



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

## 'Time Gentlemen': Bangalore and its drinking cultures

### Citation for published version:

Bates, C & Ikegame, A 2010, 'Time Gentlemen': Bangalore and its drinking cultures', Paper presented at The City in South Asia, The National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, 18/07/10 - 20/07/10.

### Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

### Document Version:

Early version, also known as pre-print

### Publisher Rights Statement:

© Bates, C., & Ikegame, A. (2010). 'Time Gentlemen': Bangalore and its drinking cultures. Paper presented at The City in South Asia, The National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan.

### General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



**Conference on ‘The City in South Asia’**

**National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, July 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2010**

**‘Time Gentlemen’: Bangalore and its drinking cultures**

**(Draft only, please do not quote)**

Aya Ikegame (NIHU & Minpaku) and Crispin Bates (Minpaku & University of  
Edinburgh)

**Introduction**

Probably better than anybody else the serious pub-goers of Bangalore know where are the current boundaries of the city. This rapidly growing city has been swallowing many surrounding villages, officially and unofficially, as its area has expanded. The poor residents of nearby villages are waiting for the day when their village is included within the Greater Bangalore area and the price of their not so productive agricultural lands suddenly shoots up. However, the serious pub-goers will not be happy because it means they will perhaps have to travel even further than before to satisfy their thirst. The habit of going outside of the city to drink began when the city authority introduced a series of restrictions on alcohol consumption within the city boundary. Currently the pubs, clubs and bars have to close at 11pm sharp. Surprisingly this rule has been efficiently enforced by the police. While visiting the city’s famous clubs, we often encountered policemen coming to make sure that the club was closing. Drinkers do not mind this at all. If they have the energy they simply drive their cars or bikes (it is hoped that some of them are still sober) to outside of the city to continue drinking. There are numerous venues that have been established just outside of the boundary for this purpose. On New Year’s eve of 2006, the city authority went so far as to entirely close the city centre M.G. Road to all business and traffic in order to prevent the street party which spontaneously erupted there in the

previous year. Again, the young middle classes of Bangalore were well prepared: many discos outside of the city boundary offered attractive all-night parties and sold tickets in the city centre well in advance. M.G. Road on that day was dead, but there were many people enjoying themselves elsewhere.

In May 2008, over 180 people lost their lives by consuming illicit alcohol in the border areas of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. At least eighty of them were from slum areas of Bangalore and another thirty from rural suburbs outside of the city. The Congress party immediately condemned the BJP government for the banning of the legal manufacture and the sale of arrack in the state, which they held to be the cause. The newly elected the chief minister, Y.S. Yediyurappa was the architect of this ban on arrack in July 2007. Such, so called hooch tragedies, seem to arise regularly in India whilst the number of deaths are often especially high following the introduction of regulations restricting drinking. Gujarat, the only remaining dry state in India has come under special criticism on these grounds, with the horrific casualties from illegal liquor consumption in recent year attracting profound criticism and the scorn of licit distillers elsewhere in India.<sup>1</sup>

Drinking in India has always been an extremely contentious issue. Christian missionaries encouraged a policy of temperance, whilst the army in cantonment cities such as Bangalore fortified its troops with copious quantities of spirits. Giving up drinking was considered to be one of the ways in which lower castes could claim higher status in the varna hierarchy. Gandhi added to this 'Sanskritising' behaviour a sense of patriotism, since alcohol was a major source of income for the colonial state (Carroll 1976). Unfortunately, the excise duty on alcohol remained an extremely important source of income for post-independence state governments, accounting for more than 20% of tax revenues in most states. Inheriting as it did both the nationalist (or Gandhian) moral agenda and the financial structures of the colonial era, the post-colonial state has had to play a seemingly contradictory role.

Some states tried to introduce a total prohibition on alcohol sales, but most of them failed to continue this, with the exception of Gujarat. However adopting a moral

stance whilst ensuring financial demands are not necessarily contradictory aims. After all, it is all about controlling people's moral and bodily practices. The Southern states have thus all of them now banned the sale of arrack, a typical working class drink, on the grounds of health and family welfare, whilst encouraging the sale of Indian Foreign Liquor (IMFL) a more middle class drink which happens to be centrally distributed. This is a clear example of how the state has endeavoured to exercise moral authority whilst controlling and collecting excise revenues more efficiently. Earlier, toddy liquor was banned for similar reasons.

Studies on alcohol in general have been dominated by the disciplines of biology, public health, social policy, and social psychology which have tended to regard alcohol consumption as a question of individual pathology (addiction) or as a social problem leading to alcohol related violence, family neglect etc.). Anthropological studies, especially functionalist approaches, on the other hand, have tended to emphasise the socially integrative role of drinking (Heath 1987: 105, Dietler 2006 : 230). Here drinking alcoholic beverages has been understood as normal social behaviour and even crucially important for its socially integrative role (see for example Douglas 1987). However, anthropologists have notably neglected the political and economical aspects of drinking, as observed by Singer (1986), and it is only recently that socio-cultural anthropology has begun to examine historically sensitive issues concerning how alcohol is deployed within the micro- and macro-politics of society. It is noticeable, furthermore, that the wealth of studies on the social meanings of food in India (eg. Dwyer 2004, Osella 2008) have tended, delicately, to avoid the issue of alcohol altogether.

There are relatively few academic studies concerning alcohol in India, but historians have contributed immensely. Lucy Carroll (1976) has demonstrated the clear connections between nineteenth century temperance movements in the West and the Gandhian agitation for prohibition, which had otherwise often been regarded a uniquely Indian process of 'Sanskritisation' or a pure product of anti-colonial nationalism. David Hardiman (1987), on the other hand, has shown how the

avoidance of alcohol in India might have an agenda of its own, entirely unrelated to the temperance advocacy of missionaries or that of Gandhian nationalists. This agenda sought to release subaltern groups from the thrall of exploitative liquor dealers and moneylenders and conceived of self-improvement in indigenous but neither Christian nor sanskritic terms. These historical contributions have shown how intimately the consumption of alcohol is linked to power and politics; and that moralising about alcohol has commonly been adapted and interpreted in ways that will suit purely material self-interests. This is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the fate of the Gandhian temperance campaign of the 1930s and 1940s, which enjoyed total and complete ideological and political acceptance at the dawn of independence, but was almost entirely abandoned over the course of the subsequent three decades. However, even half a century after Gandhi's death, it seems that the social and political economy of drink cannot escape from the rhetoric of morality and temperance, and even perhaps demands it in order to legitimise specific practices. Thus, as alcohol consumption has diversified and increased, the discourse of abstinence has been re-born in new forms which echo the growth in inequality, new political agendas, and the changing class divisions within Indian society.

The moral, economic and political tensions arising from the political economy of alcohol consumption are nowhere more intensely felt than within the confines of Indian cities. It is within Indian cities that we see most vividly the segregation of the drinking public in class terms being enacted within spatial terms as well. This is perhaps most dramatically apparent in India's most modern metros, where whole zones of shopping malls, five-star hotels, and nightclubs have become no-go areas for the poorer and less prosperous city residents. This essay focuses on this phenomenon specifically within the city of Bangalore, the IT capital of India, one of the fastest growing cities in Asia, and the capital city of the state of Karnataka, which has also, incidentally, become a gateway for the entry of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party into the south of India.

## **You are what you drink: the social stratification of alcohol in India**

The types of alcohol that people consume and their consumption patterns are very unique in India. Beer, for example, is the most popular alcoholic beverage in most parts of the world, but in India it occupied only 16 per cent in volume terms and 2.4 per cent in absolute alcohol terms of the total alcohol consumption in the early 2000s. The per capita consumption of beer is thus a mere 0.55 litres in India while the world average is 23 litres (NIMHANS 2003:22). The unpopularity of beer in India is mainly due to the relatively heavy tax on beer compared to other types of liquor. Since the tax levies are not based on alcohol content but on volume, people tend to go for 'value for money' drinks which contain more alcohol. Recently efforts have begun to produce wine on a larger scale in India, but much of it is exported (eg Maharashtra 'champagne') to the middle east. The amount of wine consumed in India itself is still negligible.

One of the major categories of alcohol beverage sold in India are the so-called Indian Made Foreign Liquors (IMFL). This type of liquor, with its rather confusing name, are labelled and sold differently as whisky, rum, brandy, gin, vodka, etc., according to the colour, flavour and perfume artificially added to it. Despite their various labels, the bulk of IMFL drinks are nothing but rectified spirit distilled from molasses, a by-product of sugar. Situated in the middle of sugar cane cultivation with abundant water from Kaveri, Southern Karnataka is an ideal location and one of the largest centres for alcohol production in India. The other major alcohol producing states are Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh (NIMHANS 2003:21). Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, are also major centres for the industrial brewing of beer: an activity commonly linked to the location of military cantonments.

While IMFL is the favoured drink of the urban middle classes, the rural population and urban working classes prefer to drink arrack (otherwise called country liquor). In the nineteenth century, arrack could be made from distilled toddy (also known as *thalakka*, *thari*, *silpi*, *feni*, and *kallu*) which is the fermented juice of the Palmyra or

coconut palm (*ibid.*: 7). Formerly a household activity, legal arrack is presently distilled from molasses on an industrial scale.

The system of centralised distillation was first introduced by the British in the nineteenth century. The Abkari commission of 1869 proposed a system that was intended to produce more spirits at a cheaper price than the village distilleries whilst simultaneously increasing the revenue from excise duties (*ibid.*: 12-3). The central distillery system was originally intended to meet the demands for consumption within military cantonments but gradually monopolised the market in general throughout India. Under this system, pure spirit was distilled from sugar cane under license. Initially the entire production process was handled in government owned distilleries, but this proved unprofitable. It was therefore later developed into a two tier system of distilling: the privately-owned and licensed primary distillers who produced arrack and the secondly distillers who refined arrack and turned it into differently flavoured liquors. The major manufacture of alcohol was thus centralised, with the less refined arrack meeting the demands of poorer consumers, and wealthier consumers (including the military) imbibing the output of the secondary distillers. Many villagers and tribal population continued producing their own alcoholic beverage such as *mahua* (fermented flowers, drunk as beer or distilled), toddy, and *neera* (extracted sap of palms), but this is generally discouraged as lying outwith the government licensing and taxation system. To inhibit unlicensed production and sale, state governments have latterly introduced centralised systems for the wholesale distribution of IMFL and arrack, with only authorised retailers being permitted to purchase from this source and on condition that they buy nowhere else. What kind of alcohol a person consumes, and where, has thus become a key indicator of her/his social positioning in terms of class, caste, gender, and occupation.

## **Drinking in Bangalore**

### **The Space of IMFL**

In 2007 and 2009, we conducted a number of interviews with the people who were drinking in bars or clubs in central Bangalore. We also interviewed one of the IMFL makers in Karnataka and visited their factory, and interviewed sales staff from the leading beer producer in the city. We have visited dozen of clubs most of which had a restaurant area, disco, or lounge-bar. This type of bar has become very popular in Bangalore city centre and are often situated in shopping malls rather than in five star hotels, which are more common places in which people drink in other cities such as New Delhi or Kolkata. We also visited a couple of clubs in outer suburban areas, where many call centres, IT offices, and BPO centres are located. The customers of the clubs we visited were mostly middle classes, especially professionals in their twenties and thirties. Not all of them were so called ‘corporate types’, but the majority were wealthy enough to pay entrance fees as high as Rs. 500, which (at this level) usually included a single glass of cocktail within the price. We also visited slightly cheaper pubs where male university students shared huge pitchers of beer and sung American rock songs together or where young migrants from the north-eastern states hung around together seeking respite from their hard working lives.

We met a group of men in their mid-twenties who were drinking in a lounge-bar in M.G. Road on a Sunday. One man was from Simla, HP, and working for a Bangalore branch of the real estate giant Landmark. He said that they have been at the same bar for four consecutive days and explained to us where he typically goes and what kind of alcohol he drinks.

(Real estate man): In Bangalore, the happening days are Wednesday and Saturday. People want to have a party in mid-week (on Wednesday) and week-end (Saturday nights). Sunday is rest. We can drink till 11.00 in the city. After that we go out of the city in order to carry on drinking. Typical places are one near the new airport and

another one in Mysore-Bangalore road. It takes 30min to get there. It is a pain, but we can then enjoy till morning. I normally drink brandy, vodka (although he was drinking beer at that time). Beer is just for socialising. I won't get high. To get high, I drink brandy or vodka. I don't drink wine, because you have to drink it a lot to get high.

The pattern he described was a six-day working week, which he maintained could not be survived without a mid-week break. This was a common practice he insisted and this did indeed seem to be the case as the clubs were relatively quiet on the remaining days of the week.

The Real estate man told us that his favorite bars were *Zero G*, *Hint*, and *Spin* where he said teenage girls hung around at the weekend. (This was probably though sheer bravado, as we went to *Spin* at the weekend but could not find any.) His friend was an Indian army captain from Rajasthan who was visiting an army base in Bangalore for a few days. They went to a college together and have kept in touch since.

(Army man): I am just visiting my old friend working in Bangalore. I am going back to Delhi tomorrow. In the Army canteen, alcohol is very cheap. It depends on the state, but a bottle of Scotch costs only about Rs 60. Outside, it will be Rs 200. Yes, I earn less than my friend (Real estate man) but if you think about stability and the benefits I am receiving, it is not bad at all.

Many people to whom we talked in bars and clubs were in groups of friends and occasionally amongst work colleagues. They were college classmates, sharing a flat, friends of friends, and so on. It was quite surprising to see how many of them maintained intimate relationships outside of kin networks and in ways that were unrelated to their workplace. Many of them were not even from the same state.

The general image of pubs in Bangalore is simply negative. The local newspapers and tabloid magazines published in Kannada regularly report awful things going on

in pubs. The pub appears in popular discourse as a place where gangs and politicians organise 'sex parties' with call-girls (serviced apartments have also acquired similar reputation). The image of the pub is thus as bad as the brothel if not worse. When we planned to visit *The Beach*, a popular club in Indiranagar, a middle class residential area where many BPO and IT companies have their offices, it was not easy to find an auto-rickshaw driver willing to take us there. We finally found one, but he was still very reluctant. Even when we offered to raise the price rather significantly, he said 'Madame, it is a bad place. You should not go'. With this reluctant driver, we eventually went to Indiranagar and asked a local resident for directions. We could hear this apparently middle class gentleman telling our driver in Kannada not to take these people to the place. 'It is a real shame we have a such place in this locality' he said. The driver came back and said 'See, I told you so'. However, perhaps due to its location in a residential area, we found the club to be full of friendly, relaxed, well-behaved people, including many office workers. There were even several families enjoying their dinner in the restaurant area. From talking to the several patrons, we concluded that this pub was conspicuously a pub frequented by friends, who had come from all over India, and whom they had met through flat-sharing. Almost like students. The only thing they had in common was that they had travelled far from home to Bangalore to seek work. The music was loud but the club was too crowded for people to dance, instead people added to the noise through spirited and energetic conversation.

The very largest night club which we visited was on Residency road, situated on the top floor of an office block. In common with other larger establishments this club served food (in this case not very good food) and this particular club had several bars, including one in an outdoor area where there was a half empty swimming pool. There was more than one group of young women from the north-east (chaperoned by a couple of men), who sensibly stuck together. Many clubs have a couples-only policy, which leads to some amusing negotiations outside the entrance as young men and women agree who is going to pretend to be with whom. This club had no such policy.

It was the only club where there was clear evidence of drunkenness and where there was any significant number of foreigners. The excesses were lead by young American youths, who enjoyed throwing each other into the pool. Club staff occasionally drenched the crowd with a fire hose. There was no dancing and the young Indian patrons did not stay for long.

By contrast clubs such as *Hint*, which is located on top of a major shopping mall just off M.G. Road, had a determined couples-only, the patrons were more mature, and they were very much focussed on the dance floor, which dominated the establishment. *Taika*, located atop another eerily dark shopping mall on M.G. Road similarly opened soon after the shops were closed. They had a bar and a small lounge area where food was served, but the club-goers were entirely focussed on the professional looking dance floor. Here the young clientele turned out to listen to House, Trance and heavy bass dance music, played by guest DJs, and were serious about their business. Alcohol consumption was light.

Perhaps the least hedonistic establishment of all was *Fuga*, which was located in Ashok Nagar, not far from Sacred Heart Girl's High School, the Good Shepherd Convent, Bishop Cotton and other elite private schools. This was an extremely new, spacious, and modern nightclub, cleanly decorated and serving excellent food. It was decidedly quiet however and we noticed that the clientele included several groups of middle class teenage girls, evidently out to enjoy a 'night club' experience, who were accompanied by their fathers. Non-alcoholic cocktails seemed to be the order of the day here.

We noted that in several clubs the most popular drink was the 330ml. bottle of Kingfisher beer, which was drunk directly from the bottle. Drinking directly from the bottle no doubt looked cool, but as explained to us by the drinkers in one bar, it was also was the cheapest drink available, which you could easily carry around without spilling, and which could be made to last a long time. Often just a single bottle would be consumed per person during the evening and groups commonly clubbed together to buy the round with one or two men being delegated to attend the bar. Unlike a

glass, no-one could see when the bottle was empty, and you were spared the expense of a second trip to the bar or (worse still) the embarrassment (for women) of having to ask a man to buy them another drink. In other words, the consumption of beer was a pre-eminently social activity. Where cocktails were consumed, this was commonly included in a relatively higher entrance fee for the club. Only in one bar did we notice any enthusiasm for people to buy a second or third cocktail and this was in the centrally-located 13<sup>th</sup> Floor lounge club, which was exclusively a drinking establishment.

Bars and night clubs in the Centre were generally patronised by wealthier sections within the middle classes: especially young professionals working within the BPO and IT sectors. Lower middle-class youth, by contrast, tend to avoid drinking in such establishments on a regular basis, preferring to consume alcohol in local bars, restaurants, and dhabas, which they consider more affordable and ‘more welcoming’ (Nisbett 2007: 944). Below this there lies another level of drinking dens, including roadside liquor and arrack stalls and less salubrious backroom bars in poorer areas, which are clearly entirely off-limits to the middle classes of all sorts. Thus what you drink and where you go to drink is strongly related to social status.

### **The Space of Arrack**

To find arrack shops in Bangalore in the first instance was not easy, but once you find one, you will see that they are everywhere. The typical arrack shop (*sarai angadi* in Kannada) in the city centre is literally a bare concrete box with an open window. On the window, there will be a huge pile of arrack in plastic sashes (*paketto sarai*) and a grumpy looking man waiting for the customers. They are often situated on a back street in busy commercial areas. One we visited was in an area of town where the residents are largely artisans and either Muslim or Christian (hence inevitably poorer). Access was via a narrow, stinky, muddy street off the main road, which was used as a rubbish dump. The shop had a long empty concrete counter: it was late evening and there men sitting on the ground outside, presumably exhausted from their days work and the liquor they had just consumed. It was altogether an

unappealing environment. Another nearby was more salubriously located on a street corner, but it was similarly barren. These are not social spaces but places where people buy a drink, consume it quickly, and leave (provided they have the strength).

There are said to be 1,116 arrack sales points in the city<sup>ii</sup>. We were very eager to spend more time visiting arrack shops and in talking to people there but were discouraged from doing so. The timing was probably too sensitive (just one month before the banning of the sale of arrack), and being a woman and a foreigner did not help either. We were fortunate though to talk to an IMFL manufacturer in Bangalore who did their own ‘fieldwork’ on arrack drinkers. When we visited their office in central Bangalore in May 2007, people were excited about the prospect of the ban on the sale of arrack. They were certain that the ban would bring more profits to the IMFL makers in the state (as it did). They were energetically preparing to expand their business into the ‘lower segment’ of the market. To research their market, they sent their ‘boys’ to arrack shops and invited customers to a table set up by the manufacturer where they were asked about their preferences regarding IMFL.

One member of the family who owned the distillery who joined this ‘fieldwork’ enthusiastically explained to us what he found:

They (the customers at arrack shops) are mostly construction workers, drain cleaners etc., who need physical strength to work. They start drinking in the morning before they go to work and drink 5 or 6 times a day. They don’t spend any time in the shop, just ask ‘60 koDi (give me 60ml)’ and quickly swallow it at one gulp. It was interesting to hear what was said when I asked a man about his favorite IMFL. He said he likes drinking Rum during the summer which is quite opposite to what we conventionally think. Our sale of Rum drops during the summer because it is considered to be a Hot drink and makes you hot. But he said that he likes it because his body becomes hot and he feels all the tiredness goes away. Another interesting thing was that they don’t prefer Gin because of its colourlessness. They are skeptical of liquor

shopkeepers if the liquor does not have any colour, as they would not then notice when the shopkeepers add water to it. When they are in the shop, those who could not afford to buy any nuts or snack or pickles, they just take some salt (which is free) and lick it and leave.

He observed the arrack drinkers very carefully to the extent that he noticed one drinker, while licking salt, threw a glance at the poster of a sexy girl. He concluded that 'we need to have a sexy poster too' to advertise their drink. The distillers decided also that they needed to supply IMFL in very small bottles (possibly PET bottles) to meet the demand from this segment of the market. This was because unless the drink was in a sealed contained the typical arrack drink would not trust the quality (hence the popularity of plastic saches). At the same time, they would only buy at one time as much as they could consume on the spot.

Another employee of the manufacturer, who used to supply arrack, was the man who organised this 'fieldwork'. He told us that arrack manufactures (first distillers) will not lose much money after the ban since most of them were already producing IMF while the IMFL manufacturers (second distillers) will profit from it because their sale will extend more into the lower segment of the market. However he further said:

The 99 per cent of licensed arrack shop owners will suffer. Currently license renewal costs 4 to 5 lakhs per year, but if it is an IMFL liquor shop, they have to pay nearly twice, around 8 to 9 lakhs. Also in order to get a new IMFL shop license you need 15 lakhs. Most of them cannot afford. Moreover, the number and area of IMFL liquor shops are severely limited. The Government made clear that they were not going to pay any compensation to the arrack shops. Most of them will have to change their job.

Estimates of the number of people who were involved in the licensed arrack trade vary greatly. Prior to the ban on the sale of arrack, various organisations, such as the Arya Idigara Sangha (toddy tapper caste organisation) and Sarayi Maratagara

Karmika Sangha (Union of workers selling arrack) organised large rallies in several locations in the state. They claimed that the ban would throw over 500,000 (5 lakh) people on the streets and would affect the livelihood of over one million (10 lakh) people<sup>iii</sup>. One report quoted a government officer saying that around 120,000 people were in the trade and almost all of them have turned to the illicit liquor business<sup>iv</sup>. The Karnataka government subsequently promised to rehabilitate people who were employed in the arrack business under various schemes of the industries' departments<sup>v</sup>. However, it is not known how affectively the government implanted these schemes for the rehabilitation of arrack workers and succeeded in preventing them from going underground.

### **The Space of Illicit Alcohol**

An interesting variation on the consumption of illicit alcohol is to be found in lower middle class areas of Bangalore, such as the commercial streets of Malleshwaram. Here the arrack shop was not to be found, but the cost of pure IMFL was still prohibitive. Shops selling alcohol would commonly therefore sell beer and a limited variety of IMFL bottles at the front of the shop, but patrons would also be allowed to drink a glass on the premises. And at the back of the shop there was a section displaying bottles bearing the labels of imported brands such as 'Johnny Walker' and 'Smirnoff'. This was all arrack under another name and probably included also illicitly distilled alcohol. The taste was not dissimilar to surgical spirits. Customers here were commonly drinking a single glass of spirits and then leaving, or brought with them bottles that they asked to be filled, presumably at rock bottom prices. It is widely known that primary sugar-cane distillers produce spirits on the sly, in excess of the amount they are declaring and legally selling onwards to the IMFL manufacturers (who further distil, flavour and bottle it). This liquor is commonly described as 'seconds' (tax evaded liquor) and amounted to almost two and half times more than the amount of IMFL legally sold in 1999-2000<sup>vi</sup> (Govt. of Karnataka, quoted in NIMHANS 2003: 2). It is presumed that this is one typical manner in which this illegal product is provided with an outlet.

Entirely illicit production and the production of 'seconds' liquor is difficult to separate. Because it is not taxed, it sells for considerably less than the retail prices for arrack and IMFL that are set by the state. Combined together it is believed that 'undocumented consumption' amount for considerably more than 40% of total alcohol consumption (*ibid.*:2).

There are a variety of spaces where illicit alcohol is manufactured and consumed. Toddy tapping has been banned in most of the parts of all four southern states for decades, but coconut and palm farmers insist that toddy is a traditional food item, nutritious and healthy and are beneficial for poor farmers<sup>vii</sup>. The toddy tappers are often rivals to the arrack shop owners, even though they are commonly from the same caste, since both are competing for the same customers at the lower end of the market.

The sample survey in Karnataka conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)<sup>viii</sup>, shows that 34.1 per cent of women who drink said that their preferred place for drinking is 'at home' and 22.0 per cent said 'on the street or lonely places' followed by 'in a pub, bar or arrack shop' (20.7 per cent). Amongst men who drink, 35.9 per cent said they liked to drink 'in a pub, bar or arrack shop', 19.7 per cent preferred 'At the counter of the liquor shop', 19.4 per cent said 'on the street or lonely places', and only 5.3 per cent specified 'at home' as their preferred place for drinking. This clearly indicates that spaces of drinking are highly gendered. Although we observed more middle class women drinking than ever before in public pubs or clubs in Bangalore, the majority still drink in private. The preference of women for drinking in private appears to be a reflection of both the traditional morality which Indian women are supposed to uphold and the anticipation of the possible danger that Indian women may encounter if they drink in public. Although the tendency to drink in private makes them vulnerable in other ways, for women, going to a male-dominated bar or arrack shop is still unthinkable. At the same time, for women buying illicit hooch to drink at home is distinctly more

accessible since a large majority of the hooch sellers are women and they often visit towns and villages to sell their produce during the daytime (NIMHANS 2003:25).

Consumption of illicit hooch is strongly related to poverty (Manor 1993). Although the manufacturing cost of arrack was cheap, the excise levied on arrack still made it more expensive than illicit hooch. After the banning of arrack in Karnataka, it is difficult to imagine that these vulnerable sections within society would move (as hoped) towards the consumption of more expensive IMF liquors. They simply could not afford it.

### **The Advertising Space**

The advertising of alcohol in India is extremely restricted. Pictures of bottles of alcohol cannot be shown on any advertising material except on the internal and external walls of bars, liquor shops, and pubs. It is not even permitted to specify that what has been advertised is alcohol. Since the only thing that is allowed is advertisement of the brand name, alcohol ads in India often look extremely abstract. The Bangalore distiller with whom we conducted interviews told us about their efforts to increase their 'presence' in the market by promoting their names of their various brands. They once managed to persuade a Kannada filmmaker to place their whisky in one of the scenes of a film. Since they co-funded the film, the director agreed to do so. This rather familiar technique of product placement was though immediately noticed by the state film board of censors and the filmmaker was told to remove the scene in which a whisky bottle had been prominently displayed. The film was a suspense thriller featuring a Kannada superstar Vishnuvardhan, who died in 2009 at the age of 59, but it did not have much success, just like the hundreds of other Kannada films that are shown in the theatres for a few weeks and then disappear. In the giant billboard of the film alongside the highways, we could recognise the small trademark of the whisky they were promoting, but it was probably too small for most people to notice.

While small distillers are struggling to sell their brand image, India's largest alcohol manufacturer, the UB group, could easily fill public spaces with images of their alcohol products. The United Breweries group (UB group) owns the largest private airline in India which bears the name of their best selling beer, *Kingfisher*. The chairman of the UB group, Vijay Mallaya also owns an Indian Premier League cricket team based in Bangalore, called *Royal Challengers*, which resembles the name of their blended whiskey and lager beer, *Royal Challenge*. His lavish parties, his liveried and 'personally selected' airline hostesses, his enthusiastic promotion and funding of an Indian Formula One racing team, and occasional patriotic acts such as successfully bidding at international auctions for the sword of Tipu Sultan in 2004 and for the private belongings (including spectacles) of Mahatma Gandhi in 2009, have all contributed to keeping his image constantly in the media. Even his political ambitions probably have a much to do with the selling of his products via his media presence as it does with a desire to influence and manipulate political situations to the benefit of alcohol producers. In June 2010, he was elected an MP of the Rajya Sabha as an independent candidate for the second time. He allegedly paid thirty or fifty crore rupees to the JDS (Janata Dal Secular) to ensure their support (later the BJP decided to support him as well) despite the fact that he never attended a single discussion in parliament on the last occasion that he was elected as an MP.

The advertising of alcohol is largely centred around the image of a new urban life style and especially emphasises its consumerist tendencies. Parties, short skirts, sea-side beaches, sun glasses, white jackets, catch phrases like 'the King of Good Times' (catchphrases for both Kingfisher and Vijay Mallaya himself), all contribute to create the atmosphere of a relaxed, but highly stylised social space. Even the advertisements in regional languages follow the same trend. A recent Kannada advertisement said '*tension yaake, saakashtu stailu* (why do you feel tension? It is full of style)', having a large picture of two popular Kannada film stars walking in a relaxed posture in white suits with black sun glasses. The image of two successful men with a hint of underground gang culture suggests what the Kannada-speaking lower middle classes

most associate with drinking. It is something they might aspire to be a part of at the same time as they morally despise it.

### **Morality and profits**

As the Gandhian/nationalist enthusiasm for the implementation of a national policy of total prohibition gradually faded in the mid-1960s and slow economic growth pressurised government budgets, many states began to abandon their restrictive policies towards alcohol consumption (Reddy & Patnaik 1993??). Mysore (present day Karnataka) was the first state to give up their partial prohibition in 1964 and other states soon followed.

Some scholars have cynically noted that this relaxation of prohibition may have been related to the growing influence of criminal elements amongst within India's political elite (Reddy & Patnaik 1993??). However, the cause of prohibition has also been supported by criminal elements in Karnataka. Recently the state became infamous for a violent attack on the Amnesia pub in Mangalore (400 kms west of Bangalore) in January 2009 which especially targeted women drinkers. This attack was organised by a supposedly hardline Hindu and local nationalist organisation the Sri Ram Sena and was pre-advertised to the Press, so that journalists could be present to film the event. Pravin Valke, the founding member of the Sri Rama Sena told the India Express:

These girls come from all over India, drink, smoke, and walk around in the night spoiling the traditional girls of Mangalore. Why should girls go to pubs? Are they going to serve their future husbands alcohol? Should they not be learning to make chapattis? Bars and pubs should be for men only. We wanted to ensure that all women in Mangalore are home by 7 p.m.<sup>ix</sup>

Women wearing short-sleeved kurtas in Bangalore were targeted around the same time and there was talk of organised demonstrations against the celebration of Valentine's Day. The Mangalore incident highlighted the rightward shift in Karnataka politics since the BJP came to power in the state. This has seen a growth in support also for another self-appointed guardian of the nation's morals, the

Bahujan Samaj: the militant youth wing of the Sangh Parivar. Unsurprisingly, the state government refused to prosecute the leadership of the Sri Rama Sena for their involvement in any of the above events. The incident though successfully brought to attention the evident resentment felt by many lumpen elements in urban Karnataka, consisting principally of young men who have failed to benefit from the rising prosperity within the cities and are reacting against the conspicuous consumption associated with it. Unfortunately, the moral stance of the Sri Rama Sena has lately been entirely discredited by an expose in *Tehelkha* magazine, which has proved that the Sri Rama Sena are willing to organise a violent demonstration anywhere for an appropriate fee, regardless of the victim or who was likely to benefit.<sup>x</sup>

The demand for the banning of the sale of arrack was initiated on rather higher moral ground by women's movements in the rural areas of south India. Especially in Andhra Pradesh, low caste women and especially Dalit women within villages, organised themselves with the assistance of political parties such as the CPI (M), CPI (ML) and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to campaign against liquor drinking. These newly assertive and often educated low caste women claimed that their communities were the constant victims of domestic violence and burdened with heavy debts because of their husbands' drinking habits. They considered arrack as 'a social evil' and campaigned to force thousands of arrack outlets to close (Reddy & Patnaik 1993, Sarveswara Rao & Parthasarathy 1997). It is widely believed that the popularity of the TDP leader N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) was partly due to the fact that he strongly supported this women's cause and promised them that that he would introduce prohibition in the state (Vyasulu 1998).

To call for the banning of arrack or the introduction of prohibition is always extremely popular in India where temperance is associated with respectability, purity, patriotism and self-improvement. In Andhra Pradesh, the cause of women campaigning against alcohol was strongly supported by left-wing politicians, campaigning 'on behalf of' the poor. In Karnataka, women's groups such as Stree-Shakti and other organisations demanding the banning of arrack, were strongly

supported by religious seers, powerful Lingayat *mathas* (monasteries), and Hindu nationalist politicians of the ruling Bharatiya Janata party within the state.

Before the ban, arrack contributed nearly Rs 2,000 crore to state revenues during the financial year of 2006-2007. This was second only to the income from commercial taxes<sup>xi</sup> and consisted of 60 per cent of the entire excise revenue (a total of 3,414 crore rupees). It was said therefore that the introduction of the ban in July 2007 would cause a loss of Rs 1,800 crore to Rs 1,900 crore<sup>xii</sup>. Prior to the introduction of the ban, the then deputy-chief minister-cum-finance minister Yediyurappa (who went on to become Chief Minister in May 2008) initiated various reforms in the alcohol industry. The Karnataka State Beverages Corporation Ltd started supplying IMFL directly to retailers and has not renewed the licences of wholesale dealers who were gaining a 5 per cent commission for providing this service<sup>xiii</sup>. Simply by removing private wholesale dealers, the state government expected to increase excise revenues by 150 crore rupees.

In May 2010, nearly three years after the ban on the sale of arrack, the Karnataka Excise Department announced that they had collected a revenue of Rs. 7,500 crore through the sale of IMFL during 2009-10.<sup>xiv</sup> This was more than twice what they used to collect from the sale of arrack and IMFL combined. The moral campaign to prevent the suffering of women and families thus brought about a dramatic increase in tax revenues to the state which, at the same time, has been able to significantly increase its control over the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages.

## **Conclusion**

There are elements of counter- culture to alcohol consumption. The advertising of alcohol draws upon aspirational ideals associated with prosperity and wealth. At the same time, alcohol consumption has a macho, bad-boy image. Elements of this are seen at all levels of society. There is also an association between alcohol and a lifestyle that is independent of conventional social mores. There can be very positive elements to this form of self-assertion: friendship and socialising outside of the usual

bounds of family, gender and caste, and the assertion of equality and camaraderie amongst upwardly mobile educated middle classes. Notwithstanding the modest prosperity of those involved, this could be described as the assertion of a new subaltern form of citizenship (Pandey 2009), that lies counter to the conventions of society and which resists the demands and regulations of the state. For this reason, the behaviour of the drinking classes in Bangalore does not easily fit the dualistic model of civil society that has been described by Partha Chatterjee (2008).

At its extremes, one might argue that there is an IMFL drinking elite that is widely tolerated by society, and an arrack-consuming working class that is excluded, characterised as addictive, and generally disparaged. However, there are clearly new cultures of drinking that are emerging between these extremes. There is also an increasing overlap between the two as new government regulations have restricted the sale and distribution of arrack and has driven working class consumers into the IMFL segment of the market. Yet despite these complications, there is clearly still one predominant trend, and that is the shrinking space that is made available to lower class consumers. On the one hand, their consumption is inhibited by low caste women activists campaigning to close liquor shops. It is also severely curbed by politicians who seek public approval through the denunciation of alcohol (whilst carefully avoiding any mention of middle class drinking habits). Behind this rhetoric lies an assumption that the middle classes are responsible and mature enough to 'handle their drink' whilst the masses need to be guided and controlled in their access to alcohol.

Additional pressures on the lower class drinker come from churchmen and religious zealots in an unholy alliance with state governments, who are vigorously seeking to outlaw the manufacture and consumption of all but the highest quality, centrally distributed, and most heavily taxed and therefore most revenue lucrative forms of alcoholic drink. Perhaps the greatest pressure of all though on the space of the working class drinker derives from the embourgeoisement of the Indian city (Chatterjee 2003). For the first time since independence, Indian cities are growing

beyond the role of mere marketing and service centres for cantonments or the headquarters of civil administration. They are beginning to reflect the rise of a new middle class and new white-collar industries and occupations that have the capital resources to transform the environment within which they live. Street markets, pavement dwellers, and lower class inner city suburbs are being bull-dozed away and replaced by fly-overs, shopping malls, offices, and hotels. Within this milieu a new form of youthful middle class drinking culture has developed. It is predominantly, however, a culture of prosperity. The lower class drinker is excluded from this environment as s/he may doubtless also be excluded from the opportunity to consume either licit or home-produced alcohol in his/her native village. In the process, this section of society is perhaps also being transformed, to provide better, more efficient and disciplined workers for the burgeoning metropolis.

## **References:**

- Carroll. L. (1976) 'The Temperance Movement in India: Politics and Social Reform', *Modern Asian Studies*, 10 (3): 417-447.
- Chatterjee, P. (2003) 'Are Indian Cities Becoming Bourgeois At Last?' in I. Chandrasekhar and P. Seel, eds., *Body.City: siting contemporary culture in India*, New Delhi: Tulika.
- Chatterjee, P. (2008) 'Democracy and Economic Transformation in India', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. ?? No. ?? April :53-62.
- Dietler, M. (2006) 'Alcohol: Anthropological/ Archaeological Perspectives', *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 35: 229-49.
- Douglas, M. (ed.) (1987) *Constructive Drinking: perspectives on drink from anthropology*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Dwyer, R. (2004) 'Editorial: the Cultural Meaning of Food in South Asia', *South Asia Research* 24 (1): 5-7.
- Joseph, A. 1995 'Impact of Prohibition on State Excise: Study of Four Southern States', *Economic and Political Weekly* December 2: 3051-53.

- Hardiman, D. (1987) *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Heath, D. B. (1987) 'Anthropology and Alcohol Studies: current issues', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16: 99-120.
- Manor, J. (1993) *Power, Poverty and Poison: Disaster and Response in an Indian City*, New Delhi: Sage.
- NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore) (2003) *Report for the WHO Collaborative Project on Unrecorded Consumption of Alcohol, Karnataka, India* (accessed at <http://www.nimhans.kar.nic.in/deaddiction/Publications.html> 27/06/2010).
- Nisbett, N. (2007) 'Friendship, consumption, morality: practising identity, negotiating hierarchy in middle-class Bangalore', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 13(4): 935-950.
- Osella, C. (2008) 'Introduction: South Asia special issue on Food', *S. Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31 (1): 1-9.
- Pandey, G. (ed.). (2009) *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Reddy, N. & Patnaik, A. (1993) 'Anti-Arrack Agitation of Women in Andhra Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 (21): 1059-1066.
- Sarveswara Rao, G. and Parthasarathy, G. (eds) (1997) *Anti-Arrack Movement of Women in Andhra Pradesh and Prohibition Policy*, New Delhi: Har-Anand.
- Singer, M. (1986) 'Towards a Political-Economy of Alcoholism: the missing link in the anthropology of drinking', *Social Science & Medicine* 23(2): 113-130.
- Vyasulu, V. (1998) 'On Prohibition: Dangers of a Blanket Solution', *Economic and Political Weekly* April 18: 877-879.

---

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> In July 2009 more than 120 people died in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, after consuming illicit liquor (*The Hindu*, 13, July 2009). For another mass scale incidence in 1981 in Bangalore where more than 300 people died, see Manor 1993.

- 
- ii There were 15,215 arrack sale points in Karnataka in total (*The Times of India*, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007).
- iii *The Hindu*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2007,
- iv Jaishankar Jayaramiah 'Storm over arrack ban after Karnataka tragedy', *The Financial Express*, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2008.
- v *The Times of India*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007.
- vi The Taxation Task Force of Karnataka estimated that in 1999-2000, while 28 million litres of IMFL was officially sold in the state, while 67.9 million litres of IMFL was additionally sold by way of "seconds" (Govt. of Karnataka, quoted in NIMHANS 2003:2).
- vii For example, in May 2010, about 6,000 farmers in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu staged a protest against the ban on toddy tapping. Several thousands of them were arrested (the Hindu, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010).
- viii Sample size was 21,276 individuals from 5,200 families in Karnataka. The survey was conducted in 2002 in four districts of Karnataka: Bangalore, Dharwad, Bidar, and Uttara Kannada (NIMHANS 2003: 46, 48).
- ix *The Indian Express*,
- x *Tehelkha* magazine,
- xi *The Times of India*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007.
- xii *The Financial Express*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2007.
- xiii *Ibid.*
- xiv *The Hindu*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2010.