

**First-ever medical camp in 11 village since Independence
All children found anaemic**

CHANDER PARKASH
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

BHARIAL (GURDASPUR), AUGUST 27

Independence of the country seems to mean little to residents of 11 villages bordering Pakistan as they are still sans basic amenities.

With a medical camp organized for the first time since 1947 in this village today, about 3,000 residents of 11 villages have started thinking that there are people and organizations which feel concerned about their plight and conditions they have been living in for the past six decades.

However, the medical camp organized by the Lions Club (Diamond), Kahnuwan, in collaboration with the Red Cross De-addiction Treatment-cum-Rehabilitation Centre, Gurdaspur, with the help from the Border Security Force (BSF) here today disappointed those concerned about the well being of residents of Rajpur, Chebe, Toor, Maimi Chakranga, Kookar, Nika, Rajji Beli, Lasiana, Kajley and Rajpur Jattan.

Romesh Mahajan, Project Director, Red Cross De-addiction Treatment-cum-Rehabilitation Centre, said almost 450 patients, from these 11 villages, who were checked at the camp by a team of Doctors, including Subhash Chander, R. S. Bajwa, and Subhash Kunjar. As many as 150

Patients were found to be suffering from viral fever, 250 from skin diseases and 50 from other ailments. Not a single person single person was found to be healthy. About 150 children were also found to be Anaemic. The average age of residents of these villages, which could not get any metalled road so far, was between 45 years to 50 years.

He said the camp, inaugurated by Commandant, BSF, R. Muthukrishnan, was organized in the compound of the Middle School. It took four hours to reach the venue by using BSF boats, tractors and walking. The patients were given medicine worth Rs. 15,000 free of cost. They were also given refreshments.

Clinical test of revealed eight out of 15 patients had abnormal functioning of hearts. About 15 persons were suffering from typhoid.

Mahajan revealed in case of medical emergencies, BSF personals used to take patients to different hospitals located in towns by using different modes of transport in this roadless area. The one para-medical staff member posted in this area was seen rarely performing duties.

He said now medical camps would be held in this area at regular intervals. The second camp would be organized after 2 months.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Dated :- September 6th 2007.

Sukhwinder Malhi | TNN

Gurdaspur : With drug peddlers targeting school going children and easy availability of the prescribed drugs at chemist shops in the district, the administration, in collaboration with District Red Cross Society, and Gurdaspur De-addiction and Rehabilitation Centre, has chosen 26 school teachers to impart them training and awareness as to how young minds should be sensitized against drug menace.

Talking to TOI on Wednesday, Gurdaspur de-addiction and rehabilitation Centre director Romesh Mahajan, after inauguration of the three-day UN-funded awareness seminar for teachers, said according to the survey conducted by the centre, while 70 per cent of the youth are hooked to intoxicants in the one form or the other, 18 per cent of school children are hooked to drugs in Gurdaspur district.

Unemployment was the main reason for taking to drugs.

Mahajan said whole factors like unhappy family environment, declining standards of social health, unemployment and easy availability of drugs and intoxicants were responsible for drug addiction among youth, and the teacher can play a vital role in sensitizing students against drug abuse.

Mahajan, in-charge of one of the best

managed drug de-addiction centre in the state and in the country, said 40 per cent of the reformed drug-addicts tend to relapse into drug-addiction.

Mahajan said while the Gurdaspur drug de-addiction centre has one MD doctor, six counsellors, a gym and yoga teacher, keeping in view the need for training unemployed youth, a computer centre would be set up shortly where student will be taught computer learning, computer repairs and mobile repair so that when they go back to the society after de-addiction, they are able to earn their living, thus reducing chances for a relapse.

He said a humble beginning has already been made with Punjab agriculture minister Sucha Singh Langah having already contributed Rs. 2.5 lakh to set up computer training centre at the drug de-addiction centre here.

He said the de-addiction and rehabilitation centre has been instrumental in getting bank loans for as many as 772 persons so far to set up their business.

The three-day seminar for teachers to impart awareness against drug abuse to teachers which opened here at a local hotel, is begin conducted by UN representative Jayant Chopra and his team.

HELPING YOUTH TO GET THE MONKEY OFF THEIR BACK

Sukhwinder Malhi/TNN,

(Dated 17.12.2007)

Gurdaspur: Romesh Mahajan, the project director at the Drug De-addiction & Rehabilitation Centre here, is a very busy man these days. Despite the recent inclement weather his day starts very early with yoga classes and counselling sessions for the drug addicts housed at the centre. He has become busier these days after the centre started IT training classes for young people attending the De-addiction Camp. The youths are imparted professional training to enable them to get jobs when they return to their homes after being cured of their addiction.

Talking to TOI on Saturday, Mahajan, who was recently honoured by Punjab governor S.F. Rodriguez at a function in Chandigarh for his untiring efforts to ensure a drug-free society, said besides a yoga teacher to help the inmates quit drugs, alcohol and other intoxicants, there were six counsellors for the 48 drug addicts attending the de-addiction camp.

Expressing concern at the increasing incidence of substance abuse among the educated middle class, particularly youngsters, he said in one case all the family members including mother, father, wife, husband and brother were addicts taking drugs through intravenous injection.

He said the conducts a computer Centre as well as mobile phone repair workshop with the assistance of a company AMP Solution, to impart IT and cell phone repair training. He said the computer teacher, Amit Kumar; himself is a reformed drug addict who has managed to kick the habit.

Mahajan said while joblessness and peer pressure at schools and colleges was a significant reason for young people taking to drug, most of those attending de-addiction course were college graduates. He said parents, teachers and NGOs could be of great help in reforming misguided youth through understanding and proper counselling, though the incidence of relapse was high.

He said while the Gurdaspur centre was one of the best in Punjab, addicts from other states like Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were also coming to attend the de-addiction camp.

A recipient of eight awards as well as the President's silver Medal before being honoured by Rodrigues, Mahajan said Gurdaspur being a relatively poor and backward district; the Government should provide quality education and more job opportunities to the large number of unemployed people here.

BATTLE AGAINST NARCOTICS

By Dinesh Kumar,

THE TRIBUNE

(Dated 09.03.2009)

The news for India and the subcontinent on narcotic drugs is not encouraging. India has since long been precariously flanked by Asia's two biggest drug producing regions – the Golden Triangle comprising Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, and the Golden Crescent comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

A recently released report prepared by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has painted a grim picture for the region. First, there is increase in the trafficking of amphetamine-type stimulants or ATS and their precursor chemicals throughout South Asia.

This is important because ATS are abused by more people than cocaine and heroin combined. Manipulating pleasure centres of the brain, these synthetic drugs, which include 'speed' and 'ecstasy', are easy to produce, cheap to buy and hard to control.

They can be more potent than cocaine and usually have a longer lasting effect. Taken as pills, smoked, inhaled or injected, ATS are particularly attractive to young people because they produce a sense of high energy, a release of social inhibitions and feelings of cleverness, competence and power.

A recent report prepared by the UN office on Drugs and Crime states that ATS alone affect approximately 25 million worldwide with most abuse taking place in East and South East Asia. It has not so far been ascertained whether the Indian sub-continent is becoming a recipient or is merely serving as a transit area between manufacturing hubs in East Asia and the rapidly growing illicit markets on the Arabian peninsula.

Second, the HIV transmission rate in the subcontinent is still high among persons who abuse drugs by injection and this has only been rising in the subcontinent. The INCB report observe that in India the prevalence of HIV infection among such drug abusers in 2006 was estimated at a national average of 8.71 per cent.

In Nepal HIV prevalence among such drug abusers in Kathmandu was the highest in this region at 34 percent. In India, morphine and heroin continue to be among the substances most commonly abused. The two main illicit opium-producing countries in the region are Afghanistan and Myanmar.

For India, already a victim of jihadi terrorism, this is a matter of serious concern. In Afghanistan which has been the victim of a bloody conflict for the last three decades, there has been an upsurge in

cannabis cultivation while opium is being increasingly processed into morphine and heroin.

Although Afghanistan's problems are not caused by illicit drug crop cultivation, but in many respects they are aggravated by it and form part of a cycle of conflict and instability that is proving hard to break.

In Pakistan, which forms part of the Golden Crescent, there has been a resurgence of illicit opium poppy cultivation, which has been finding its way in the region.

But India too is a contributor to narcotic drugs. India is one of the largest producers of cannabis resin in the subcontinent. Although the law enforcement authority in India have reportedly been regularly eradicating large areas of illicitly cultivated cannabis plants, the report states that a significant amount of cannabis still finds its way into the illicit market in the country.

The challenges to the international drugs control system are as daunting today as they were a century ago and perhaps more complex. Of considerable concern is the impact of globalization that had been facilitated by the advances of the information and communication technologies, for example, the report observes how drug traffickers are among the most widespread users of encryption for internet messaging and are able to hire high level computer specialists to help evade the law enforcement, coordinate shipments of illicit drugs and launder money.

The law on this do not seem to be adequate and the 'Convention on Cyber-crime', which entered into force on July 1, 2004, is to date the only multi-lateral treaty dealing with that problem.

Another challenging fall-out on the communication revolution is the emergence of 'rogue' pharmacies that are encouraging drug abuse among vulnerable groups. For example, the report observes that in the United States where the abuse of prescription drugs by young adults has been rising sharply since 2002, 34 illegal Internet pharmacies dispensed more than 98 million dosage units of hydrocodone products during 2006.

In India, illegal Internet pharmacies are not in vogue. But they could emerge soon. In any case, pharmacists in India mostly do not insist on prescriptions, making it easy for customers to buy drugs across the counter. The battle against narcotic drugs is only getting more complicated and that does not auger well for the world's most populous region, already mired in terrorism and strife.

BY KRISHNA KUMAR,

(Dated 07.03.2009)

Sukhwinder's is a despairing familiar story in drug-plagued Punjab. The vibrant Punjab that has ushered in the Green Revolution is today living in dazed stupor, as 67 per cent of the rural households in the State have at least one drug addict, a survey conducted by the Department of Social Security Development of Women & Children reveals.

Once an affluent village in Amritsar District, Maqboolpura has come to be known as a "widow village", where almost every home has lost some of the male members to the menace of drugs. Drug addiction has become a stigma that belies claims of prosperity in the state.

The vibrancy of Punjab is virtually a myth, as no cereals are being sold here by the youth, especially drug addicts (Amali is the local term used for addicts), to earn their livelihood. Instead, many sell their blood to procure the daily dose of deadly, and even beg on the streets to satisfy their addiction.

Sukhwinder was once caught by the in charge of the blood bank in his district when he went there to sell his blood. His skinny frame, death-like pallor, deep sunken eyes, and particularly the multiple injection marks on his arms, gave him in, telling the tale of his notorious past. "It is no longer a question of a village getting ruined. The whole state is in the strangle-hold of this death trap", informs Virsa Singh Valtoha, ruling party MLA from the Valtoha constituency that spread across 96 km along the Indian-Pakistan border. "It is complete disaster all the way as the number of addicts keeps on increasing", he rues.

Younger victims

Not only are more and more people getting hooked to drugs, unfortunately, they are falling prey to lethal habit at a much younger age. Youths gets lured in to the world of drugs by tasting bhuki, which grows like a wild grass freely available in the fields. Or they take gutka or tobacco pouches.

"The problem assumed epidemic proportions in the rural areas where unemployment is rampant," says a patron of Punarjyot, an NGO working for welfare of youth in Punjab. A whole generation is as good as destroyed. Not a single village is without scores of drug addicts,"

Once hooked, these young men graduate to cough syrups like Phensadryl and Corex. Proxyvon, Dormant 10, Diazepam Tablets. From this stage they, then move on to a more lethal menu of opium, charas, ganja, mandrax, smack, heroin, lizards' tails and many more items like application of shoe polish in hair while sitting in the sun, smelling petrol and taking Iodex spread on bread, to get that heady feeling. "Peer influence, thrill-seeking and curiosity about drugs were found to be man factors that make youth take to drugs",

observes an official of Spring Dale Senior School, Amritsar. With the consumption of intoxicants having become so wide-spread most boys treat as introduction to them as some kind of a coming-of-age ceremony.

The sordid story of drug addiction begins out of a curious adventure and soon turns into a nightmare. "I have seen my colleague's son selling off his land and wife's jewellery to procure his daily dose," says Surinderpal Singh, an English teacher at a Government School in Narli. "It is really frightening as he sometimes asks his mother to shoot him in order to save him from this vicious circle."

The spread of AIDS too, is linked to the malady due to the use of injectible intoxicants. The death rate and the number of HIV positive cases have increased by 60 per cent due to rampant use of intoxicants. As per reports, within just one year hundreds of youths have lost their lives to drugs.

Deadly drug stores

The scenario is becoming grim rapidly, say medical experts and social workers, due to mushrooming of illegal chemists' shops, which are adding fuel to the fire that is destroying Punjab. Even a small village with a population of about 2000 has at least 10 to 12 chemist shops, without any physician of general practitioner nearby.

"Many chemists are surviving on these addicts as they provide drug to them without prescription. Injectible intoxicants, tablets and syrup are easy available," says Dr. Deepak Sahdev, of EMC Super Specialty Hospital, Amritsar. "Even many of the so-called de-addiction centres are actually proving to be addiction centres. These are, in fact, supplying drug to the inmates."

The number of such shops, mostly selling drugs, and de-addiction centres, being run to fleece the patients, has increased at an incredible rate in the state. "A misconception about de-addiction is being spread in Punjab with some centres promising de-addiction with laser therapy," says Dr. Debasish Basu, Professor, Drug De-addiction Centre at PGIMER (Post-graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research), Chandigarh. "Most of the privately run de-addiction Centres lack basic facilities and are there just to mint money."

Media reports have often revealed inhuman treatment being meted out to drug addicts at private de-addiction Centres where they are even chained and beaten up mercilessly on the pretext of being disciplined. In Mohali, workers of a local de-addiction centre recently dumped a youth at the gate of his house after de developed medical complications. The youth died later.

The Punjab Government has, of last, started conducting raids on illegal de-addiction centres in the state.

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FATAL ATTRACTION) continued
(Dated 07.03.2009)

The increase in the number of patients at de-addiction centre in the PGI is alarming. The institute gets 1,000 patients at a walk in clinics every year, while 500 patients are registered in the OPD. Nearly 250 addicts are being treated as in-patients.

Chain reaction

“Drug addiction is a chain reaction. One person ropes in the others into it,” explains Dr. Basu.

Vikas, a student of BBA, narrates his dreadful experience of trying to make his batch-mates attend a seminar on the issue. They sought smack as compensation,” says Vikas. “They also forced me to take some pills bought from a nearby chemist.”

Even Punjabi kudi (girls) are in the grip of this menace. Kirat, a student dental college in Dera Bassi, revealed that many of her friends sail through the strain of pressure of examinations with the help of the ‘stuff’. “A cigarette break is quite normal. Pills are provided in a purse if you need more stamina,” she reveals. Girls also prefer cough syrups to other deadly forms of intoxicants. They get their ‘quota’ from young peddlers, mostly boyfriends, who operate in the vicinity of co-educational institutions.

Trading death

Smuggling and narco-terrorism are a natural corollary of drug menace. Youth are able to make a quick buck through drug trafficking. “We are able to confiscate only 10 per cent of the smuggled narcotic substance. The rest is consumed in the market,” reveals a senior Narcotic Control Bureau officer in Chandigarh. There are recoveries occasionally, but they are not even the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

For several years, Punjab was only a transit point for smack from Afghanistan, which was being routed to other parts of the world or the metros of the country. “Punjab is no more just a transit point now. The Afghanistan smack is being sold here and a large number of youths have taken to it,” says an official of Narcotic Control Bureau.

The drug trade has increased 30 to 40 per cent in the last year, ever since the cross-border civilian movement has increased between India and Pakistan.

Recently, on Christmas eve, the Punjab Police recovered 50 kg heroin worth of Rs 250 crore in the international market from a young brother-sister duo in Phagwara. The Narcotic Control Bureau, Chandigarh, reports that the number of registered cases of heroin smuggling has increased manifold since 1998, and more than 1,200 kg of the drug had been seized during the last period. The data suggests that since 2004 more than four kg heroin has been seized.

The report also suggests that cocaine, charas, methaqualone, ephedrine, acetic anhydride, and amphetamine are some of the other drugs flowing in the state. Since the cultivation of poppy is licensed in

certain parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, drug trafficking from western borders as well, oils the drug cauldron in the state.

“International drug cartel and terrorists operating in neighbouring countries are actively involved in drug smuggling,” says a police official. Social activist, however, believe that a police-level drive is not sufficient to deal with the situation.

“The war against drug menace cannot be fought in a piecemeal fashion,” believes Dr. Manjith Singh, Professor, Department of Sociology, Punjab University. “People have to wake up to the gravity of the situation. Punjab takes pride in its Green Revolution. Now to get rid the state of the malady of drugs, we need another revolution. But no one knows how long it will take,” However, for many like Sukhwinder Singh it is too late.

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He lost his mother, wife, job to drugs

The Tribune

Dated - May 09th 2009.

Chitleen K. Sethi,
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

GURDASPUR, MAY 08

Amit (32) has come back from a hellhole, lucky to be alive to tell his story. Father of a five-years-old son, Amit has lost his mother, wife and mother-in-law to drugs.

From a broken family, Amit's childhood was divided between his father who lived in Hisar and his mother in Jaunpur. "My mother's best friend was a nurse there and was addicted to narcotic injections. She dragged my mother into the habit. My mother-in-law died leaving her daughter in my mother's care. I married her without knowing that she too was an addict," related Amit.

Trained in computers, Amit had a well-paying job in Gurgaon. "We shifted there and when I came to know about my wife's addiction, I tried to get her out of it. She would promise me, leave the injections for a few days, but then relapsed. I told her that leaving drugs was not tough and to prove it I started taking the injections thinking I would get out whenever I wanted. But before I knew it I was hooked. I tried to kick the habit, but just could not. On some days I used to take over 30 injections," said Amit.

The two had a son and within a year of his birth, Amit's wife died, she was only 23. "I became too weak to work and lost the job. I came back to Hisar doing odd jobs. Drugs took my mother's life some years later and I was left alone to take care of my son. That is when I decided to get out of this hell. My father brought me to

this centre here and I went through the therapy," said Amit.

He is now totally cured and is working in the same centre as a computer teacher.

Amit is one of the many success stories. Drug habit can be kicked. It is difficult but not impossible," says Romesh Mahajan, project director, Red Cross De-addiction Centre.

Since the inception of the centre in 1991 we have treated more than 10,000 addicts. Another more than 30,000 addicts have been treated through our round-the-clock OPD. But there seems to be no end to this problem. Almost 70 per cent of young male population in Gurdaspur is in the grip of one or the other drug," he says.

The 30-bed centre is working under the aegis of the Red Cross Society, Punjab, and getting grants from the Centre. The inmates are kept free of cost for the duration of their treatment. A relative or attendant stays in the centre with the patient. "We have a gymnasium, a library and games etc, for the inmates," says Mahajan.

We have realized that the cured addicts would need jobs and after their treatment we train them in computers and other skills that have a job potential. The training is also free of cost and to run this facility I give back my salary to the institution," he says. Agriculture Minister Sucha Singh Langah, who is from this area, pays for the food that is given to the centre inmates.

"Since the problem is ever increasing, we have written to the government to increase the bed capacity to 50," Mahajan added.

Drug addiction spreads

The Tribune

Date : May 09th 2009.

by Gobind Thukral

Three decades ago we visited the inner Malwa area in Punjab to find out the level of drug addiction. We heard shocking tales of how youth were getting hooked to opium, bhukki and narcotics. Worse, pharmaceutical combinations meant to treat diseases were being consumed for a high.

At Bathinda's Red Cross De-addiction Centre, some of the well built youth hailing from rich land-owning families looked pale and forlorn. Some were even married and had children. Doctors.

Parents cursed their fate as wives and sisters prayed to the almighty to help the husbands and brothers recover. Farm labourers were more miserable as not many had relatives and friends to help them get out of the killer habit. In all, it was a miserable story of hopelessness.

Those were then the sad tales from the Malwa of Punjab. Now drug addiction has spread to all corners of Punjab and Chandigarh. In many villages, towns and cities, not a single family is spared./ haggard youth, locally called "smackia", greet you at bus terminals, in street corners, close to chemist shops and liquor vends. At marriages and other social gatherings they form separate groups.

Elderly advise you to steer clear of these louts. Many parents and elders wish them either dead or move to some foreign lands with the hope that work would reform them.

A senior doctor at Chandigarh's PGI has estimated the number of drug addicts as several lakhs in Punjab. He also revealed shocking tales of ingenuity like roasting of lizards or even consuming pain-killers and tranquillizers of various forms. Narcotics powder and heroin seized in Punjab in the last three years is sufficient as a single dose for over 50 lakh people.

Once hooked, young men soon graduate cough syrups, and then move on to a lethal diet of opium, charas, ganja, mandrax, smack and heroin. Those who can not afford these take a deep breathe of petrol or spread Iodex on bread to get a momentary thrill.

Studies by PGI doctors over the years have found peer pressure, thrill seeking and even curiosity about drugs as the main factor that make youth take to drugs. Lack of any purpose in life was another key reason.

Myths relating to sexual potency, thrill-seeking and punitive attitude of elders and lack of support during periods of stress were other reasons for drug addiction. This widespread consumption of intoxicants gives a false sense of coming-of-age status for youth.

The Punjab Department of Social Security and Development of Women and Children conducted a

survey in 2005 and found 67 per cent of the rural households in Punjab having one drug addict each. The report that covered Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Muktsar and Gurdaspur found narcotics were the most common form of addiction.

Dr. Ravinder Singh Sandhu, Professor, Department of Sociology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, found more than 73 per cent of drug addicts belong to the age group of 16 to 35 years. There are numerous studies to warn the political and social leaders of the dangerous situation where Punjab has landed in.

Intriguingly, the excise policy followed by the successive Governments is liberal and aims at getting more and more taxes through more and more liquor vends.

Currently, the revenue is around Rs. 1728 crore as opposed to Rs. 1656 crore in 2007 – 08.

There were 6902 liquor vends in Punjab. In Chandigarh there are more liquor vends than government primary schools. Now add to this illicit distillation, almost two times and the sixth river of Punjab is full of intoxicants.

There is a well-knit nexus that makes the supply and sale of drugs a smooth lucrative business and it puts to shame the government lethargic corrupt functioning. The smuggler-police-politician nexus, added by a chain of retail outlets, work smoothly. Interestingly, politicians and law-enforcement agents blame each other for the mess. We all know how politicians use smugglers for money and musclemen.

Chemists along with quacks, drug peddlers and truck drivers have been identified as main supply source of drugs in Punjab. Chemists provide drug to addicts with out a prescription/. Even many so-call de-addiction centres are actually proving to be addiction centres. These are, in fact, supplying d rugs to the inmates. The number of chemist shops and de-addiction centres has increased at an unbelievable rate. Private de-addiction centres lack basic facilities but earn a quick buck.

Now during the election time, the supply is maintained by the political leader to please voters. Several thousand new drug addicts have been added during present elections.

The problem has assumed epidemic proportion in the rural areas where the education level is low and unemployment rampant. Not a single village is without scores of drug addicts.

Is this not the time for the leaders like Mr. Parkash Singh Badal and Capt. Amrinder Singh to at least instruct their candidates and cadres not to supply drugs to voters?

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Dated :- December 13th 2009.

Sukhwinder Malhi | TNN

Gurdaspur: The reformed Drug Addicts of Gurdaspur De-addiction Centre washed and scrubbed the Civil Hospital campus on Saturday. Rendering this social service, they looked happy and contented doing the scavenging work voluntarily, despite the fact some of them came from middle class background and had not done menial works.

Romesh Mahajan Project Director of the centre said the idea was conceived and executed after inmates expressed their willingness for voluntary participation. He hoped it would help to inculcate in them the sense of belonging to society and remove sense of alienation, which took them to drugs in the first place.

“The Community service not only brings them back their sense of belonging to society but also acts as mental cleansing and removes their craving or dependence on drugs” said Mahajan

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cannabis cultivation while opium in being increasingly processed into morphine and heroin.

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by Gobind Thakral **Drug addiction spreads**

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Myths relating to sexual potency, thrill seeking and punitive attitude of elders and lack of support during periods of stress were other reasons for drug addiction. This widespread consumption of intoxicants gives a false sense of coming-of-age status for youth.

The Punjab Department of Social Security and Development of Women and Children conducted a

report that covered Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Muktsar and Gurdaspur found narcotics were the most common form of addiction.

Dr. Ravinder Singh Sandhu, Professor, Department of Sociology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, found more than 73 per cent of drug addicts belong to the age group of 16 to 35 years. There are numerous studies to warn the political and social leaders of the dangerous situation where Punjab has landed in.

Intriguingly, the excise policy followed by the successive Governments is liberal and aims at getting more and more taxes through more and more liquor vends.

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There is a well-knit nexus that makes the supply and sale of drugs a smooth lucrative business and it puts to shame the government lethargic corrupt functioning. The smuggler-police-politician nexus, added by a chain of retail outlets, work smoothly. Interestingly, politicians and law-enforcement agents blame each other for the mess. We all know how politicians use smugglers for money and musclemen.

Chemists along with quacks, drug peddlers and truck drivers have been identified as main supply source of drugs in Punjab. Chemists provide drug to addicts with out a prescription/. Even many so-call de-addiction centres are actually proving to be addiction centres. These are, in fact, supplying d rugs to the inmates. The number of chemist shops and de-addiction centres has increased at an unbelievable rate. Private de-addiction centres lack basic facilities but earn a quick buck.

Now during the election time, the supply is maintained by the political leader to please voters. Several thousand new drug addicts have been added during present elections.

The problem has assumed epidemic proportion in the rural areas where the education level is low and unemployment rampant. Not a single village is without scores of drug addicts.

Is this not the time for the leaders like Mr. Parkash Singh Badal and Capt. Amrinder Singh to at least instruct their candidates and cadres not to supply drugs to voters?

Sukhwinder's is a despairing familiar story in drug-plagued Punjab. The vibrant Punjab that has ushered in the Green Revolution is today living in dazed stupor, as 67 per cent of the rural households in the State have at least one drug addict, a survey conducted by the Department of Social Security Development of Women & Children reveals.

Once an affluent village in Amritsar District, Maqboolpura has come to be known as a "widow village", where almost every home has lost some of the male members to the menace of drugs. Drug addiction has become a stigma that belies claims of prosperity in the state.

The vibrancy of Punjab is virtually a myth, as no cereals are being sold here by the youth, especially drug addicts (Amali is the local term used for addicts), to earn their livelihood. Instead, many sell their blood to procure the daily dose of deadly, and even beg on the streets to satisfy their addiction.

Sukhwinder was once caught by the in charge of the blood bank in his district when he went there to sell his blood. His skinny frame, death-like pallor, deep sunken eyes, and particularly the multiple injection marks on his arms, gave him in, telling the tale of his notorious past. "It is no longer a question of a village getting ruined. The whole state is in the strangle-hold of this death trap", informs Virsa Singh Valtoha, ruling party MLA from the Valtoha constituency that spread across 96 km along the Indian-Pakistan border. "It is complete disaster all the way as the number of addicts keeps on increasing", he rues.

Younger victims

Not only are more and more people getting hooked to drugs, unfortunately, they are falling prey to lethal habit at a much younger age. Youths gets lured in to the world of drugs by tasting bhuki, which grows like a wild grass freely available in the fields. Or they take gutka or tobacco pouches.

"The problem assumed epidemic proportions in the rural areas where unemployment is rampant," says a patron of Punarjyot, an NGO working for welfare of youth in Punjab. A whole generation is as good as destroyed. Not a single village is without scores of drug addicts,"

Once hooked, these young men graduate to cough syrups like Phensadryl and Corex. Proxyvon, Dormant 10, Diazepam Tablets. From this stage they, then move on to a more lethal menu of opium, charas, ganja, mandrax, smack, heroin, lizards' tails and many more items like application of shoe polish in hair while sitting in the sun, smelling petrol and taking Iodex spread on bread, to get that heady feeling. "Peer influence, thrill-seeking and curiosity about drugs were found to be man factors that make youth take to drugs",

observes an official of Spring Dale Senior School, Amritsar. With the consumption of intoxicants having become so wide-spread most boys treat as introduction to them as some kind of a coming-of-age ceremony.

The sordid story of drug addiction begins out of a curious adventure and soon turns into a nightmare. "I have seen my colleague's son selling off his land and wife's jewellery to procure his daily dose," says Surinderpal Singh, an English teacher at a Government School in Narli. "It is really frightening as he sometimes asks his mother to shoot him in order to save him from this vicious circle."

The spread of AIDS too, is linked to the malady due to the use of injectible intoxicants. The death rate and the number of HIV positive cases have increased by 60 per cent due to rampant use of intoxicants. As per reports, within just one year hundreds of youths have lost their lives to drugs.

Deadly drug stores

The scenario is becoming grim rapidly, say medical experts and social workers, due to mushrooming of illegal chemists' shops, which are adding fuel to the fire that is destroying Punjab. Even a small village with a population of about 2000 has at least 10 to 12 chemist shops, without any physician of general practitioner nearby.

"Many chemists are surviving on these addicts as they provide drug to them without prescription. Injectible intoxicants, tablets and syrup are easy available," says Dr. Deepak Sahdev, of EMC Super Specialty Hospital, Amritsar. "Even many of the so-called de-addiction centres are actually proving to be addiction centres. These are, in fact, supplying drug to the inmates."

The number of such shops, mostly selling drugs, and de-addiction centres, being run to fleece the patients, has increased at an incredible rate in the state. "A misconception about de-addiction is being spread in Punjab with some centres promising de-addiction with laser therapy," says Dr. Debasish Basu, Professor, Drug De-addiction Centre at PGIMER (Post-graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research), Chandigarh. "Most of the privately run de-addiction Centres lack basic facilities and are there just to mint money."

Media reports have often revealed inhuman treatment being meted out to drug addicts at private de-addiction Centres where they are even chained and beaten up mercilessly on the pretext of being disciplined. In Mohali, workers of a local de-addiction centre recently dumped a youth at the gate of his house after de developed medical complications. The youth died later.

The Punjab Government has, of last, started conducting raids on illegal de-addiction centres in the state.

(ContinuedPlease Turn Over)

SHUNNING DRUGS, YOUTHS CLEAN UP HOSPITAL

The Tribune

(Dated 13.12.2009)

Varinder Singh

Gurdaspur, December 13

Throwing their addiction to drugs to the winds and embracing life in a positive and inspiring way, as many as 37 drug addicts joined hands and cleaned the civil hospital here yesterday.

Hailing from different parts of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana and undergoing treatment at the Red Cross Drug De-Addiction Centre, the youngsters earned applause from the patients and the hospital staff for their act.

These addicts, who age between 16 and 30 years, resolved to shun drugs forever. They have already won half of their battle against drugs by completing a major part of their ongoing 35-day long De-addiction course after being motivated by de-addiction center's project director Romesh Mahajan and counselors, including Saroj Bala, HS Bedi, Raghbir Singh and Rajneesh.

Patients and staff of the Local Civil Hospital were amazed to see a team of youngsters descending early in the morning to pick up the job of cleaning the hospital complex. They not only made the OPD appear spick and span in no time, but also

cleaned all other wards of the hospital during their three-hour long" operation clean-up", which concluded at around 1p.m.

Patients and the Local staff of the civil Hospital were amazed to see a team of youngsters turning up early in the morning to clean the Hospital complex

"What proved to be most satisfying for us was the response of patients and the hospital staff," said civil surgeon Dr. NS Batra. "We are overwhelmed to see that we have not been discarded by the society. Now we have started feeling once again that we are also part and parcel of the society. We are very happy to have done this work for other," said some of the visibly elated youngsters.

Most of them hail from far off place like Bilaspur and Chamba in Himachal Pradesh and they had been into drugs like cough syrup, chars, smack and liquor for a couple of years before landing at the center.

Mahajan said the youngsters were strong-willed and had resolved against consuming drugs in future.

Drug addiction spreads

by Gobind Thukral

Three decades ago we visited the inner Malwa area in Punjab to find out the level of drug addiction. We heard shocking tales of how youth were getting hooked to opium, bhukki and narcotics. Worse, pharmaceutical combinations meant to treat diseases were being consumed for a high.

At Bathinda's Red Cross De-addiction Centre, some of the well built youth hailing from rich land-owning families looked pale and forlorn. Some were even married and had children. Doctors.

Parents cursed their fate as wives and sisters prayed to the almighty to help the husbands and brothers recover. Farm labourers were more miserable as not many had relatives and friends to help them get out of the killer habit. In all, it was a miserable story of hopelessness.

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The Punjab Department of Social Security and Development of Women and Children conducted a

survey in 2005 and found 67 per cent of the rural households in Punjab having one drug addict each. The report that covered Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Muktsar and Gurdaspur found narcotics were the most common form of addiction.

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Keeping in view the horrific state of menace of addiction prevailing in Punjab, especially in the border area, and the irrepressible and continuously flourishing trade of drug trafficking either from across the Indo Pak border or from other states around, the Police Department of Punjab is determined to take stern steps to crush this state of affair with an iron rod. It is also a matter of great concern for a large number of people to see mushrooming of the illicit/unauthorized/ private factories manufacturing spurious medicinal intoxicants, which are available at a very low cost and that too with much ease. This has received loud applauding from all and sundry which are in some way or the other, are affected by this menace.

Battling addiction

Red cross center doing yeomen's service

Ravi dhaliwal/tribune news service

Gurdaspur, September 4

Young Ajit Singh used to brim with youthful exuberance till he caught up with the drug vice. The Batala youngster melted under sustained peer pressure and started taking poppy husk and later graduated to using opium. At the age of 18, Ajit's life was smashed to smithereens and from morning till evening he was on lookout for the next dose. Despite being enveloped by darkness all around him, Ajit sighted some light at the end of the tunnel. A relative took him to the Gurdaspur Red Cross integrated rehabilitation center for addicts. Now with a spring in his step, a fully-cured Ajit successfully runs a cycle repair shop in Batala and earns enough for his and two kids.

The case of Ajit is symptomatic of thousands of other youths in Gurdaspur district. The Red Cross center has treated 36,352 addicts till now in the outdoor patient department, while 12,570 addicts got a new lease of life by getting indoor treatment. The centre has gained a name for itself and patients from as far as Siliguri, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi have been treated. An interesting feature of the centre is that the reply percentage is just 17 to 20 as compared to the national average of 30 per cent.

However, project director Romesh Mahajan says he has identified hundreds of drug peddlers in the adjoining cities of Batala and Pathankot who need to be reined in if the source of drugs is to be nipped in the bud. He says influential people like Keemto and Pawan Kumar of Gandhi Camp, Batala, are doing roaring business while the police, for some inexplicable reasons, is turning a blind eye to their nefarious activities.

He added that he also brought to the notice of the cops the activities of Vijay Kumar and Pawan Kumar, both labourers working at the Batala co-operative sugar Mills, who openly sold narcotics. Likewise, Mahajan says in Pathankot the worst affected areas are the new overbridge, Balmiki Mohalla, Dhangupir Dargah, and MH road.

He claimed that just recently he had forwarded a list of 23 drug peddlers to Gurdaspur SSP Lok Nath Angra, who, on his part, assured him that he would rein in the peddle.

Mahajan disclosed that the latest fad among the youth was to taste typewriter fluid which gives a feeling of euphoria.

The project director remarked, "we also work on the addict's psychology and emotional security and we make him search for a new meaning in life" however, there are many skeptics who say that despite the best efforts of the Red Cross centre, drug addiction is so rampant that every third household is affected by drugs and the authorities should take some concrete steps to check the menace by involving NGOs and well-meaning citizens.

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FIGHTING DRUG ABUSE

THE TRIBUNE

Friday December 24, 2010

Drug abuse is a psychiatric, psychological and social problem (“Drug hits Adolescents “ by Rajat Ray and Anju Dhawan, Dec 18). While persons of all ages and places can fall into the trap of drug abuse, and the most susceptible among them are the youth. Not surprisingly, drug abuse has almost become an epidemic among the youth.

New Intoxicant adds to woes of drug-ridden Gurdaspur district

Red Cross De-addiction Centre Identifies the lethal drug, sold under the brand name of “Shivam Munakka” and written to administration to check the misuse

RAVI DHALIWAL
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Gurdaspur, February

While every third household in this border district affected by the scourge of drugs, the district administration While every third household in this border district affected by the scourge of drugs, the district administration and different NGOs are fighting a losing battle.

But the Red Cross De-addiction Centre at Babbehali, near here, apart from treating addicts, has, after an intensive research, identified a new drug which is ruining the lives of youth in this belt.

Project Coordinator Romesh Mahajan has written to the Deputy Commissioner that a new drug being sold under the brand name of “Shivam Munakka” has entered the market in a big way and is available at every nook and corner of the city at extremely low rates.

Mahajan observed that thousands of youth had discarded traditional drugs like opium, poppy husk and psychotropic substances and have now turned to “Shivam Munakka” which, he said, was more lethal than the traditional drugs.

In his letter, Mahajan has written that, “The large-scale consumption of the newly introduced drug is playing havoc with the young generation in the district where every third household, according to reports, is affected with drugs. The drug is cheap and to compound the matters it is easily available over

the counter. Keeping in view the disastrous effects of the drug I request you to take stringent steps to check its availability.”

The Project Coordinator has urged the DC to impose Section 144 of the CrPC so that the drug is banned.

Mahajan said that the contents mentioned on the packaging did not reveal much but the drug actually was a derivative of marijuana and cannabis. Doctors at the de-addiction centre disclosed that the after-effects of the drug include memory loss, rapid mood changes and attacking near and dear ones without any provocation.

A doctor, preferring anonymity, revealed that “Shivam Munakka” was not only drug playing havoc with young and impressionable minds. The other drug, which is commonly used by the youth in this district, is white fluid normally used to erase printed words. “A large number of teenagers are approaching the centre for treatment of white fluid. Recently a young boy from Dinanagar due to over sniffing. White fluid is a stationary product and under normal circumstances it should be made available only at stationary shops. However it is selling like hot cakes at grocery shops across the city and that too at a premium.”

Gurdaspur SSP Varinder Pal Singh said, “We are aware of the enormity of the situation. We will be forming special teams in collaboration with the health authorities to check the spread of the highly toxic “Shivam Munakka”.

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Today, drugs have the potential to threaten the life of a nation as a whole, what to talk about Punjab alone? Drugs are affecting our productivity, disrupting academic work, shattering families, increasing crime, and overburdening social service agencies. The factors leading to drug addiction are lack of parental care and supervision, lack of moral and religious education, the influence of the media and pop culture, broken homes, disdain for authority, peer pressure, etc, leading the youth to seek refuge in drugs. Drugs relieve their tension and counter depression, although this period of ecstasy is short-lived.

Although drug abuse has a hoary past, it has become extremely convoluted, widespread and menacing today. Common painkillers are stocked in huge quantities by peddlers

and openly sold. Known by the name of grass weed, maal and hash, cannabis is illegally available at cheap prices. All this is done despite the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, under which possession of drugs is an offence. Those who smuggle drugs and lure youth boys and girls should be punished severely. The enforcing agencies should drastically reduce the availability of illicit drugs and smash the distribution network. They must continue to make concerted efforts to rid the society of this evil which need to be fought at all levels – local, national and global. As drug trafficking is also patronized by some politicians and the bureaucrats, a joint task force of the police, the BSF and the Health Department must take up the challenge with active support from the drug firms, social organizations and educational institutions. Victims of drug abuse should be given a chance of rehabilitation.

Clinics can detoxify addicts and educational institutions should guide their pupils to get rid of this social evil. Families and NGOs can help rehabilitate the addicts.

**PUNJAB SPECIAL
HINDUSTAN TIMES**

10.11.2011

**RED CROSS
AWARENESS RALLY
AGAINST DRUG
ADDICTION**

Gurdaspur:- Aiming to curb the increasing drug menace in the rural areas of Gurdaspur District, the local Red Cross drug de-addiction Centre, along with Shaheed Sainik Parivar Suraksha Parishad and NRI Sabha, jointly organized a procession to create awareness about the ill effects of drug addiction at village Deeda

Sainian near Dina Nagar on Wednesday. The village is notorious for illicit distilling and popularly known as Deeda Distillery. Deputy Commissioner Mohinder Singh Kainth, while flagging off the procession stressed upon launching a comprehensive move to eradicate drug abuse among the youth. Following this 15 addicts from the village decided to get themselves admitted in the local Red Cross Drug De-addiction Centre for treatment. Skits, lectures, poetry recitation and songs were organized to motivate youths to avoid drug abuse
HTC

De-Addiction Centre Gets a new building at Babehali

Gurdaspur: - The Gurdaspur District De-Addiction and Rehabilitation centre run by the Red Cross Society has got a new home near Babehali Village.

Built at a cost of Rs. 30 lakhs the new complex include a library, a cinema house, and a yoga room. Lauding the role of the de-addiction centre Agriculture Chief Parliamentary Secretary and Gurdaspur M.L.A Gurbachan Singh Babehali said while the de-addiction centre is one of its

own kind in the region having guided youth to shun drugs and drinking, it has carved a niche for itself in four northern states of the Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and J-K as several inmates from these states were reformed and rehabilitated along with thousands of others at this centre.

De-addiction centre Chairman Romesh Mahajan said while the Gurdaspur district figured among the worst districts of the Punjab where drug abuse was most prevalent the situation was alarming as 70 percent of youth were taking to intoxicants in one form or the other.

Caught in drugs, now hooked to life, courtesy Red cross

Kamaljit Singh Kamal

Gurdaspur:- The problem of drug addiction runs so deep in the border districts of the state that it threatens to wipe out the younger generation, sparing not even the small children.

Hooked to correction fluid, Madhav, a 10-year old boy from Pathankot, was brought to the red cross drug de-addiction and rehabilitation centre in gurdaspur a month ago when his health started deteriorating. A student of Class 3rd, he fell in bad company and started taking intoxicants like charas, and bhang with his classmates before “graduating” to correction fluid.

When my health started deteriorating my parents became worried and brought me here. When I did not have the money to purchase correction fluid I would steal it from the house.

I simply could not live without it. But I have fully recovered now. I have even gained 5 kg in the past one month, “said Madhav, who will be discharged from the centre on the Monday.

I have decided not to consume any intoxicants ever in my life. I will also ask my friends to stay away from drugs,’ he said’.

Another inmate of the centre was a catering inspector of the railways who was addicted to cough syrup. “I used to consume cough syrup worth Rs 2,200

everyday. I spent whatever I earned on buying cough syrup. I used to purchase it from a known contact at consume cough syrup worth Rs 2,200 everyday. I spent whatever I earned on buying cough syrup. I used to purchase it from a known contact at wholesale rate; otherwise I would not have been able to afford it. I am now back on my feet and will not touch any drug ever again, he said.

The 50 bed centre has treated more than 13,000 indoor patients, including 45 women, of the 20-40 age group and attended to more than 40,000 patients in OPD so far.

Center’s project director Ramesh Mahajan said that they were providing everything to patients, including medicines, food and clothing, free of cost. “We are also imparting them free training in hardware, software, networking, computer and mobile repair and vocational training in beekeeping, dairy farming, mushroom cultivation and fish and poultry farming under our rehabilitation programme, “he said”.

Mahajan has written a letter to the district magistrate, demanding a ban on the sale of “Shivam Munakka”, which is available in the small pouches priced at Rs 2.50 each. He said it contained ‘bhang’ (cannabis), which could lead to memory loss, frequent mood swings, abusive behavior, panic attacks, and depression. He also urged the administration to regulate the sale of correction fluid.

**De-Addiction centre seeks funds to upgrade Infrastructure
Written to Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**

Ravi Dhaliwal /Tribune News Service

Girdaspur, 29 December

With the scourge in the Drug Addiction in Majha Region spreading its tentacles deep and wide, the Red cross De-Addiction Treatment-cum-Rehabilitation Centre has written to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for funds to upgrade the centre's infrastructure. It has sought increases in bed capacity at the centre from 30 to 50.

Drug Addiction among youth, particularly those belonging to rural areas, has spread like bougainvilleas in the Region and the onus has fallen on the Red Cross centre here to treat and rehabilitate youth. The centre has got immense success in treating addicts. Till now, 48,922 addicts have got a new lease of the life at the centre, which has gained a name for itself in areas as far as siliguri, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi.

Project Director Romesh Mahajan claimed that with Addicts coming to the centre registering a phenomenal increase, the existing infrastructure has been stretched to a wire. This is precisely the reason why he has written a letter to the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry seeking up gradation of infrastructure.

The letter states that? It is becoming difficult for the centre to treat addicts with the meager funds being received from your Ministry through the NGO, the Indian Red Cross Society, Punjab State Branch, and Chandigarh. Moreover, there is a heavy rush of addicts seeking admission for treatment because of an extensive campaign launched by the District Administration and the police

against drug peddlers and traffickers. It is in this context that we request you to kindly sanction up gradation of the centre from 30 to 50 beds?

Interestingly, the Gurdaspur District Social Security Officer has been regularly sending in his recommendations for up gradation of infrastructure for the past three years. He has also been enclosing the year wise progress reports for the last three years but to no avail. The Officer has also asked for the grant of Rs 23.62 lakh for the purchase of additional infrastructure including beds, tables, sets of linen, blankets, and office equipments which is admissible for a 50- bedded hospital as per norms laid down in the manual in respect of the Union Government? Central sector scheme for Prevention of Alcoholism and Substances (Drugs) Abuse.

Meanwhile, Project Director Romesh Mahajan has urged Gurdaspur Member Parliament Partap Bajwa to put in a request to Mukul Wasnik, Minister for the Social Justice and Empowerment to expedite the process of up gradation of the centre. Mahajan disclosed that Bajwa enjoys a personal rapport with the centre may receive the grant soon.

There are many Sceptics who feel that the scourge of addiction is so powerful that up gradation of the centre may not be the panacea of all ills relating to drugs in the region. A former addict, whose soul and body have now been? Cleansed? At the centre, disclosed that he knows of hundreds of drug peddlers in the adjoining cities of Batala and Pathankot who need to be reigned in if the malaise of drugs is to be nipped in the bud

DRUG ABUSE NEEDS TREATMENT, NOT JAIL

The U.S.A sees drug abuse as a public health problem as much as a crime issue and is seeking to learn from countries in Europe and else where about how to treat addiction as a disease, Barack Obama's drugs policy chief has said. Gil Kerlikowske, the US president's director of national drug control policy, said the US is taking a more balanced approach to substance abusers rather than fighting a war on drugs centered mainly on law enforcement.

National Highway-15, remember the name

Now, for the downside, Romesh Mahajan, who heads the Gurdaspur District Hotel Association, though happy with how NH-15 has changed lives is worried about the negative impact on the micro-economy of the small towns located on the way. “While acting as a catalyst for the development of the region, the highway has disturbed the economy of small towns. A majority of hotels and dhabas, which used to see a massive influx of tourists, are virtually on the verge of closure. Many have downed shutters. Several petrol pumps on the Pathankot-Amritsar stretch are recording just 50 per cent sales since not many commuters stop. Small-time vegetable and fruit sellers have disappeared from the scene,” he says.

The Tribune

dated: 23rd July 2017

Her Home without drugs

The answer seems to lie in the safe and nurturing environment of the centre and then at home. “Aftercare is vital. The main concern of all doctors is to integrate the women addicts back in society” says Dr. Romesh Mahajan, Project Director, Red Cross Drug de addiction Centre. He has successfully treated 67 women, mostly married. All of them are now well settled and happy. Their families hated them for taking drugs. Today the same families love them and say it in as many ways as they can.