

# ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE in Context of Human Freedom and Societal Need

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**A**lcoholism is dependence on alcohol. It is also characterized as 'compulsive and uncontrolled consumption of alcoholic beverages'. This state occurs when a person becomes so dependent on alcohol that without which he/ she cannot live in equanimity and quietness but feels stressed and distracted in mind and body. Alcoholism and drug abuse do not occur all of a sudden, but develop when they are consumed regularly and in large quantity. First, a person takes alcohol and drug to relieve stress or to get pleasure. Later on he/she begins to consume it in social gathering and gradually becomes alcoholic. Once a person consumes alcohol or drug he/she is prompted to take again as he/she feels stressed without taking. The fact is that casual and social drinking eventually leads to heavier drinking.

It is now fashionable to consume alcohol and drug particularly at festive occasions and social gatherings on the

pretext that moderate consumption of these beverages will not cause any physical and psychological harm. First, it is difficult to remain contented at the limited quantity of alcohol and drug consumption. Second, it has potential hazards such as loss of control, emotional overreaction and psychic problems. Persons who take these intoxicating substances every so often lose control of their faculties and exhibit behaviour which they themselves do not know what they are doing. Alcohol and drug users generally exhibit three traits. First, they are so obsessed with alcohol and drug that they think in a negative way and their attitude leads them to incessant consumption. Second, the users are unable to stop the consumption of these substances and it is very difficult for them to refuse available alcohol and drug. Third, the addicts, despite of adverse consequences, continue consuming these materials and go beyond all social and moral constraints. These characteristics are dangerous to

human existence as they cause serious damage to the vitality of mind and body.

## STAGES OF ADDICTION

Alcohol and drug dependence takes place gradually. A person passes through different stages in order to be completely dependent on alcohol/drug. If one takes precaution at the initial contact with alcohol/drug, one can easily get rid of these harmful substances. This is pertinent to the parents of alcohol/drug addicts. If parents take care of their children, teach them the devastating effects of alcohol/drug, inculcate positive morals in them, develop positive thinking and direct them to constructive work, they can change the drinking habit of these youths.

The first stage is the initial contact stage when one for the first time uses alcohol/drug and faces different repercussions. It entirely depends upon the psychological and emotional state of a person that how one reacts. If the person is relaxed,

comfortable and manages to handle, losing control has less trouble but it creates serious problems to those who are nervous, more concerned with maintaining control and prone to negative drug reaction. The use of alcohol/drug for such persons creates emotional imbalance and psychic disturbance. It also depends on the situation in which, and the people amidst whom, alcohol/drug has been taken. If they are uncomfortable and strange, the negative drug reaction may be obvious result. However, the first contact with the alcohol/drug cannot remain first but it progresses further and propels the users into other stages. This is the reason that alcohol/drug use is called progressive disease. They

involve persons more and more as they progress through the stages. The first contact generally leads to the next stage and its experience may lead to subsequent stages and finally culminates to the dependence on alcohol/drug.

The second stage of alcohol/drug use comes when a person is so involved in these substances that most of his/her time and energy are spent in their use. The intoxicating substances become the integral part of the individual's life. Such persons always associate with others who use the same drug. They consume alcohol/drug together, join bars and find places where they can get together and consume these substances. Individuals in this stage always try to make sure that the alcohol/drug is

available. They always keep these substances whenever they are away from home or go outside the city.

The third stage is characterised as the excessive use stage when a person uses alcohol/drug excessively. It is difficult to describe excessive use because there are different kinds and criteria of excessive use but generally it refers to considerable alcohol/drug use that produces dangerous and negative consequences and when users spend increasing time in buying, selling and using alcohol/drug. This stage is also called drug abuse. Some people call it binge drinking which, according to an estimate in the United Kingdom, occurs when a man consumes more than eight units of alcohol and a woman consumes over six units in one setting.

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind.*

*Say, He is Allah, the One. Allah is Eternal and Absolute. None is born of Him nor is He born.*

*And there is none like him (Suratul Ikhlas 112)*

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Binge drinking is an acute problem in many countries that are trying to find out proper mechanism to cope with it. In the United Kingdom, according to an estimate 40% of emergency hospital admittances are alcohol related. Consuming alcohol/drug three to four times a week, by and large, leads to binge drinking which is more fatal to health than frequently drinking small quantities. According to a research conducted by the University of Western Ontario, 'men who drink 22 or more units of alcohol a week have a 20% higher rate of admission into acute care hospitals than non-drinkers'.

The fourth and the last stage is of addiction that generally means compulsive and uncontrolled consumption of alcohol/drug as well as a person's complete dependence upon them. In this stage it is difficult to return to any of the previous stages. Alcohol and drug addiction is perilous to life, damages the vital parts of the body and attenuates the vitality of human existence.

### **IMPACT OF ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE**

Alcoholism and drug abuse beyond the shadow of a doubt are a great menace. They have devastating effect on users' life, their families and society. Consumption of these substances damages the person's nervous system, creates depression and makes the users dull, sedated and unable to act in a relaxed and natural way. They affect users' thoughts, emotions and behaviour. It is observed in several studies that heavy and regular drinking harms a person's ability to coordinate

muscles and speak properly.

In many cases binge drinking causes patients to go into coma. In a research conducted in Canada out of 25 deaths worldwide 1 is caused by alcohol. According to the British Medical Association, alcohol kills six persons in Scotland every day. However, alcoholism has a long term ethanol effect on an individual. It has catastrophic physical, mental and social impacts. Women are more sensitive to these impacts particularly in pregnancy as it causes foetal alcohol syndrome.

Medical investigations in cross setting indicates that long term alcohol use causes varieties of physical deficiencies, important among them are cirrhosis of the liver, pancreatitis, epilepsy, polyneuropathy, alcoholic dementia, heart disease, nutritional deficiencies, peptic ulcer and sexual dysfunction. All these are very fatal to the lives of individuals. Besides, there are greater chances of developing cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Women develop more complications from alcohol dependence than men. They have high mortality rate from alcoholism than men. The important parts of the body that are easily damaged include brain, heart and liver. There is also an increased risk of breast cancer. Heavy drinking among women causes adverse effects on their reproductive system.

Constant and heavy consumption of alcohol damages the functions of the brain and creates various mental health problems. Important among them is dementia. Alcohol is the second leading cause of dementia, as 10

per cent of dementia cases are due to it. Studies show that there is increased effect of neurotoxic effects of alcohol on the brain. The result is that a person's ability of perception is impaired to a great extent. Apart from this, psychiatric disorders are also common in alcoholics. The percentage of patients suffering from psychiatric disorders is increasing every day. Most of the users suffer from anxiety and depression disorders that may also lead to psychosis, confusion and organic brain syndrome. The fact is that alcohol and drug abuse spoils the cognitive and perceptive abilities of the brain develops subversive feelings which will lead to anti-social personality disorder. Women used to taking alcohol and drugs are more prone to physical or sexual assault, abuse and domestic violence than the non-users.

The physical and psychiatric consequences of alcohol and drug abuse create severe social problems and impair the very fabric of social relations. The users due to the pathological changes in brain and body and under the influence of intoxication exhibit undesirable behaviour that often break the general principles of etiquette, violate social norms and commit criminal offenses. They are involved in child abuse, domestic violence, rape, burglary and assault. They inflict physical and mental injuries to others, disturb the peace and freedom of innocent members of society. Consequently, those surrounding them keep a distance from the alcoholics who are isolated from family and friends. This isolation again causes marital conflict,

maladjustment and divorce. Sometimes due to their nasty behaviour they lose their job which creates financial and other problems to them and their families.

The strangest phenomenon of modern life is that in spite of disastrous impact of alcohol and drug abuse on individual and social life, it is considered etiquette to serve alcoholic beverages in social gatherings and on festive occasions. Modern man, who claims to be civilized, considers it a way of entertainment and a lifestyle to take beverages and drugs and offer them to their friends. Sometimes the members of the group that are intoxicated can become openly aggressive and verbally abusive to others. They take liberty with female members and the group tolerates all these undesirable acts in the name of patience as requisite for modern social relations. This is due to the fact that modern man wants liberation from the shackle of societal bond, and enjoys maximum freedom and activities that give them momentary pleasure. This is what we see in the West which has so-called developed values and morals conducive to technological changes and, for which it is facing moral degeneration. But these values, when imported to the East, created contradictions and vitiated the basics of human existence.

#### GIFT OF MODERNISATION

Modernisation took place in Europe when

natural sciences were developed and applied to change the physical surroundings and living conditions of the people. They had beyond a doubt succeeded in finding out the principles that determined the relation among physical phenomena and on that basis made sophisticated

machines, tools and technological devices to satisfy human needs in the best possible way and make living condition comfortable. People, when experienced these artefacts of contemporary life, became fascinated and agreed with social scientists' view that if we want to take full advantage

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of these artefacts we have to change our traditional views and develop new ideas and values consonant with the technological changes.

As a matter of fact they introduced new ideas, new rational system conducive to new ways of generating wealth and of governance based on maximum utility of resources and material gain. This outlook is characterised as modernity as the obvious resultant of the process of modernisation and considered scientific and most appropriate way of transforming economic, political and social life of humans.

In the wake of this process people have learned to make choices, seek alternatives and express doubt about the efficacy of the present societal solutions.

Thus, modern men and women challenged the plausible structure of society, claimed freedom from societal bonds, relied on their so-called rational capacity and did what pleases their egos and fulfil their wild aspirations. They claimed liberation from all the constraints imposed on them to regulate their behaviour and direct them towards the achievement of social goals. The result was that in the name of freedom, modern humans began to justify those acts and behaviour which were once considered disastrous to their lives and society as well. They vindicated nudity and establishment of nude clubs, homosexuality, marriage within the same sex and children's right to get divorce

trends cause intellectuals and men of knowledge to think of and visualise the future of humanity. The bitter truth is that modernity is associated with the economic welfare, profit, generating wealth, satisfying urges to the best possible way, realising one's aspiration and sensual gratification at the cost of others and societal interests and goals. Modern norms and values are hedonistic in nature devoid of virtuous and ethical principles and, as such, detrimental to humanity. Alcoholism and drug abuse is another expression of modern lifestyle.

#### HUMAN FREEDOM AND SOCIETAL NEEDS

Freedom is generally misinterpreted. It does not mean to do whatever one wants to do. It is always associated with the freedom of others as well as societal needs and goals. It involves certain restraints necessary to regulate human behaviour, safeguard others' freedom and achieve societal goals. Society is the constellation of individuals as it prescribes appropriate and beneficial ways to live together in peace and harmony. It comes into being for overall well-being of its members. Cultural pattern, rules and regulations, customs, norms and values that society develops are to produce such humans who would cherish its ideals, carry out them throughout the land and establish a system of its grail. The most important is the plausible structure which determines the criteria of good and bad and helps to develop norms and values which individuals have to follow to maintain the ideals of society.

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Constraints and restraints, checks and control are imposed on humans to train and encourage them to adopt what is righteous and virtuous and reject what is iniquitous and evil.

However, individuals cannot be left free to do what they crave, yearn for and aspire because in this way they will endanger their own existence as well as that of others. It is thus, necessary to create a balance between human freedom and societal needs. A society has to face disaster if it fails to curb those factors that shatter the balance between human freedom and societal needs. No society can afford to give freedom to its members to abrogate its norms in order to develop their own.

These are the reasons that society bans and forbids those acts that damage its integrity and solidarity and wreck its very existence. Nudity, homosexuality, same sex marriage, children's right to get divorce from their parents, alcoholism and drug abuse are such phenomena that cause disaster to humanity. They make humans fall down from the high pedestal of civilized and rational beings to barbarous and outrageous ones.

Imagine what will be the future of a society where a majority of persons commit these inhuman acts. Modern society in the name of freedom allows individuals to cross the limit of moral standards and undermine the normative pattern. These trends do not

liberate individuals from societal bonds, but motivate them to shed blood of innocent persons and also of themselves. These are the indications that the modern society is proceeding towards its doom.

#### ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Islam establishes an altruistic society based on righteous and virtuous ideals as well as on high standard of moral and ethical principles. It cherishes what is upright and invites people towards them and rejects what is wrong and evil. To follow and establish virtues requires courage and moral probity. Islamic society trains its individuals, inculcates good values and imbues them with courage to retain high ideals of life manifest in their

**“Do not kill your children for fear of want. We will provide for them and for you. Surely killing them is a great sin.”**

*(Al-Qur'ān - 17:31)*

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daily activities.

For that Islam prohibits those things and elements that have adverse effect on individuals' psyche, create distraction in their minds and body and damage their potentials to resist evil. This is the reason that Islam outright rejects intoxicants, whatever their forms may be, and disapproves of their use. The first Qur'anic injunction (Qur'an, 2:219) declares that all intoxicating liquors or drugs are not only evil but great evil. There may be some benefits in them, but the harm is greater and more devastating than the benefits. Thus, it is dangerous to come into contact with them because when one once comes into contact with them one will get more and more involved until one becomes dependent upon them.

Islam cuts their roots out and bans them so that they cannot have a negative impact on individuals' life and on society as well. Intoxication impedes the thinking capacity of individuals

and makes them inactive and indolent. Persons under intoxication do things without being conscious of their purpose and impact and thus, such actions become meaningless and do not serve the purpose for which they are taken. Islam condemns this situation too because persons under intoxication are not aware of the efficacy of actions, and thus, not eligible to perform obligations particularly prayers.

The second injunction also disapproves of the intoxicating substances. It prohibits believers from performing prayers under the state of intoxication (Qur'an, 4:43). The reason is that it is the requirement of worship that one should be conscious and clear to know what one is doing and uttering to the Lord. Moreover, worship is to present oneself to the service of the Lord with utmost sincerity and devotion. This demands that one should submit oneself to the Lord in the most humble, dedicated and disciplined way which is not possible under the state of intoxication.

The last injunction declares all kinds of intoxicants, abominations and the handiworks of Satan and commands humans to turn away from them to get true success (Qur'an, 5:90). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) before the revelation of this injunction had already warned people to stay away from the intoxicants and apprised them of God's displeasure. After the revelation of this injunction the Prophet proclaimed to destroy all sorts of intoxicants and the people abided by his proclamation. The streets of Madinah were witness to this incident.

Alcoholism and drug abuse in fact daze human mind and in this state one cannot judge the nature of things and events, and make positive contribution to society. Instead, persons under the state of intoxication perform such actions that endanger their own lives as well as the lives of others. It is the societal need to create such a condition where people can live in peace and harmony, develop their

potentialities and through mutual actions enrich the system for which society comes into being. It is immaterial to ascertain what restrictions society imposes for the attainment of its goals. Modern society in the name of freedom introduces new set of norms which are contradictory to societal goals, and, at the end, create confusion, contradiction, anarchy and leads to destruction.



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