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For the favour of publication

The state refuses to heed to children and women's agitation against illegal sale of alcohol and liquor related abuse & violence

In solidarity with the Madya Nisheda Andolana (MNA), the Anti-Alcohol Movement that concluded its 4000 member protest march across 200 kms of Karnataka, we demand that the State Government stops stone-walling the issues of this campaign, and owns up its responsibility to address the phenomenal harm caused by the State's alarming dependence on Excise, pushing for increased Sale of Alcohol and propagation of illegal sale of alcohol; all of which has further perpetuated abuse and deprivation experienced by women and children due to alcohol abuse.

While abuse of alcohol is directly responsible for staggering health and social costs, (70 percent of violence against women and over 80 percent of domestic violence affecting children, women and elderly), the State continues to ramp-up its Excise earnings from the sale of alcohol. According to a NIMHANS study¹ it is estimated that while gains in terms of revenue from alcohol sales are Rs 216 billion every year, losses from adverse effects of alcohol are estimated to be Rs 244 billion, apart from the immeasurable losses due to multiple and rollover effects of alcohol use.

Members of the Bhima Sanghas, Children's Sanghas and Women's Sanghas in Udupi District who we partner with have been raising the issue illegal sale of alcohol repeatedly for over two years with details related to locations of every single outlet in their respective panchayats. Yet they have hardly received any state support and have had to face back-lash for their protagonism locally. While the verdict on whether or not a total ban on alcohol is the solution is still pending— going by its failure in other states - there is not an iota of doubt alcohol related harm, is a matter of great urgency and shame, which the State must address head-on, in consultation with children and women whose rights are most violated by it.

The Excise Department in Karnataka is the 2nd largest revenue-earning department in the state, functioning under the administrative control of the Finance Department². More than 95%³ of its revenue is from Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and beer. In the past 11 years, the consumption of liquor in Karnataka has grown by 77% and the excise revenue by a staggering 273%. The Excise Revenue has increased from Rs 4,812 crores in 2007-08 to Rs 17,948.5 crores in 2017-18.

The State Excise Department Targets have been increased every year; It is shocking that the Target increase in the last 4 years has been at least Rs 800 crores more than the previous year. For 2018-2019, the target was revised twice, from Rs. 17,948.5 crores to Rs 18,750 crores in February 2018, and subsequently revised to Rs 19,750 crores in July 2018 by the present government. Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh top the list in the number of retail outlets in the country, with 5 of the other states closely competing with the top 2 states. Even more alarming is that over the last couple of years the

¹ "Burden and Socio-Economic Impact of Alcohol , The Bangalore Study", by NIMHANS

² <http://stateexcise.kar.nic.in/english/index.asp>

³ http://stateexcise.kar.nic.in/english/sourcewise_revenue.asp

government opened around 300 liquor outlets through Mysore Sales International Limited (MSIL), the state-run marketing entity, and now is the process of opening another 600 outlets. This will take the number of MSIL outlets to 1,360. Right now, the numbers of sale outlets have been increased in Tier 2 and Tier 2 Cities and rural markets are being opened up indiscriminately. This along with the 2017 Supreme Court judgment to relax the ban on liquor shops along national and state highways for cities, towns and municipal areas with a population of 20,000 or less to 220 meters from the earlier 500 meters, will further increase access to alcohol for smaller communities already reeling under its ill effect. Illegal sale of alcohol has become even more rampant and underage drinking is becoming widespread with all signs of growing into an epidemic. These regressive moves will further increase the vulnerability of these already affected communities and is a clear sign that the government is not listening to its constituency's plea and needs.

According to 2013 study titled " Assessment of Pattern and Profile of Substance Use Children in India " by a Group on Substance Abuse and Drug Addiction, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, "Most of the child samples from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (85-89%) reported current use of alcohol". Not a single case has been registered against owners of liquor shops, vendors, lounges in Bangalore for serving liquor to under aged patrons since legal age for drinking has been increased from 18 to 21 years in 1976.

It is time that there is collective outrage and public support to this matter which is affecting millions of citizens of Karnataka.

The Concerned for Working Children
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