

## The Sale of Samsu in Selangor, 1900-1941

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the consumption of *samsu* in Selangor before independence, covering the period from 1900 to 1941. The production and consumption of *samsu* is a significant issue that has not been thoroughly explored or widely understood. Although *samsu* is primarily consumed by the Chinese and Indian communities, Malays were not entirely excluded from drinking this alcoholic beverage. This study focuses on the introduction of *samsu* in Selangor and highlights some factors contributing to its consumption. Several factors contributed to the widespread illegal sale of *samsu* in Selangor, including economic hardship and poverty, attractive advertising, and weak enforcement of regulations. The closure of *toddy* shops and the rising cost of *samsu* production also led to an increase in the demand for illegal *samsu*. There has been little detailed and specific research on *samsu*, making this study crucial in providing information and knowledge about *samsu* in Selangor. Existing research largely focuses on alcohol consumption in general and does not delve deeply into the specific details of *samsu* consumption. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gaps in previous research and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of *samsu* in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** *Samsu*, Factors, Selangor, Chinese, Indian

### Introduction

The arrival of Chinese immigrants in Malaya is often associated with opium and secret society activities, while the Indian community is linked to the consumption of *toddy* and *samsu* (Azharuddin, 2012). Excessive consumption of *toddy* and *samsu* was considered a social disease that the British had to contend with (Azharuddin, 2012). This social issue continues to persist among the Malaysian population today. The problem of *samsu* can also be observed in other states such as Kedah, Penang, Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Negeri Sembilan. The tragedy at Wellesley Estate in Lunas, Kedah, in 1981 was a dark episode as many victims died due to *samsu* mixed with foreign substances. This incident affected 81 individuals, with 49 admitted to Kulim Hospital, 32 deaths, and five others becoming blind (The Straits Times, 1991).

The ease of preparation and low production cost made *samsu* readily available at a cheap price, around 40 cents, to anyone, whether men, women, or even children. Interestingly, *samsu* was an alcoholic drink produced by the Chinese. The Indian community did not have the expertise to produce *samsu*. However, according to Mary Assunta, Indian laborers did know how to make alcohol from grains, but they never practiced it due to a lack of agricultural produce (Mary, 2001-2002). Crops were crucial for the Indian community to sustain their daily food needs. Although *samsu* was sold in estate grocery shops, many Indian laborers consumed it illegally because it was cheaper and had a higher alcohol content (Krishnan & Raman, 2018). Nevertheless, *samsu* could only be consumed occasionally, unlike *toddy*, as *samsu* had more harmful effects. The illegal sale of *samsu* became a major factor in causing various negative impacts on the Indian community due to its widespread availability.

### **Production of *Samsu***

*Samsu* was classified as a controlled item, meaning that anyone wishing to produce, sell, or store the beverage was required to obtain a license. Under the Revenue Farms Enactment of 1904, a license application for producing *samsu* had to be approved by the authorities (SUK SEL 1/1933). At the time, the government was responsible for managing the entire process of issuing licenses for distilling and selling *samsu*. All procedures related to obtaining a license to brew, sell, or import *samsu* required prior approval from the state government.

The Licensing Board did not have the authority to determine sales rates or taxes imposed on distillers and retailers selling *samsu*. The government was responsible for setting the selling price of *samsu* based on the principle of supply and demand for the beverage. This meant that in Selangor, *samsu* could only be processed and sold after the authorities (Resident's Office) had granted a license to the *samsu* manufacturers (SUK SEL 284/1922). To obtain approval, an application had to be submitted to the government, including a request to distill *samsu*. This measure was intended as a method of controlling the production and sale of illegal *samsu*, which was often produced in secret. The existence of illegal *samsu* affected the reputation of licensed *samsu* producers, causing them to suffer significant losses. Retailers who applied for a license from the Resident to sell *samsu* in shops were required to obtain a license for a period not exceeding one year (12 months), with monthly license fees not exceeding four dollars per month (SUK SEL 367/1904).

*Samsu* could only be sold at licensed estate shops, and the authorities had the right to revoke any licenses if the conditions of the application were not followed. Applicants were allowed to open shops to sell *samsu* only in districts under the supervision of European District Officers. Each shop had to display a signboard to clearly indicate their location to the authorities. According to Section 13 (i) of Enactment 5/1923, no one except license holders under Section 12 was permitted to store or possess any equipment, tools, or apparatus for distilling or producing intoxicating liquor (SUK SEL 3825/1925).

Every applicant holding a license to sell *samsu* was required to present the license as proof to the relevant government officials (enforcement officers) upon request or during routine inspections of the shop. One regulation that had to be followed was that estate shops selling *samsu* were only permitted to operate between 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., and exceeding these hours could result in the revocation of the *samsu* business license. Furthermore, activities such as gambling, causing disturbances, or public intoxication were strictly prohibited in these

estate shops. Any issues, including deaths related to the consumption of alcoholic beverages like *samsu*, were required to be reported immediately to the nearest police station.

Those wishing to obtain a license to distill *samsu* had to submit a written application to the Resident, detailing the full cost of building the distillery, its location, and the size of the factory. These factors were crucial in determining whether the application would be approved. One such application was made by Ong Koon Chan, who applied for a license to distill *samsu* in Bukit Weld in 1909 (SUK SEL 3851/1909). However, various other factors also influenced whether an application would be accepted, including the current economic conditions and other considerations. Moreover, the presence of European officers was a significant factor in these matters. In the case of an application made by Yeoh Seng Niah in 1922, the application was rejected because the authorities believed that the proposed distillery would not be profitable (SUK SEL 1547/1922). However, the real reason was the unstable economic conditions at the time of the application, as many distilleries and *samsu* factories in the Federated Malay States (FMS) had been closed, such as the one in Teluk Anson. The prevailing circumstances influenced the authorities in their decision regarding Yeoh Seng Niah's application.

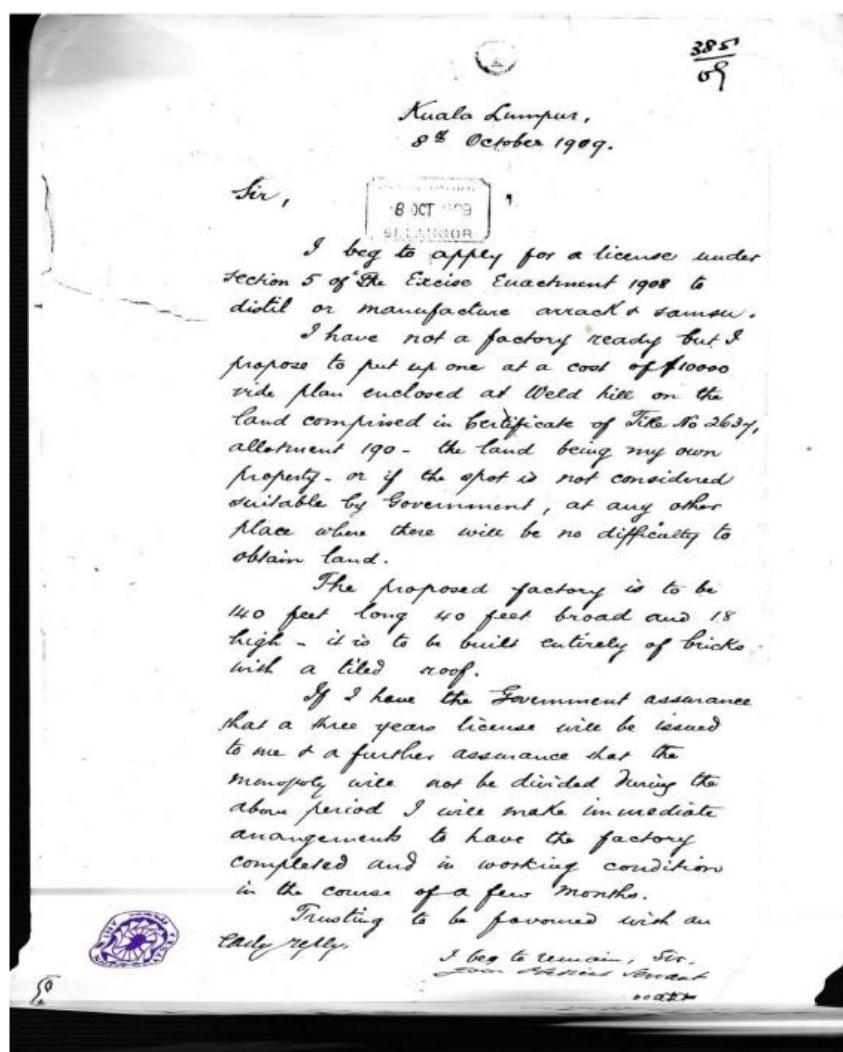


Figure 1: Application Letter for a License to Distill Alcohol and *Samsu*

Source: SUK SEL 3851/1909, Applies for a license to distill or manufacture arrack and *samsu*.

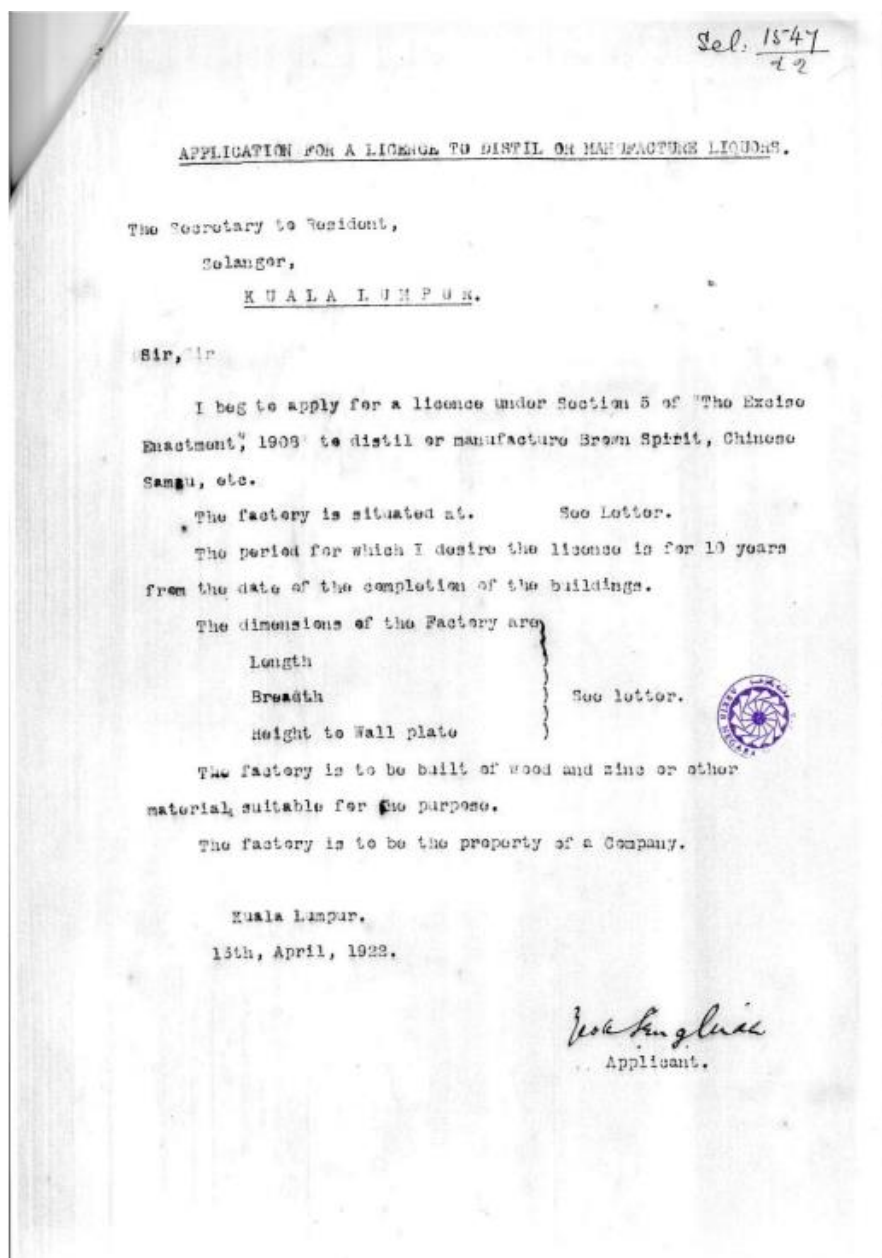


Figure 2: Application Letter for a License to Produce Alcohol

Source: SUK SEL 1547/1922, Application for a License to Distill or Manufacture Spirits and Samsu.

Additionally, there was an application to open a *samsu* distillery in Klang by Yeoh Koh Kiat (SUK SEL 893/1918), but his application was also rejected by the Selangor Resident because licenses for distilleries could only be granted in areas with the presence of European Customs Officers (SUK SEL 1/1933). Every year, *samsu* producers were required to pay a licensing fee to operate their business in Selangor. For instance, in 1922, the fee imposed was 12 dollars for a one-year or six-month period (SUK SEL 284/1922). However, this license fee had to be paid in a lump sum, starting only from March 1922, as previously, payments could be made in monthly installments (SUK SEL 284/1922).

By 1936, the total number of licensed alcohol shops selling alcoholic beverages, including *samsu*, in the Federated Malay States (FMS) was recorded at 534. However, there were only six distilleries for alcohol and *samsu* throughout the FMS. In Selangor, the most significant distillery was The Nipah Distillery Ltd, located in Kuala Selangor, near the Nipah Palm estate, north of the Selangor River (Federated Malay States Report, 1936). This distillery began producing *samsu* in 1935 (The Straits Times, 1935). In Perak, important distilleries included Guan Ho Distillery in Taiping, Soon Seng Distillery in Teluk Anson, and Jackson's Distillery Co. in Ipoh. In Pahang, the main distillery was Tong Ah Distillery in Raub, and in Negeri Sembilan, Ban Joo Lee Distillery in Seremban (Federated Malay States Report, 1936). These distilleries were the primary suppliers of alcohol and *samsu* in their respective states.

### Storage Warehouse

For licensed *samsu* manufacturers and companies importing *samsu*, they had facilities for storing their products. In Selangor, *samsu* manufacturers were permitted to store their products in customs warehouses located throughout the state. For imported *samsu*, the storage warehouse was situated at Port Swettenham if the *samsu* was brought in by ship and transported via sea routes. If it was brought in by train, the *samsu* needed to be offloaded at Tanjong Malim and Bangi before being transferred to the same storage facility at Port Swettenham (Selangor Government Gazette, 1909). This storage facility directly benefited manufacturers or importers by providing them with low rental costs for storage, making it easier for the government to regulate the circulation of *samsu* in Selangor.

Selangor's fast economic growth made import and export operations a priority, with Port Swettenham emerging as the primary entry and departure point. The storage warehouse was one of the options offered. Effective storage management is difficult, though, because of congestion brought on by the increased of this beverage. To meet the storage needs, including those of *samsu*, a new warehouse had to be built in Kuala Lumpur. If there was not enough room in Port Swettenham to hold all of the *samsu*, it would be shipped to a warehouse in Kuala Lumpur (SUK 1031/1913).

The congestion at the Port Swettenham storage warehouse was not only due to the large volume of imported and exported goods but also because of the actions of *samsu* manufacturers who stored excessive quantities of *samsu* at the Port Swettenham warehouse, surpassing the available storage space. The imbalance between reduced consumer demand and the quantity of *samsu* imported or produced in Selangor contributed to the issue. This meant that supply exceeded demand, resulting in a surplus of *samsu*. This situation occurred in 1918 when as many as 1,600 jugs of unsold *samsu* were left at the Port Swettenham warehouse. (SUK SEL 3296/1918).

The issue of warehouse congestion and competition for storage space with other goods also arose at both Port Swettenham and Kuala Lumpur. The warehouse in Kuala Lumpur was deemed unsuitable for storing rice due to its proximity to the river, which could compromise the quality of the rice. This situation often led to frequent relocations between warehouses for *samsu* and alcohol, rice, or opium, all of which were important commodities at the time, alongside rubber and tin. The storage congestion and competition for space among these goods created logistical challenges, especially as each commodity had specific storage requirements. (SUK SEL 2506/1919).

Furthermore, *samsu* stored in these warehouses was not exempt from issues such as leakage, fire, or warehouse damage, which could affect its quality. The warehouse in Kuala Lumpur was completed on August 1, 1911, and fully operational by 1912, with priority given to importers in Kuala Lumpur (SUK SEL 1031/1913). In 1912, the total rental income for this warehouse amounted to \$4,727.59, compared to only \$537.12 for the five-month period from August to December in 1911. The standard storage period for goods in the Kuala Lumpur warehouse was six months. However, goods, including *samsu*, were often stored beyond this six-month period, leading to overcrowded and limited storage space. For instance, in 1919, 2,000 jugs of *samsu* remained in the Kuala Lumpur warehouse beyond the allowed six-month period, as the *samsu* manufacturers did not retrieve them. This situation was partly due to the relatively low rental rates at this warehouse compared to others (SUK SEL 3296/1918).

In situations where goods were stored beyond the allowed period, the Customs Supervisor would issue a notice to the *samsu* owner, with further action depending on their payment history (SUK SEL 3548/1919). If the owner had a consistent payment record, they were typically granted additional time to collect their goods. However, if payments were inconsistent, the goods would be auctioned off, and the proceeds would be used to settle any outstanding taxes and warehouse fees. This system aimed to prevent traders from keeping *samsu* in storage for too long without paying rent, while also freeing up space for other merchants needing to store their goods. The issues faced by government-owned storage warehouses led to the growth of privately licensed warehouses, though *samsu* owners had to pay higher fees compared to government facilities. For *samsu* that could not be sold and had exceeded its storage period, it would be disposed of, including being dumped into rivers. This was done because spoiled *samsu* posed health risks to consumers. For instance, in April 1920, Customs disposed of 11 lots of *samsu* valued at \$15,771.12 by dumping it into a river (SUK SEL 2283/1920).

### **Samsu Taxation**

The taxes imposed on *samsu* were a key aspect that required careful attention. Overall, the taxes on alcoholic beverages, including *samsu*, in Selangor and throughout the Federated Malay States (FMS) were based on the alcohol content and the brand of the beverage. Taxes were applied to alcoholic drinks brought into the FMS and had to be paid when the goods arrived at the customs warehouse in Port Swettenham. Alcoholic beverages stored in the customs warehouse could not be removed until the importer or owner presented the appropriate license to the responsible officer at the customs warehouse (Selangor Government Gazette 1909). Each type of alcoholic drink was subject to different tax rates, whether produced within the FMS or imported from abroad, as shown in the table below:

Table 1

*Import Tax on Alcoholic Beverages in the Federated Malay States*

Alcohol Classification	Import Tax	
	Colonial Era	Federated Malay States (FMS) after 2.3.1915
Alcohol content above 85%	\$3.00 per gallon	\$4.80 per gallon
Alcohol content between 85% -70%	\$2.40 per gallon	\$3.84 per gallon
Alcohol content between 70% -40%	\$1.50 per gallon	\$2.40 per gallon
Alcohol content below 40%	\$1.50 – \$0.24 per gallon	\$2.40 –\$ 0.48 per gallon

Sumber: H.C.O 1800/1914, Enhanced Import duty in malt liquors and spirits.

Based on Table 1, the amount of tax imposed on *samsu* importers varies according to the alcohol concentration. Higher alcohol content incurs a greater tax, as indicated in the table, with alcohol exceeding 85% subjected to taxes ranging from \$3.00 to \$4.80. The tax rates also change annually; for instance, in 1909, the tax on *samsu* was \$1 per gallon, which is equivalent to half a dozen quarts or a dozen bottles (SUK SEL 4479/1908). By 1912, the tax had increased to \$1.20 per gallon of *samsu* (SUK SEL 1031/1913).

### Sellers and Buyers

In the business of *samsu*, a chain exists that connects those involved in its production (manufacturers or producers) with those who directly sell it to buyers or consumers. Both of these groups producers and sellers are predominantly comprised of Chinese individuals. While there are instances of Indian sellers, their numbers are quite limited. Research into *samsu* revealed that Indian sellers could be found in Larut, Perak, where an Indian laborer was detained for illegally distilling *samsu*, resulting in a production of 40 gallons (Federated Malay State, 1937).

However, such cases have not been reported in Selangor. While the Chinese dominate the production and sale of *samsu*, Indians tend to be the sellers and consumers. Nevertheless, authorities, recognizing that uncontrolled consumption of *samsu*, toddy, and alcoholic beverages can lead to significant social issues, have implemented controls. The sellers in question operate out of toddy and liquor shops located on plantations. However, the toddy business is closely monitored by the British. All toddy shops on plantations are periodically inspected by excise officers to ensure they operate satisfactorily, preventing the sale of spoiled or illegal toddy and *samsu*.

Additionally, there is pressure on the Indian community, particularly among laborers, to purchase alcoholic beverages from legitimate sellers due to their higher prices. This situation forces them to rely on illegal sources, especially toddy or *samsu* from nearby vendors (Federated Malay State, 1937). While *samsu* is often associated with men, there are also women involved in the illegal *samsu* trade. For example, in 1916, a Chinese woman named Lei Haw was arrested by authorities for illegally distilling *samsu* (SUK SEL 6133/1916) and was fined \$250 or sentenced to two months in prison. Despite frequent arrests of those involved

in illegal *samsu* sales, the trade continues to thrive due to high demand from laborers, driven by its significantly lower price compared to licensed *samsu*.

The presence of illegal *samsu* in the market has negatively impacted the production and sale of legitimate *samsu*. The illegal *samsu* has garnered considerable public demand due to its much lower price; in Selangor, for instance, illegal *samsu* costs only one-third of the price of legitimate *samsu*. For example, in 1933, illegal *samsu* was sold for just 40 cents for a quarter gallon, while legitimate *samsu* was priced at \$1.30 (SUK SEL 808/1933). This significant price difference leads laborers to opt for illegal *samsu*, as it remains the same type of beverage. The preparation method is similar to that of legitimate *samsu*, but there is a critical difference: illegal *samsu* often contains hazardous additives, specifically methyl alcohol (The Star National Daily, 1977). Methyl alcohol is a potent poison primarily used in industries like rubber glove manufacturing and paint production. It is not suitable for mixing with alcoholic beverages, and studies have confirmed its dangerous implications when used in such drinks (H.C.O. 432/1921).

*Samsu* is openly sold in various places such as grocery stores, colok stalls, and barbershops, making it convenient for Indian and Chinese laborers to access supplies. In 1906, a total of 68,033 gallons of alcohol and *samsu* were imported into Selangor. *Samsu* particularly appealed to the poor laborers working in plantations and rural areas, with reports indicating that around 30% of adult Indians consumed *samsu*. Among different ethnic groups, Indians had the highest consumption rate at 94%, followed by Chinese and others at 35%, and Malays at 25% (Marimuthu, 1979). Some toddy shops that were closed have since been converted into *samsu* shops. Workers, who typically receive their wages at the beginning and middle of the month, tend to spend their money on more expensive drinks like beer and stout. However, as their funds dwindle, they often revert to purchasing *samsu* due to its affordability.

Not only does *samsu* provide a source of income for its producers, but the byproducts from its production also contribute to their earnings. *Samsu* sellers are adept at managing raw materials and capital effectively, utilizing every aspect of the production process without waste. For instance, the leftover mash or byproducts from the distillation process are collected in kerosene barrels and sold to pig farmers for 15 cents per two kerosene barrels (SUK SEL 1/1933). The revenue generated from selling these byproducts is often used to pay the workers involved in the *samsu* production.

At the lowest level of this chain are the buyers or consumers. Those involved in the consumption of *samsu* include Malays, Chinese, and Indians. However, Indians are the largest group of consumers among these three ethnicities, followed by the Chinese and Malays. Indian laborers are the most frequent consumers of *samsu*, particularly illegal *samsu*, due to its lower price. The Chinese also consume *samsu* but tend to prefer products from licensed factories (Federated Malay States Report, 1936). This preference is influenced by the fact that many Chinese are involved in the production and sale of illegal *samsu*.

As a result, they are aware of the cleanliness and quality of illegal *samsu*, which drives them to purchase *samsu* from licensed manufacturers. Women are also drawn to *samsu* due to the promises made by sellers that it is beneficial for their health, can increase breast milk for



pregnant mothers, and acts as an anti-aging agent. Pure *samsu*, free from harmful additives, contains D-glucose, ethyl D-glucose, glycerol, organic acids, and amino acids that are effective for preventing and treating skin aging caused by UV exposure (Law, 2011). However, the majority of *samsu* produced contains harmful additives that diminish its efficacy as an anti-aging agent and can even pose health risks to consumers.

### **Factors Influencing Consumption**

Various factors contribute to the consumption of *samsu* among laborers, particularly among Indian workers. The following discussion will focus on these factors. Upon examination, it becomes evident that these factors arise not only from the pressures of their daily lives but also from the easy availability of both legitimate and illegal sources of *samsu*.

### **Life Pressures and Poverty Issues**

According to Plaut (1967), the pressures and hardships of life are primary reasons for individuals turning to alcoholic beverages. The stress experienced by Indian laborers drives them towards consuming alcoholic drinks, particularly toddy and *samsu*. They believe that alcohol can provide a temporary solution to their problems, leading them to opt for *samsu* and other alcoholic drinks. The low selling price, ranging from 4 to 10 cents, makes *samsu* an attractive choice. The combination of life pressures faced by these workers, along with the burdens of farm work, serves as a significant motivator for them to use *samsu* as a means of momentarily escaping their challenging realities. After consuming a few bottles of *samsu*, they often become intoxicated and lose consciousness, using the drink as a way to forget their problems, albeit temporarily.

Poverty is a profound catastrophe affecting individuals' lives, with the majority of laborers in Malaya living in deprivation and scarcity. They must work tirelessly to meet their daily needs, often receiving low wages for their hard labor. Their lives can be likened to the phrase "earning just enough for today," forcing them to be frugal with their daily expenses. This situation places immense pressure on Indian laborers, especially men, who strive daily to improve their circumstances but find themselves stuck in the same rut. They perceive that only alcohol, including *samsu* and toddy, can help alleviate their stress and provide a brief respite from their problems. Consequently, *samsu* emerges as a highly suitable beverage due to its affordability and easy accessibility compared to other alcoholic drinks.

### **Advertising Methods**

What draws Indian plantation workers to *samsu*? Beyond its easy availability and low price in the market, an important factor is the advertising strategies employed by sellers to promote *samsu* to the public. Sellers utilize appealing advertising methods that highlight the benefits of *samsu* for both men and women. These advantages are prominently displayed on labels found on every bottle of *samsu*. Some of the claimed benefits include its purported positive effects on health, its ability to treat rheumatism (a type of joint pain), relieve bodily aches, assist with low blood pressure, and improve digestion (Assunta).

Additionally, there are labels on the *samsu* bottles that claim it is beneficial for the elderly, nursing mothers, and those with poor appetites (Karnani, 2016). The poverty experienced by these Indian workers has limited their access to quality education, preventing them from discerning the truth of these claims, leading them to believe everything stated on the *samsu*

labels. This represents a significant and cunning deception by sellers to boost sales and maximize profits. Consequently, it is not surprising that women also become entangled in *samsu* consumption as a result of being influenced by these misleading labels. Children, too, are affected by the sight of their parents frequently intoxicated, often urging them to purchase *samsu* on their behalf. This environment further encourages children to experiment with drinking *samsu*.

Furthermore, some children work on plantations and engage in heavy labor to help supplement their family's income. They perceive *samsu* as an energy-boosting drink due to its low price. The influence of parents plays a negative role in promoting *samsu* consumption among children. Additionally, many of these children are not attending school and are instead working in the fields. To ensure they remain energized for work, they resort to drinking *samsu* as a source of energy. *Samsu* is sold without a license in various retail stores, plantations, and even from private homes. Sellers of *samsu* employ various sales tactics to ensure the sustainability of their sales and to encourage the local community to consume *samsu*. This situation indirectly brings them profits from their sales. Additionally, some toddy shop owners also sell *samsu*, creating a profitable "two-in-one" concept for these vendors. Drinkers can easily access both toddy and *samsu*, as they are widely available throughout villages and in the small grocery stores located on plantations. It is crucial to investigate and understand the reasons behind why individuals, especially lower-class workers, may become entangled in *samsu* consumption. The pressures and stresses of life are often cited as the primary reasons for an individual's decision to turn to *samsu*. Coupled with heavy and exhausting workloads, these workers seek *samsu* as a means to find peace of mind and escape from various problems. *Samsu* is seen as a remedy that helps consumers cope with serious issues and the daily pressures of life. They perceive *samsu* as a way to soothe their hearts and emotions amidst arising difficulties. As noted by author J.D. Armstrong, "The dynamic functions of alcohol as discharging (or reducing) anxiety, guilt, shame, the narcotization of painful reality..." (Armstrong, 1961).

### **Easy Access**

The low price of *samsu* has led to consistently high demand for it. Residents continually strive to obtain *samsu* by any means necessary, whether it be legitimate or illicit. *Samsu* has become an essential source of livelihood for them, often disregarding the potential negative consequences. The strong demand has created opportunities for manufacturers to establish distilleries near plantation areas, such as The Nipah Distilleries of Malaya Ltd., which was built close to the Nipah Palm Estate (Federated Malay States Report, 1936). This strategic location attracts more laborers to purchase *samsu* produced by the factory. Furthermore, it is observed that the production of *samsu*, particularly illicit varieties, typically occurs in rural areas and near rivers to facilitate the distillation process.

### **Closure of Todi Shops**

The closure of toddy shops by the British was aimed at addressing social issues, including the problem of drunkenness among Indian laborers due to their addiction to illicit toddi and *samsu*. The British took actions to shut down toddy shops under government oversight and control in an effort to curb and reduce the sales and consumption of toddy and *samsu*. This initiative was intended to help plantation workers who consumed toddi to focus better on their jobs and lives. Additionally, this measure was part of the efforts by estate managers and the

Department of Labor to encourage Indian laborers to save money and reduce their drinking habits (Nanjundan, 1950). Toddy and *samsu* had significantly tarnished the work reputation and lives of Indian workers due to their complete dependency on these beverages. Without them, these laborers appeared unable to work and looked lethargic, akin to the walking dead. This situation deeply concerned the British, as it posed a risk to the agricultural and mining sectors, potentially leading to significant losses for them if the situation worsened.

Therefore, the best solution for them was to close the toddy shops so that Indian laborers could no longer enjoy the drink (Krishnan, 2015). All unlicensed toddy shops in Selangor were ordered to shut down by the British to prevent laborers from purchasing toddy, which would, to some extent, help them overcome their addiction. However, this closure was not a wise decision on the part of the British; as the Malay proverb goes, "I thought it was sunny in the daytime, but it rained at noon." This situation indicated that while the closure might reduce toddi consumption, it did not change the drinking habits of the laborers.

The closure of toddy shops did not solve the problem; instead, it gave rise to another issue by contributing to the growth of *samsu* businesses among Indian laborers on the plantations (Mahajani, 1932). The closure did not create any pressure or problems for toddy sellers in acquiring the drink due to the transformation in the sale of *samsu* (Marimuthu, 1979). This was noted by the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) in its report, which indicated that Indians continued to line up for *samsu* and toddy. Their strong addiction to alcohol made it difficult for them to quit drinking, leading them to seek out other alcoholic beverages. *Samsu* became popular among laborers because of its low price and easy availability. Furthermore, *samsu* was not only bottled but also sold in packets, making it a preferred choice for many Indian laborers (The Straits Times, 1991).

The toddy drink was replaced by *samsu*, which was also in demand among Indian laborers and provided a lucrative source of income for toddy shop owners. They were still able to generate revenue by selling *samsu* in toddy shops. Additionally, these Indian laborers also obtained *samsu* supplies from nearby Chinese villages (SUK SEL 1056/1927). This assistance would not resolve their addiction issues; instead, it encouraged the laborers to become heavy drinkers of *samsu*. The closure of toddy shops created new opportunities for the *samsu* market due to the absence of close competitors (The Straits Times, 1932). Toddy was replaced by *samsu*, which was perceived as cheaper, more accessible, and provided a more potent intoxicating effect for drinkers. The British should have conducted a thorough investigation into this issue before deciding to close the toddy shops, as this action did not help the drinking habits of the laborers; instead, it further pushed them to consume other alcoholic beverages like *samsu*.

### **Lack of Police and Customs Enforcement**

Efforts to eliminate illegal *samsu* have proven ineffective due to the presence of certain dishonest police and customs officers who have accepted bribes from *samsu* sellers. These sellers are willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the continuity of their sales to the local population. For instance, they would pay some police officers \$3 a month to keep their sales areas "clean" from any police raids (Wiebe & Mariappen, 1978). Any planned raids or patrols by the police would be communicated in advance to the *samsu* sellers. The money given to these police officers acts as a form of protection for those operating illegally. This situation

tarnishes the reputation of other police officers and indirectly complicates efforts for the police and customs to hunt down illegal *samsu* sellers and dismantle their operations.

### Increased Demand for Rubber

The demand for rubber in the market has led to a corresponding increase in the demand for labor (SUK Kelantan 539/1913). This situation has opened up more opportunities for Indian laborers to migrate to Malaya. The British were pleased with this development as it would further expand the plantation industry and increase state revenue. Indirectly, this also resulted in a growing demand for alcoholic beverages such as *samsu* and toddy. This trend was evident during the rubber crisis of 1920, when the demand for *samsu* also felt the impact. The demand for *samsu* decreased, resulting in a significant number of bottles remaining unsold in shops and still stored in customs warehouses. For example, in 1920, around 200 boxes of *samsu* were kept in customs storage beyond their expiry date, leading to notices being issued by the customs authorities.

Initially, Indian laborers were brought to Malaya to work in sugarcane and coffee plantations in Penang. They were typically contracted for a short period, usually three years. The increase in the number of Indian laborers in Malaya has led to several social issues, including the illegal consumption and sale of *samsu*. According to the data presented in Table 2 below, the number of Indian laborers in the estates increased by 46,000 from 1921 to 1931. This increase was a result of the introduction of the kangani system, which provided a more systematic approach to the recruitment of foreign labor from India (Krishnan, 2014).

Table 2

*Number of Indian Laborers in Estates, Malaya (1921-1957)*

Year	Number of Indian Laborers
1921	258,000
1931	304,000
1947	241,000
1957	226,000

Source: Sandhu (1969) *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement, 1786–1957*, p. 217.

### *Increasing Distillery License Fees*

The rise in illegal *samsu* sales has escalated as a result of increased distillery license fees imposed on *samsu* producers. This situation has adversely affected the demand for *samsu*, as distillery operators are forced to raise the selling price of *samsu* in the market to avoid losses due to higher production costs. Consequently, in response to the increase in license fees, producers have had to increase the price of *samsu* to cover their production expenses. Despite the overall demand for *samsu*, producers face the challenge of potentially driving consumers toward illegal distillers (SUK SEL 856/1933).

The rise in license fees has also increased production costs, making it necessary for distillery operators to adjust the retail price of *samsu* to prevent financial losses and the possible closure of their businesses. This situation complicates the lives of Indian laborers, as they must spend more to purchase *samsu*. The existence of illegal *samsu* becomes an appealing

option for them, as it is much cheaper than the licensed variants. Additionally, they can easily obtain illegal *samsu* at any time without worrying about stock availability.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this discussion reveals that the sale of *samsu* in Selangor consists of several categories. First, there are licensed *samsu* sales and illegal *samsu* sales. Licensed *samsu* refers to products that are legally recognized, meaning their production and sale comply with existing laws. In contrast, illegal *samsu* is produced without proper authorization. Compared to illegal *samsu*, licensed *samsu* benefits from various facilities, such as storage warehouses, which are unavailable to illegal producers.

Secondly, there are several fees and taxes imposed on *samsu* sellers that contribute to higher prices for licensed *samsu* when compared to illegal alternatives. The sale of licensed *samsu* requires obtaining a permit from the authorities, and sellers must adhere to specific regulations, including being prepared to present their licenses for inspection. Violating any of these conditions can lead to the revocation of their licenses. Taxes and fees are levied on each unit of *samsu* produced, contributing to state revenue, and the tax rates vary depending on the alcohol concentration in each product.

The sale of *samsu* is largely driven by Chinese entrepreneurs, while Indian laborers often fall victim to *samsu* addiction. Overall, this discussion highlights that the Chinese are the pioneers in *samsu* production, particularly in illegal manufacturing, while unemployed Indians often work as laborers for Chinese bosses in the production of *samsu*. In addition, this writing highlights that poverty is a significant factor driving laborers to become involved in *samsu* consumption, particularly illegal *samsu*. Their impoverished living conditions and low incomes make it difficult for them to access better-quality alcoholic beverages than *samsu*. They can only afford higher-quality alcohol at the beginning of each month when they receive their wages, after which they return to *samsu*. For these laborers, *samsu* has become a necessity in their lives, alongside food, clothing, education, and other essentials. The burdensome workload pushes them to seek energy-boosting drinks to maintain their stamina. As a result, laborers become addicted to *samsu* through frequent consumption. This situation is exacerbated by the high alcohol content in *samsu*, which leads to quicker intoxication.

The British policy to eliminate toddy has indirectly encouraged laborers to turn to *samsu*. Rising fees for distilleries have led to an increase in illegal *samsu* production. This has raised the prices of imported alcoholic beverages in Selangor, including *samsu*. Observing this situation, *samsu* producers have seized the opportunity to further expand their illegal *samsu* business. Additionally, the lenient enforcement against illegal *samsu* exacerbates the issue, making it easier for laborers to access *samsu*.

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