

ALCOHOL POLICY AND CONSUMPTION
PATTERNS IN SRI LANKA

L.W. Karunaratne
Ministry of Policy Planning & Implementation, Colombo

In the late 17th century, Robert Knox, observed that "drunkenness they do greatly abhor, neither are there many that do give themselves to it".

Many incidents are mentioned in literary works of ancient Sri Lanka when people had consumed toddy at social functions. The mention of 'stronger drinks' appear along with the advent of western powers.

The alcohol policies of the National Governments of Sri Lanka had been flexible. In 1950, a few changes in the excise policy were introduced with the objective of bringing about total abstinence in the island. In 1985 a complete reversal of these prohibitive policies was adopted, by resuming the issue of new licences for the sale of liquor, with the purpose of eradicating the menace of unlawfully manufactured liquor.

In Sri Lanka, a considerable change in the alcohol consumption patterns could be seen during the pre-war and post-war periods.

The pre-war consumption of arrack was only 350,000 gallons per year whereas it was 1,151,213 gallons in the year 1948/49. Twenty years later, in the year 1967/68, it rose upto 3,579,912 gallons showing almost a four fold increase. For the period 1978 to 1985 the consumption of arrack had been more or less constant. In 1985, the amount of arrack consumed was 5,781,670 gallons. From 1946/47 to 1985, there had been 620 per cent increase in the rates of alcohol consumption whereas the population increase during this period had been only 240 per cent.