



The Meeting Point

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The smallest good deed is better than the grandest good intension

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Editorial:

Whichever party forms government and assumes power after winning in the election for the Tamil Nadu State Assembly, has been accomplishing two tasks consistently: 1. closing down the government primary schools one after another, 2. opening newer liquor shops in every nook and corner of the state.

Culturally speaking, drinking of alcohol was and is still considered as a taboo in the Indian society, particularly in Tamil Nadu state. Drunkards are hated and looked down not only by the people in the society but also by their family members. In course of time, drinking was permitted by the governments successively and presently, the liquor shops have been nationalized in the state. Hence, the government policy has made alcohol consumption a habit and the culture of the people.

Those people who belong to the economically weaker section of the society are the most susceptible to drinking habit. Most of the habitual drunkards in the state are artisans, agricultural labourers, construction workers, head load workers and casual labourers. They earn a meager amount of wages by doing irregular jobs and spend much of their earning on liquor, giving the families the remaining money, which is insufficient to make the both ends meet.

Besides, men resort to domestic violence. Prolonged domestic violence forces the children to work to support their mothers in running the families. Therefore, Total Prohibition of liquor is the long-time desire of the housewives and the adolescent girls at the grassroots and the demand of women's movements in Tamil Nadu.

Against their wishes and instead of sensitizing the drunkards to abstain from drinking, the government has extended the working hours of liquor shops and bars, introducing newer brands and increasing the prices of liquors, in a sadistic manner. This will further engulf the earnings of poor men and degrade their standard of living. The most agonizing factor is that even the school students have fallen prey to drinking habit.

Studies show that Tamil Nadu in India is the state which deserves the first place in alcohol consumption. Majority of the drunkards are youth. The number of liquor addicts increases by 15% every year in the state. 25% of the state revenue is from liquor sale. As the revenue of the state increases by the sale of liquor, income to the poor family decreases. 35% of the people who commit suicide or attempt to commit suicide are drunkards. Drunkards, besides suffering themselves physiologically, make their families suffer psychologically.

So, AREDS and SWATE Women's Movement have been fighting, in coalition with the like minded organizations and the people's movements for **Total Prohibition** in the state.

Yours in solidarity,
L. A. Samy

Bars must be barred

Society of Women in Action for Total Empowerment (SWATE) observed the International Day against Drug abuse and illicit Trafficking by way of organizing a protest demonstration for total prohibition in Tamil Nadu state. About hundred women activists and the members from different people's organizations initiated by AREDS for Dalits, unorganized workers and youth participated in the demonstration held in front of the Taluk Office in Karur on the 26th of June 2011.

Drinking liquor has become almost a habit of most of the men in India and it remains a social evil, particularly in the rural Tamil Nadu. Majority of the rural population survives only on irregular employments or agricultural works. With the meager income, most of the rural families lead a subsistence existence. Usually, men go to work but they spend much of their meager income on liquor and contribute the little to their families.

Perpetuity of this practice of men throws the families in to penury in course of time. Penury forces all the family members – even the children - to go to work just to keep the family running. Thus, the drinking habit of the adults compels the children dropout in the middle of their schooling. Once the children become dropouts, their ignorance grows and consequently, it leads to child trafficking, child abuse and child prostitution.

Further, the youth fall prey to alcoholism and spend their golden time in slumber or they behave violently in their inebriated condition, causing much disturbance to the society. When they become habitual drunkards, they resort to domestic violence or they involve in antisocial activities in order to satisfy their hedonistic pleasure.

Government-run liquor shops:

The Tamil Nadu Government run liquor shops – Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) – were booming for the past two tenures of two different political parties and the sale of liquor was increasing year by year. The present government has introduced new brands of liquor and extended the selling hours of liquor in Bars.

Consequently, poor people will lose their money on the liquor and spoil their own health. As the rich and the unethical people flourish on the liquor business, the pro-rich government will never care about the adverse impact of liquor on the life of poor people. In fact, whichever party that forms the government justifies the revenue accrued to the government via liquor business.

SWATE for Total Prohibition:

SWATE has been fighting against spurious liquor or authentic liquor since inception. Last year it, along with Women's Front undertook a campaign against liquor in Tamil Nadu and collected 5 lakh of signatures from the people for closing down the liquor shops and sent them to the conscience of the Chief Minister.

This year, it, along with Women's Front, organized a protest demonstration in Karur against liquor menace in the state. The following are the demands raised and resolutions passed by the SWATE activists:

- Bars facilitate drinking and so they must be closed immediately
- There should be no liquor shops within the radius of half a kilometer around schools, hospitals, temples, churches, mosques, bus stands, railway stations and markets
- Tamil Nadu government should bar the people below 25 years from drinking liquor, as it is in the case of Maharashtra state

- A GO says if 50% of the residents opine for the removal of liquor shop in their locality, the government should concede to it. The GO should be mended so as to 25% of opposition is enough to remove a liquor shop
- The scenes of drinking liquors should be cut off from films and TV serials
- De-addiction centres must be established village-wise or region-wise
- The adverse impacts of liquor on human physiology and psychology must be included in the school lessons



An appeal was also made to the newly elected government:

- The government should impose a ban on liquor, which kills men young and make their wives widows and makes men resort to domestic violence
- It should prohibit the sale of all those items that intoxicate
- It should impose total prohibition in the state and save the poor families from falling into penury and protect the youth from falling pray to neurological disorders, death and cultural degeneration

Cycle Rally to prevent the draining of dyeing effluents into Amaravathi

Karur is one the western cities in Tamil Nadu state, where hosieries, textile industries and dyeing industries are functioning aplenty. The dyeing industries have been using the chemical dyes at high concentration and at the disproportionate levels for dyeing the fabrics and giving fast colours to them. The chemical contents present in the effluents of the dyeing industries are hostile to the microbes present in the soil and they are destructive to the fertility of the soil when they are drained on to the soil untreated.

As per the environmental regulations, the dyeing industries must drain the liquid wastes on to the soil only after removing the toxic chemical contents present in the wastes. But they, violating the environmental laws, are draining the untreated effluents in to Amaravathi which ultimately carries the contaminated water into Cauvery. As a result, the river water and the ground water resources all along the pathway of these rivers have been contaminated and polluted irreversibly. Consequently, there is a sharp decline in the growth of crops and the volume of agricultural produce in these areas.

Farmers, general public and the social activists have long been fighting against the pollution and environmental hazards caused by these dyeing industries in Karur district. They took to streets to protest against the atrocious act of dyeing industries, orgnaising protest demonstrations, hunger strike, road roko, repeated petitioning, press meetings and the like. However, with the tacit support of the pollution control board and the district administration, the dyeing industries go on draining the untreated toxic effluents into Amaravathi River and polluting the water resources.

In order to arouse the awareness of the people on safe environment and to protest the unlawful practice of dyeing industries, Makkal Vazhvurimai Iyakkam (MVI), Save Amaravathi Environment

Movement and Forum for Protection of Water and Livelihood Resources (FPWLR) together organized a two-day cycle procession on the 9th and 10th of July 2011 in Karur.



The objective of the procession was to urge the government to check the pollution of the dyeing industries on war foot. In two days, the procession went through more than hundred villages located in the southern and northern parts of Amaravathi River. Ms. Radha, the General Secretary of the Federation for Protecting Indian Environment, flagged off the campaign. Ms. Backiyam of Society of Women in Action for Total Empowerment (SWATE) welcomed the activists. The procession obviously caught the attention of the people as all the cyclists uniformly wore white T-shirts, bearing captions 'save environment' and 'save the earth.'



Mr. Thennarasu, the general Secretary of Save Amaravathi Environment Movement, Mr. Gunasekaran, the General Secretary of (People's right to life Movement) Makkal Vazhvirimai lyakkam and Mr. Rajasekar, the treasurer of Forum for Protection of Water and Livelihood Resources (FPWLR) spoke and condemned the illegal practices of the dyeing industries.

The following were the demands of the campaign:

- The untreated effluents of dyeing industries should not enter into Amaravathi River and any of its irrigation canals at any cost
- The government should take steps to disburse adequate compensation to the public and the farmers whose lands and cattle have been affected by the dyeing industrial pollution
- In due response to the demands of various environmental organizations, the government should engage the National Environmental Engineering Institute (NEERI) to study the damages caused to Amaravathi River and the environment by the dyeing industries and publish the report to notice of the public
- The government should take stern measures to check the dumping of industrial wastes and the plastic wastes on the roadsides throughout the district

- The government should include the farmers and the social activists from Karur district into the High-level Committee appointed to address the issue of pollution caused by the dyeing industries

PDM members undergo Training on Leadership qualities

People's Development Movement (PDM) is an AREDS-initiated movement for men, the youth in particular. AREDS organizes the youth to work collectively to find solutions to the common issues that block their basic rights in the society and they are encouraged to form themselves into *sangams* (associations). These youth *sangams* have been federated and strengthened into a movement called PDM.

PDM helps the young men and a woman become more knowledgeable on social process and guides them in the right direction. Trainings on concepts, leadership, issue-based actions, Panchayat Raj, Govt., schemes etc motivate the youth to take up leadership and to get involved in serving their community.

As the election for the Panchayat Raj Institutions (local bodies) is nearing, training on the leadership qualities was organized to the office bearers of PDM on the 17th of July 2011. Members from five blocks participated in the training.



Usually, for any of the issue-based actions, be it petitioning or lobbying, the PDM members have to approach the elected representatives of panchayats or the government officials concerned with panchayat. If there are elected representatives of panchayats among the PDM members themselves, problems could easily be addressed and issues could be amicably settled down.

Therefore, the participants were motivated to contest in the coming panchayat election. Seeking the support of the like-minded people's movements is very essential for winning in the election and so, it has been decided to organize a meeting on a larger level, inviting different people-centred movements working at the grassroots level in Karur district.

The preparation of a list of PDM activists who aspire for contesting in the election is underway.

Last but not the least:

We take this opportunity to thank all those partners who have made their annual contribution to the efforts of AREDS-SHARE. Their sincere and generous help is the one that moves our commitment and to reach out. Your timely contribution made out of your personal sacrifices can be sent to the following accounts of AREDS SHARE:

For Belgium Partners

**Account N° : 000 - 0000034 - 34 of ENTRAIDE ET FRATERNITE
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avec la mention :pour le projet AREDS Inde 10-499**

For Partners in France and the rest of the World

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Yours in solidarity,

L. A. Samy