

Should smoking be banned in public places?

There are people who smoke and people who do not. It is in public places that individuals from these groups inevitably meet and are forced to interact. And in such places, whose will is to prevail- a smoker's or the non-smokers. Considering the matter objectively from the angles of environment, health, as well as individual rights, it is the non-smoker's will that should prevail. It is impractical to ascertain the wishes of each non-smoker in public place before a smoker indulges in a puff. Smoking in public places, in other words, should be banned.

'Smoke'- the very word conjures up a foul, unhealthy, suffocating, polluted environment with dark clouds of gases suffused everywhere. How, then, can smoking or rather puffing away smoke to create such a defiled environment be permitted in public places where your every little activity is likely to affect your neighbor?

The person who smokes faces a health hazard. Cigarette smoke leaves behind its deposits in the respiratory tract and is absorbed into the blood stream. Cigarette smoke contains a staggering 4,000 different chemicals of which 43 are carcinogenic. The carbon monoxide concentration in the smoke is greater than 20,000 ppm, which though diluted to 400-500 ppm during inhalation, could yet lead to a host of diseases. It displaces oxygen from hemoglobin and the result is impairment of the central nervous system functions, cardiac and pulmonary diseases that may eventually lead to heart attacks. Ammonia and the other hydrocarbons present in it could cause asthma and other respiratory infections. The hydrocarbons are also the cause of lung cancer. The dust particles in it may be the cause of eye irritation, cancer, and emphysema. Its nicotine content which is a highly addictive substance, reaches the brain in no time and constricts the blood vessels, raises the blood pressure and gives the ventral nervous system a small jolt. In the long run it can lead to lung cancer, coronary heart disease, emphysema and reproductive disorders.

At home of course you are your own master and are free to do whatever you feel like. You may justify your smoking habit saying "It calms me, it helps me work, think and forget the worries". But you have no right to disturb others by your smoking. In your office the smoke you puff may be a reason of smouldering displeasure among your colleagues that may turn into a conflagration. In buses and trains if smoking is allowed, it may be the cause of a great fire. A spark neglected may burn the place beyond rescue and the smoker would then be guilty of massacre!

The smoke from other people's cigarettes comes off a cigarette directly, rather than going through it, and hence can contain three times the tar and ten times the concentration of carcinogenic agents as the filtered smoke that a smoker inhales. Of course, the second – hand smoke gets diluted by the time it reaches a non-smoker. But that does not make it any the less dangerous. Research at the University of Zurich in Switzerland demonstrated that when a non – smoker is in a smoky room for just half an hour, he can wind up with the same amount of carbon monoxide in his blood as if he had smoked one cigarette directly. Thus “passive” smoking is harmful and rather unjustifiable.

For all the health scare or the fire scare smoking has caused, banning it may cause an economic scare! The sales of cigarettes are bound to suffer with such a ban , and government will lose revenue from excise duties. The tobacco industry will face a decline. Millions of people working in these industries will be thrown out of jobs.

When America woke up to the fact that smoking is harmful the government sought to find a way out; it discouraged its own citizens from smoking through concerted propaganda but helped the tobacco industry by allowing it to export its products. And cigarette smoking was glamourized through unethical. India cannot follow such practices. Moreover, even propaganda and the statutory warning' has not helped in India, as more and more people, especially the young , fall prey to the glamour of a smoke.

If a government cares for the health of its citizens it should rise above 'economic' considerations and ban smoking at least in public places.

Toeing the line of the other developed nations of the world, smoking section might be introduced in organizations and offices. Smokers could take refuge in separate smoking sections for a puff and at least leave the non-smokers free of pollution. The nicotine addicts might also adopt nicotine patches as a substitute for smoking. And thus at least do justice to others if not to themselves!