism has become a major social problem. In independent India, several states implemented prohibition, but it was mostly unsuccessful because, on the one hand, the prohibition movement became a populist rather than a policy intervention to curb alcoholism, and on the other hand, the anti-liquor movements continued with their schematic assumption that complete prohibition is a foolproof solution to the existing liquor menace. However, the recurring issue of drinking and prohibition remains an unsolved social problem and a contentious issue that needs an informed and constructive debate. The present paper intervenes in the debate by exploring the Gandhian idea of temperance and tracing its relevance in the present scenario.*

**Keywords:** *Gandhi, Liquor, Temperance, Prohibition, Women, Indian National Movement, Bihar, Post-independent India*

In independent India, the discourse on prohibition has been deeply rooted in and shaped by Gandhi's ideological and moral framework. Political parties and leaders, in justifying their stance on prohibition, have either underscored the Gandhian idea of prohibition or critiqued it. Numerous scholarly works on India's prohibition policy, particularly its alignment with the Gandhian principles, underscore the role of the Gandhian perspective in the policy shortcomings. Drawing a historical analogy between Gandhi's idea of prohibition and its implementation within the Gandhian movement, the existing literature critiques Gandhi's anti-liquor agitation. It argues that his constructive programme advocated for a complete prohibition without adequately considering the evolving pattern of liquor consumption, resulting in an ineffective long-term solution. Scholars such as David M. Fahey and Padma Manian contend that the Gandhian prohibition movement primarily targeted the educated section of Indian society, overlooking the liquor consumption patterns among the lower classes (Fahey and Manian 2005: 489-506). Robert Eric Colvard adds that the prohibition movement of 1930 was 'inextricably linked to nationalism and Indian freedom' (Colvard 2014: 195). However, this perspective lacks an exploration of Gandhi's role in integrating anti-liquor agitation within the Congress-led anti-colonial movement's constructive programme. In response to these critiques, this study delves into Gandhi's writing to understand the nature and the different paradigms of Gandhi's idea of temperance. Additionally, the study analyzes how Gandhi proposed incorporating the prohibition idea

into the national movement and in the lives of millions of Indians during colonial and post-independent India.

The present study tries to answer some of these questions in two parts. The first part traces how Gandhi incorporated the idea of temperance into his constructive programmes and justified temperance as a means of self-purification and attaining *swaraj*. The second part investigates the relevance of the Gandhian idea of temperance in resolving the growing problem of alcoholism in recent times.

### **Gandhi's Idea of Prohibition: Self-control, Self-purification, and Attaining Swaraj:**

Mahatma Gandhi's idea of temperance was as old as his idea of practising non-violence. His idea of temperance was shaped during his stay in England and South Africa, where he interacted with labourers, who shared their problems of excessive drinking and explained how the consumption of liquor ruined their lives. Gandhi, after returning to India in 1915, also noted a similar problem among the Indian mill labourers. Later, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1930, while delivering a speech at Navsari, he highlighted the Ahmedabad mill workers' drinking problems. He mentioned that several mill workers, after excessive drinking, lost control over their senses and turned into virtual animals; and even some of them could not distinguish between their wife, mother, and daughter (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 8-9). The vice of drunkenness not only brought misery to the lives of the labourers, but a large section of women also suffered from it. The widespread immoral practice of excessive drinking led Gandhi to reimagine the idea of temperance and try to solve the problem by advocating for the complete prohibition of liquor. It became an integral part of his constructive programme.

The year 1920 marked the integration of liquor prohibition into the constructive programme of the Non-Cooperation movement. Gandhi, emphasising the purification of individuals through abstinence from alcohol, urged the closure of liquor shops, attributing malevolence to liquor merchants who transformed drunkards into devils (Gandhi 1966 vol. 20: 401). Despite advocating picketing, he underscored a non-violent approach. Responding to a question posed by C. F. Andrews<sup>1</sup> about the treatment of drunkards and those rejecting *khaddar*, Gandhi maintained that the approach should be different. (Gandhi 1966 vol. 29: 249)

Gandhi's public addresses and editorials in *Navajivan* and *Young India* consistently called for non-violent action, *charka* spinning, *khadi* wearing, renunciation of untouchability, and abstention from drinking and detrimental habits. In August 1925, while addressing a labourers' gathering in Jamshedpur, he asserted that *swaraj* was unattainable until the workers ceased drinking and respected all women as their mothers and sisters (*The Search Light*, 14 August 1925).

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. Andrews was a British missionary, reformer, educationist and friend of Gandhi. He came to India on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1904 and devoted himself to serve the Indians.

In 1926, Gandhi blamed the government's excise policy and liquor merchants' desire for higher profit as responsible for increasing drunkenness among the masses. (Gandhi 1966 vol. 35: 392). Complete prohibition by the state, as Gandhi believed, could solve the drinking problem. During the Bardoli Satyagraha, Gandhi asserted that the British Government collected 25 crores rupees from excise revenue, and the complete prohibition by the government could alleviate the drinking problem. In defence of his proposal to complete prohibition, Gandhi denied the argument of the necessity of excise revenue for educational development by many people and identified it as a disgrace to the nation. (Gandhi 1999 vol. 40: 208).

Gandhi's idea of prohibition was staunchly supported by C. Rajagopalachari and endorsed by the Congress Working Committee, which established the Prohibition League of India in 1929 as an official body to continue the prohibition work (Gandhi 1999 vol. 41: 176). The full swing of the prohibition movement in 1930 resulted in a significant reduction in liquor consumption in Gujarat and an 81 per cent drop in liquor sales in Ahmedabad (Gandhi 1999 vol.49: 137-38). Meanwhile, when Jawaharlal Nehru proposed the idea of raising funds and organising volunteers for national service, Gandhi appreciated the initiative and suggested that total prohibition should be one of the important criteria for the volunteers' recruitment (Gandhi 1999 vol. 42: 260).

The Temperance Conference at Lahore resolved against liquor advertisements in newspapers (Gandhi 1999 vol.42: 373), and before the Civil Disobedience movement, *satyagrahis* were urged to abstain from intoxicants. Gandhi encouraged villagers to adopt cleanliness, wear *khadi*, and report individuals and liquor shops engaging in drinking activities (Gandhi 1999 vol. 42: 391-393).

### **Women as an Agency to Promote Temperance:**

At the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gandhi strategically linked the anti-liquor movement with the involvement of women, thereby integrating gendered participation into the broader framework of nationalist resistance. He was among the earliest leaders to explicitly encourage and mobilise women in the anti-liquor movement. He, while addressing a large gathering of European ladies in October 1929 at Mussoorie, said:

You can, if you will serve this country, do at least two things. You can help the poor in a tangible manner by adopting khadi and you can help the total prohibition movement...(Gandhi 1999 vol. 42: 72)

In 1930, Gandhi specially called for women's active participation in picketing, transcending age, caste, and religious barriers. He placed immense trust in the moral influence wielded by women, envisioning their pivotal role in the success of the prohibition movement and the transformation of the hearts of habitual drinkers (Gandhi

1999 vol. 48: 504-505). Drawing inspiration from the Salvation Army<sup>2</sup>, Gandhi urged Indian women to emulate women volunteers who dissuaded their brothers from succumbing to alcoholism (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 8-9). Initially, trained women were to start *satyagraha* units, followed by delegations visiting liquor booth owners to request discontinuation of the trade. Subsequently, women were to visit the homes of those addicted to alcohol, engage in picketing liquor booths, sing devotional songs, and dissuade individuals from falling prey to the vice (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 24-25). Emphasising the non-violent tone of the movement, Gandhi called on men to follow women's lead (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 58).

A notable figure in the success of the prohibition movement was Mithuben Petit, a Parsi woman and a Gandhian follower. Her efforts, particularly in Surat, Gujarat, exemplified the transformative impact of women in the cause (Gandhi 1999 vol. 48: 514-15). Gandhi leveraged her example to appeal to the entire Parsi community, addressing their significant role in the liquor business in Bombay (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 8-9). Despite criticisms from within the Parsi community, on the last day of the self-purification week in Dandi, Gandhi persisted in advocating for the abandonment of the liquor trade for the sake of national pride and patriotism. The participation of women in the prohibition conference at Dandi, as reported in newspapers like *Navajivan* on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1930 and *Young India* on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1930, indicated a growing momentum (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 117-19). Later, Shrimati Hansa Mehta and many other Gujarati women also joined the anti-liquor movement in Bombay.

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<sup>2</sup>Frederick de L. Booth Tucker started the Indian Salvation Army to preach Christianity in India in 1882. The members of the organisation adopted the Indian lifestyle and extended their area of work beyond the Indian cities. They expanded the network in Burma and Ceylon. Gradually, they extended the scope of work and included education, industry, healing and the reclamation of people from the Criminal Tribes. In 1871, the colonial government in India passed the Criminal Tribes Act and identified certain tribal communities as criminal due to indulgence of these tribes in heavy drinking along with other 'dangerous activities' according to the colonial government. The Salvation Army tried to change the lifestyle of the 'criminal tribes' by bringing them to some specific settlements, situated all over India, providing moral lessons against drunkenness, gambling, crime and impurity through education, and opening cottage industries, agricultural lands for making workplaces for the criminal tribes and turning them into wage labourers. [Also see: Tucker, F. St. G. Booth, (1928) *The Salvation Army and the Indian Criminal*, *The Policy Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, vol. 1, issue: 4, October 1, 578-593; Barnett, Alfred H., (1937) *The Salvation army in India*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 85, no. 4391, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 202-215; Ramakrishnan, Meena, (2000) *Colonial Construction of a 'Criminal' Tribe*, *EPW*, vol.35, no. 28-29; Tolen, R. J. (1991). *Colonizing and transforming the criminal tribesman: the Salvation Army in British India*, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 18, no.1, 106-125].

**Spread of the Gandhian Temperance Movement:**

Gradually, the prohibition movement initiated by Gandhi gained traction beyond its initial locations, with individuals from diverse regions of India adopting the programme. Pandit Dev Sharma proposed to launch a prohibition campaign in the area around Haridwar. Places with no risk of violence and having a sufficient number of workers were chosen as the site to launch the prohibition movement. While sketching the course of the movement, Gandhi asked prohibition workers to carry the movement in three ways, i.e., “First, by visiting the homes of addicts and dissuading them from drinking; second, by persuading the liquor-booth owners to close their business; and third, by picketing the liquor booths.” (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 4). Gandhi also said that if the government sought to suppress the prohibition movement through official directives, the public ought to respond through civil disobedience, thereby asserting their moral agency over state authority. He further believed that the cessation of liquor consumption could result in an estimated saving of twenty-five crore rupees for the people. This, he suggested, would compel the government either to seek an alternative source or to reduce public expenditure, particularly on the army and the administrative apparatus. Gandhi contended that excessive administrative costs were symptomatic of the government’s failure to earn the trust of its people. Therefore, he advocated for a fundamental restructuring of the administrative system, emphasising the necessity of building public trust as a means to achieve both economic and political reform (Gandhi 1999 vol. 49: 24-25).

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 1931 allowed the peaceful continuation of anti-liquor protests. Despite the pact’s failure in 1932, Gandhi urged picketers to maintain non-violent practices, refraining from abusing the liquor sellers or buyers. The movement, predominantly led by women, successfully evaded government oppression due to its non-violent nature (Colvard 2014: 187)

In an interview with Henry Carter on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1931, Gandhi advocated for legislation enforcing a complete prohibition on distillation and foreign liquor. He attributed the rise in drunkenness to industrialisation and the failure of the Local Opinion System<sup>3</sup>. (Gandhi 1999 vol. 53: 453). The anti-liquor protest persisted after the Civil Disobedience movement’s withdrawal, resulting in the arrest of Congress picketers in 1932.

The Act of 1935 transferred the excise department responsibility to the state government, and Congress-led provisional ministries, formed in 1937, intensified the push for complete prohibition in five provinces. Gandhi proposed a nuanced approach to prohibition, emphasising gradual implementation, prevention of new liquor shop licenses, and providing alternatives for liquor shop employees. He suggested raising funds through new taxation to balance the budget (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 35)

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<sup>3</sup> Under the local opinion system, a committee was formed of local people from different religions to suggest a suitable distillery system based on the moral sentiment of the local people.

The exigency for prohibition gave rise to dissension within the Congress ministries, particularly manifest in Gandhi's elucidation of the term 'immediately' in *Harijan* on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1937. Gandhi expounded that the temporal connotation of 'immediately' denoted a span of two or three years, while total prohibition was characterised as 'a type of adult education of the nation and not merely a closing down of grog shops' (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 76-82). He advocated the commencement of prohibition by precluding the licensing of new establishments and by closing existing liquor outlets considered detrimental to public order (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 76-82). Emphasising the provision of affordable, wholesome refreshments, reading facilities, and entertainment spaces for employees, Gandhi posited these measures as avenues to deter labourers from resorting to alcohol (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 76-82).

Moreover, Gandhi proposed exceptions for medical use of liquor and regulated quantities of imported liquor, stipulating their exclusive sale in designated areas under an authorised certificate, with a prohibition on intoxicating drinks in hotels and restaurants (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 76-82). On October 9, 1937, Gandhi articulated in *Harijan* the imperative for the government to relinquish excise revenue, cease the renewal of liquor licenses, publish a mandate for the exclusive governmental distribution of liquor, and implored the people to renounce alcohol consumption to ensure the efficacy of prohibition (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 309-10). In a bid to offset deficits, the Congress ministries, under Gandhi's counsel, explored the imposition of new taxes (Gandhi 1999 vol. 74: 328-29).

At Gandhi's suggestion, the Congress ministries introduced prohibition in five provinces. Of these, only three were successful. In 1937, C. Rajagopalachari started a pilot prohibition programme in the Salem district of Madras Presidency; D. Gilder, Health and Excise Minister of Bombay, initiated a pilot prohibition programme in Ahmedabad; and Kailas Nath Katju, Excise Secretary of United Provinces, also introduced a pilot prohibition programme in the villages of the Etah District (Colvard 2014: 188-89). C. Rajagopalachari harkened back to the Indian past and argued that drinking was always disreputable, and thus, people should abstain from drinking. He also stated that the revival of the ideas of the bhakti saints would be helpful in the process (Colvard 2014: 189). Prohibition committees were constituted in various provinces, tasking *chaukidars* and *dafadars* with reporting on extant liquor shops and identifying drunkards. The Prohibition Department vigilantly monitored the movement of individuals who were traversing from the prohibited to non-prohibited areas to satiate their thirst (Colvard 2014: 193). Notably, in the Bombay Presidency, prohibition enforcement precipitated a substantial decline in excise tax collection, prompting the government to counterbalance budgetary shortfalls by introducing supplementary taxes (Gandhi 1999 vol. 75: 210).

#### **Idea of Alternative Job Opportunity:**

Despite opposition from the liquor traders and toddy tappers, Gandhi addressed the issue of unemployment resulting from prohibition, advocating for alternative avenues of

economic activity. He encouraged toddy tappers to produce *gur* from the palm juice.<sup>4</sup> He posited that supplying palm sugar to the market could offer a viable source of income for toddy tappers, reduce the reliance on imported sugar, and alleviate the financial burden on people by eliminating the sugar tax. Additionally, he proposed alternative uses for the *mahua* flower and advocated for the utilisation of palm oil in cooking and soap production (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 255). He, however, permitted drinking *nira*, a drink made from the sap of the palm tree, at breakfast as a remedy for constipation and ultimately suggested turning all the liquor shops into a refreshment club (Gandhi 1999 vol. 72: 229). These recommendations indicate that Gandhi tried to build up an economic resistance against the colonial government by not paying *Abkari* and Sugar taxes, along with generating alternative job opportunities for the toddy tappers. He said:

...Palm jaggery can well replace sugar-cane jaggery... if the palm that are used for making *tadi* are used for making jaggery, India will never lack sugar and the poor will be able to get good jaggery for very little money. (Gandhi 1948: 32-4)

The Parsi community, however, was unsatisfied with Gandhi's idea of replacing the liquor business with jaggery manufacturing. H. P Mody, for example, objected to Gandhi's idea of prohibition and argued that drinking was a part of Parsis' social life. In response, Gandhi invoked the teachings of Dadabhai Naoroji and implored communities to prioritise the greater national interest over narrow individual concerns (Gandhi 1999 vol. 76: 8). He further stated that a large section of the Parsi community participated in the prohibition activity during non-cooperation and the civil-disobedience movements (Gandhi 1999 vol. 76: 24-28). A few members of the Parsi community opposed the prohibition movement during the 1937 ministries.

Leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, however, said that the Parsis had opposed to the prohibition because the state government of the Bombay presidency imposed a 10 percent property tax to fund the prohibition. Bose also said:

It is urged on their behalf that the 10 per cent property tax subjects them to exorbitant taxation as compared with their population and they resent being taxed in order to force non-Muslims to abstain from drink.

The effect of prohibition on our general economy is of greater consequence than even its effect on the Parsis or Muslim community. To give a small instance, a

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<sup>4</sup>Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1937 that "...I learn that in Andhra Pradesh the tappers do not sell the palm juice they extract, but they convert it into *gur* which they sell to the arrack manufacturers who make arrack out of this *gur*. In such cases, nothing need be done except for the State to take over this *gur* at a reasonable agreed price. From what I know of the tappers, they are not likely to lose anything by the impending prohibition, and the poor will get a rich but cheap food in the shape of good pure *gur* instead of a liquid which harms both body and soul". (Gandhi 1999 vol.72: 129-131).

large number of hotels and restaurants will be badly hit and may have to close down ... The fact is that while piecemeal introduction of partial prohibition is possible, piecemeal introduction of total prohibition is next to impossible... (Gandhi 1999 vol. 76: 417-18)

In reply to Bose's statement on prohibition, Gandhi told:

Subhas Babu has played a most dangerous game by mixing up the communal question with such a purely moral reform as prohibition. It is as much the concern of a Muslim or a Parsi or a Christian as of a Hindu to look after his less fortunate countryman who happens to be a labourer and falls a victim to drink. (Gandhi 1999 vol. 76: 212)

Another community of Bombay Presidency, the Bhandaris, put a petition pleading to extend their practice of toddy tapping for a few years (Gandhi 1999 vol. 76: 87). As a solution to this problem, Gandhi suggested that the state government should provide a remedy to this community and encourage them to produce *nira* and *gur*.

Despite these agitations and oppositions, the prohibition movement continued. The Karachi District Congress Committee successfully organised a prohibition programme. Gandhi wished them success on July 17, 1939, and hoped that picketing was purely educative and peaceful (Gandhi 1999 vol. 76: 137). He also congratulated the Bombay state government for continuing the prohibition work. In 1940, before the celebration of Independence Day<sup>5</sup>, Gandhi said that the day must be a day of fraternization, abolition of untouchability from our hearts, giving up spirituous liquors, self-spinning, and the sale and spread of *khadi* and village industries. (Gandhi 1999 vol. 80: 18). While instructing the *satyagrahis* on June 17, 1941, he included prohibition within the thirteen-fold items of the constructive programme.

#### **Gandhi's Vision for the Independent India's Prohibition Policy:**

During 1946-48, another shift in Gandhi's prohibition idea could be noticed. This shift highlighted his hope of transforming independent India into a liquor-free country under the supervision of the Congress and the Muslim League. He said,

National Provincial Governments are now in full swing in India. Happily, on the question of prohibition, there can be no differences of opinion between the Congress and the Muslim League...(Gandhi 1999 vol. 90: 262)

While repeating the same strategy for the anti-liquor agitation, he added a few new methods, like incorporating alcohol and narcotic drugs education in the school curriculum, forming temperance societies, and making use of temperance literature (Gandhi 1999 vol.

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<sup>5</sup>The Indian National Congress observed 26<sup>th</sup> January as Independence Day from 1930 to 1947, later as the Republic Day of India.

90: 262). This phase of the Gandhian anti-liquor resistance highlighted the importance of education in building resistance against breweries and distilleries. Gandhi also repeated his earlier demand, i.e., enactment and enforcement of a law for prohibition. On September 8, 1947, Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* that India was facing two main problems at that point, i.e., first, a shortage of foodstuffs, and second, a shortage of clothing. In this condition, spending money on liquor meant a wastage of money and a loss of self-control. Therefore, four things, he suggested to be needed for coping with this situation: first, the government should pass a requisite law. Second, the government should educate the general population to have a positive public opinion in this regard. Third, the government should open refreshment rooms selling non-alcoholic drinks in the same place as grog shops and provide innocuous entertainment in the form of books, newspapers, and games. Fourth, the income from the sale of intoxicants should be spent on cultivating public opinion in favour of prohibition (Gandhi 1999 vol. 96: 351).

Gandhi criticised and questioned the practice of stigmatizing the lower caste as drunkards and unclean by the upper-class and upper-caste.<sup>6</sup> This stance of Gandhi shows the challenge he posed to the colonial practice of freezing the identity of the communities and castes as drunkards.<sup>7</sup> Gandhi advised the government to close the liquor shops and replace them with eating-houses where people could get healthy food along with books to enrich their knowledge. At last, he emphasised the role of the interim government in the liquor business along with the drinking issue and said:

I am quite sure that giving up alcohol increases both the physical vigour of man and his capacity to earn. It is for this reason that prohibition has been a part of the Congress programme since 1920. Now that we are free, the Government should redeem its pledge and give up the unholy excise revenue. It is not a real loss, but it will bring enormous good to the people. This is the way to our prosperity. We should achieve this through our own efforts. (Gandhi 1999 vol. 98: 154)

### **The Relevance of Gandhi's Idea of Prohibition in Post-independent India**

After independence, the central government did not initiate a complete ban on alcohol at a pan-India level and allowed the state governments to collect most of their revenue from the excise department. Despite being a lucrative source of revenue, some Indian states, viz.

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<sup>6</sup>A minister asked the *Harijans* to give up their unclean habits, unclean living, and unclean clothes and abstain from alcohol in the Harijan conference in UP in 1947. A *Harjan* replied to that minister that 'the Government could burn up the unclean clothes just as it could have palm trees cut down and wine shops closed'. (Gandhi, 1999, vol. 98: 154.)

<sup>7</sup>The colonial government divided different castes according to their liquor consumption and produced the statistics of the drinking population in 1908. (see: June 1908, Finance Department, Head: Separate Revenue, A proceeding, File no: E, Appendix A, West Bengal State Archive (WBSA)).

Tamil Nadu (1957), Gujarat (1960), Bihar (the 1970s, 2016), Nagaland (1989), and Mizoram (1995) implemented a total prohibition on the sale and consumption of alcohol for a certain period or, in some cases, on a permanent basis. The implementation or withdrawal of prohibition, gradually, became a populist intervention and turned into an election agenda for winning the elections. Indian states have seen liquor consumption as a lucrative source of state revenue. Therefore, the growing nexus between politicians, police, and liquor businessmen, along with inappropriate usage of state apparatus, has changed the nature of the prohibition movement. The pressure of politicians and liquor businessmen created intricate circumstances to implement a complete prohibition in a state. However, the states of Gujarat and Bihar implemented a complete prohibition by invoking the Gandhian idea of temperance, but it achieved mixed results, which need an independent study. Though it is beyond the purview of the present work, it has been summarised briefly in the latter part of the paper.

In recent years, the state government has failed to measure and control growing drunkenness among the people, which has increased violence against women. In the 1950s and 1960s, several temperance activists and women raised their voices against growing drunkenness in India. Two ardent Gandhian followers, Sarala Behn and Mira Behn, the founders of Gandhi Ashram of Kumaon, started an anti-liquor agitation in Uttarakhand and the hills of Uttar Pradesh. They organised the women of the Kumaon region to fight against alcoholism. These organised women picketed the liquor shops and demanded government intervention, but failed to ban liquor in the region (Chandra 2008: 645). In post-independent India, the Gandhian method of prohibition failed to change the hearts of the liquor traders and the drunkards, which led to further economic distress and health hazards in low-income families (Mondal 2023a: 1197). In these years, the women's condition gradually worsened as most of the state governments looked at prohibition as an election issue, or a caste and class conflict, rather than identifying drinking as a common social problem. Therefore, the course and methods of the prohibition movement substantially changed, and it became evident from Gadchiroli's prohibition movement (1988), Andhra Pradesh's Anti-Liquor Movement (1992), and those at Haryana (1992) and Bihar (2016) (Mondal 2023a: 1197).

Kanshi Ram, a social activist and the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party, was the first Indian politician to incorporate prohibition in his political ideals to mobilise the Dalits and the backward caste of Uttar Pradesh in 1980. He saw the prohibition movement through the prism of the caste system and appealed to the Dalit women to join the movement. As the Bahujan movement started expanding in Bareilly, Rampur, Azamgarh, Meerut, and other districts of Uttar Pradesh, the Dalit women started actively supporting and participating in the prohibition activities (Narayan 2016; Mondal 2023a: 1197-1198). The prohibition movement in South India reflected complex issues of local politics, women's agitation, the muscle power of liquor mafias, and caste and class struggles.

Therefore, the anti-liquor movement gradually discarded the Gandhian method of prohibition. The initial prohibition proposal in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra (1988) identified the state's unwillingness to sacrifice revenue and local demand for liquor. However, the local women's and young people's organizations, with great vigour, continued their demand for a complete prohibition (Bang 1992: 1822). Ultimately, the Maharashtra government imposed a ban on liquor in the Gadchiroli district in 1993. The anti-liquor movement of Andhra Pradesh began in the Naxal-dominated areas of Nizamabad, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, and Khammam districts from 1981, and the Naxalite groups promoted this anti-liquor movement (Mondal 2023a: 1198).

Later, in 1992, women volunteers of the anti-liquor movement in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh devised a new mode of resistance that was neither Gandhian nor Marxist in nature (Ilaiah 1992: 2406). In their anti-liquor agitation, the women of the Nellore district deviated from the Gandhian idea of non-violence and opted for direct actions instead. Their *modus operandi* was disrupting the process of liquor auction and license issuing, thereby physically and morally assaulting the liquor traders, sellers, and drinkers. They also wrote letters with blood to the state government seeking complete prohibition. These women challenged the authority and nexus of local liquor mafias, police, and politicians. The government, frightened by such a strong women's movement, tried to divert attention by adding a class-caste dimension to it. The then ruling party of Andhra Pradesh estimated a loss of Rs. 860 crores in the implementation of prohibition. Yet, all the political parties in Andhra Pradesh, except the Indian National Congress, included complete prohibition in their election manifesto to attract women's votes. The Nellore movement stopped the practice of the liquor auction in the villages, and the Kurnool's anti-liquor movement developed a militant way of resistance at the village level. Despite these developments, the problem of alcohol consumption and alcoholism was not resolved. Once again, the demand for a prohibition is being raised in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The tribal women of Adilabad started a prohibition movement, but failed to get support from the district administration, police, and tribal men (Singh 2020; Mondal 2023a: 1198).

The complete prohibition in Bihar was first introduced in 1979 by Karpoori Thakur, then chief minister of Bihar. Recently, once again, Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar, asserted Gandhi's dream of a liquor-free society and completely prohibited the sale, consumption, and manufacturing of alcohol in Bihar in 2016. Since 2016, after the complete prohibition in Bihar, several governmental accounts and newspapers have reported a reduction in domestic violence and crime against women. To compensate for the revenue loss due to prohibition, the Bihar government increased taxes on domestic products, especially on milk, sweets, and clothes, along with auto parts and electrical goods. Nitish Kumar and his government have taken all measures to implement the prohibition to fulfil the election promise. (Mondal 2023a: 1196-1197).

However, the arbitrary use of state machinery to control liquor consumption brought huge unemployment to communities of Pasis and Mushars who were involved in liquor

manufacture and trade. The state government did not offer an alternative job to these people. Instead, the government brought a scheme under which they could sell *Nira*<sup>8</sup>, but this scheme did not deliver the expected result and failed miserably due to poor implementation at the ground level. Besides, the recent prison statistics show that the anti-liquor law adversely affected the wage labourers and the lower caste. Praveen Kumar and Vijay Raghavan, in a recent article, have shown that almost 1.5 lakh people were arrested in Bihar under the new Prohibition Act. Out of the total number of arrests, 34.4% people belong to the OBC, 27.1% belong to the SC, and 6.8% belong to the ST caste. These statistics also revealed that ‘the communities, which make up around 42% of the state population, have around 70% representation in arrests under the prohibition law, as also that marginalised people accounted 88% of the total arrests under the said law’ (Kumar and Raghavan 2020: 39). These arrests forced poor and marginalised sections to sell out their assets and means of livelihood for getting bail. Besides, the police also used arbitrary power and falsely exaggerated charges against offenders to put them in jail. The amendment of the Prohibition Act of 2018 also failed to solve the problematic outcomes of the Prohibition Act of 2016. The state machinery at local levels was harsh to the lower castes and toddy tapping community, rather than becoming strict on the people associated with the organised sale of liquor in cities (Kumar and Raghavan 2020: 40-41). These flaws in implementing the Prohibition Act in Bihar raise questions on Nitish Kumar’s proposition for an all-India liquor ban to fulfil Gandhi’s wish. The past experiences of anti-liquor movements show that fulfilling Gandhi’s dream of a liquor-free society would not be possible until the anti-liquor movement incorporates Gandhian ideas and methods into current conditions (Mondal 2023a: 1199)

### **Conclusion:**

Gandhi envisioned a teetotaler India and devised a multifaceted approach to realise this objective. Examining the idea of prohibition within the Gandhian movement reveals a nuanced evolution characterised by strategic phases. The progression involves the identification and critical analysis of the issue of alcoholism, the integration of the idea of temperance into the constructive programme, the gradual mobilisation of diverse segments, the formation of public opinion, the advocacy for a prohibition law, the rejection of excise revenue, and the provision of alternative employment opportunities for those economically affected by the prohibition policy. Notably, punitive measures were eschewed in favour of transformative approaches aimed at altering the mindset of individuals identified as drunkards and liquor sellers.

Gandhi’s idea of prohibition transcended a mere crusade against liquor consumption or an attempt to assert state control over citizens’ bodies. Instead, it encompassed initiatives to instigate voluntary abandonment of drinking practices, enabled active participation of

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<sup>8</sup> An Indian local liquor, prepared from palm tree and containing less alcohol.

women in the national movement, facilitated men's involvement in self-purification *yajna* through temperance, and stimulated economic revival by eschewing *Abkari* and the sugar tax. His vision sought to unite all Indians, irrespective of gender, caste, and class, in the prohibition movement. Employing moral principles, non-violence, self-sacrifice for the greater good, cooperation among diverse sections of society, temperance literature, education initiatives, the establishment of refreshment and reading clubs for labourers and liquor addicts, and the cultivation of self-control, Gandhi aimed to realise his fervent aspiration of a liquor-free India.

Post-independence, however, India failed to materialise Gandhi's dream of a liquor-free nation. While some states, such as Bihar, enforced total prohibition and ostensibly adhered to Gandhi's vision by sacrificing excise revenue, the outcome devolved into a punitive state apparatus disproportionately affecting the economically disadvantaged involved in the liquor trade and consumption. It is imperative to recall Gandhi's perspective that total prohibition is akin to "adult education of the nation" (Gandhi, 1999: vol. 72, pp.76-82) and not a mere closure of liquor establishments, emphasising the need for transformative, educational approaches over oppressive state interventions, particularly towards the poor and marginalised.

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