

## The Epidemic of Drug Addiction in Punjab (India): The Narratives of Mortal Pleasure in Punjabi Literature

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Drug Addiction is a malicious evil spread very conspicuously in Punjab (India). Punjab, based on panj-ab (five Rivers), has been known as a land of scholars, writers, warriors, gurus, sufis and saints since Harappan age. Besides, it has been considered as nation's food bowl or bread basket. But Punjab has to face huge sufferings from partition of India in 1947, Green (greed) Revolution in 70s, state's suppression during Naxalite movement in mid 70s and militancy and counter-militancy in 80s and 90s. At present, Punjab is also in traumatic turmoil due to rampant unemployment, migration of youths to foreign lands, agricultural distress, ecological imbalance, the prevalence of drug addiction, etc. The enormous deaths due to the overdose of drugs reported in Punjab in recent times indicate towards the seriousness of the problem. However, no part of the globe is left untouched by the giant of drug addiction, but the states of poor and developing countries of Asia and Africa are in more serious and deeper crisis. Drug addiction in Punjab is more problematic than other states of India because it shares 553 km of boundaries with Pakistan and is easily approachable to Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) which has become the prime and favourable spot for drug smugglers. It seems that Punjabi youth has been turned into addicts by the bordering countries which may be called a kind of Narco-terrorism. Punjab has become a gateway for drug supply from Pakistan and Afghanistan to India though some of the drugs are being smuggled from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh also.

There has been a popular discourse in media and mainstream politics that all the youth of Punjab is involved in the menace of drug addiction but it is a fact that not all the youth but undeniably a substantial number is trapped in the web of drug addiction. Undoubtedly, the crisis of drug addiction in Punjab is in dangerously alarming state. It has now reached epidemic proportions and gradually grabbing the masses at large. Dr J.P.S. Bhatia, a psychiatrist running a rehabilitation center in Amritsar (Punjab), says about drug addiction in Punjab that "It's as if we're sitting on a time bomb that can explode at any time... it [the rate of addiction] is definitely on the rise and it is increasing so much that the scenario at the moment is that of an epidemic" (q. in Dummett) [1]. The most important fact is that Punjab is not the producer of the most of the drugs. P. S. Verma, a professor from Chandigarh based Institute of Development and Communication, in his article

"Punjab's Drug Problem: Contours and Characteristics" points out [2]:

Punjab neither produces the plant-based natural substances like opium, cannabis and their derivatives, nor manufactures the precursor chemicals which are processed into synthetic and psychotropic drugs. The most distinctive feature of the demand for illicit narcotic drugs in Punjab is that it is entirely met from outside the state through a supply network controlled by the local, interstate, and international criminal gangs. (40)

Drugs which are generally used in Punjab are alcohol, smoking tobacco, opium, poppy husk, gutka etc. and these drugs have ample representations in Punjabi novels, drama, fiction and poetry. But this paper is primarily concerned with narcotic, medical, synthetic and modern drugs and their representation in Punjabi Literature from various perspectives with particular reference to Mintu Gursaria's autobiography *Dakuan Da Munda* (Son of Dacoits), Manga Singh Antaal's autobiography *Shararti Tat: Sachi Katha* (The Mischievous: A True Saga), Gurmeet Kurialvi's story "Tu Jaa Daddy" (You Go Father) and Simran Dhaliwal's "Dark Portrait" [3-6].

It may be noted that this paper is a first attempt of its kind so far as representation of drug addiction in Punjabi Literature is concerned. It is a well-known fact that literature is the reflection/mirror of society. Besides, it influences and shapes the society. Literary narratives provide not only deeper understanding but also gives alternative discourse on the social problems and situations. Literary representations can be considerably helpful to understand the root cause of drug addiction. Addiction is highly complicated and ever evolving phenomenon which one needs to understand from multiple perspectives. Literary narratives represent all the exciting, ugly and complicated nuances of addiction. In fact, anti-drug addiction crusade focuses on three components: Addict, supplier of the drugs and manufacturer of the drug but misses the most important entity, i.e., the environment which facilitates and becomes the reason of drug addiction. To understand the environment which induces the person towards addiction, the knowledge of the social, cultural, religious, political, judicial, family institutions are prerequisite. In this context, literary narrative

can provide enough insights to understand the problematic of drug addiction. Literature is the representation of the suppressed voices of whole society and it also polemically critiques the cultural constructions and defunct myths around addiction, sensitizing the masses and raising awareness about the disease. Literature provides role models for those who come out of the marshland of addiction successfully. These narratives of role models can pave the way for the addicts to come out of addiction. That is why, a sub-genre “Drug Literature/Fiction/Drug Dystopias” in English literature has emerged in contemporary times but this phenomenon is underrepresented in Punjabi literature.

Punjabi literature, from the age of naths and jogis (7-8 century), has a long tradition to represent contemporary issues with pro-people stance. Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539), in the medieval period, questioned the rulers *raje sheehn mukadam kute* (kings are lions and their ministers are no less than dogs). Like that in love legends such as Heer, Sohni Mahiwal, Mirza Sahiba and Quissa Puran Bhagat depict the resistance of women in feudal society in the 19th century. In 20th century, the novels like *Pinjar* and poems like *aj akhan Varis Shah nu* (Today I invoke Waris Shah) by Amrita Pritam represent the tragedy of the Partition of India. The poetry of Avtar Pash, Lal Singh Dil and Sant Ram Udasi represents the naxalite movement of those times. The songs of Sahir Ludhianvi and Shiv Kumar Batalvi endorse progressivism. Gurdial Singh's novels indicate the paradigm shift in relations between landlords and sharecroppers. The plays of Gursharan Singh (Bhaji) critique the state politics in the contemporary times. There are many Indian and Punjabi movies and documentaries like *Udta Punjab* and *Glut- the Untold Stories of Punjab* that represent the crisis of drug addiction in Punjab. But surprisingly, much has not been written about the drug-addiction in Punjabi literature and a silence regarding this crisis has persisted. However, there are some young writers who have come up with the painful depiction of drug addiction through their narratives. Their writings depict the family ruins, destruction and miserable death of the addict. The writers like Mintu Gursaria, Gurmeet Kurialwi, Jasbir Rana, Simran Dhaliwal, Aneman Singh, Sukhraj Dhaliwal, Manga Singh Antaal and some others are writing vigorously about the prevalence of drug addiction in Punjab.

Mintu Gursaria's autobiography *Dakuan Da Munda* (Son of Dacoits) and Manga Singh Antaal's autobiography *Shararti Tat: Sachi Katha* (The Mischievous: A True Saga) are narratives of mislead youth. In these stories, being initially good players of Kabaddi and talented young men in the age group of 15-24, the protagonists fall into the trap of drug addiction. Simran Dhaliwal's *Ghor Kande* (Dark Portrait) represents an urban young man Gavy from a well settled business family. It points out that not only rural but also urban youth is also in the grab of drug addiction. Not only poor and marginalized strata of society but also upper middle-class youth are also the victims of this menace. Addiction causes destruction of lives regardless race, class, caste and location. Before falling into the trap of drugs, Gavy, in the age group of 15-24, is an intelligent student who tops every class. The story “Tu Jaa Daddy” (“You Go Father”) written by Gurmeet Kurialwi also explores the crisis of drug addiction. In this story, Parkash is a young boy of 15-24 age group. Due to the rampant unemployment, he does not have any hope to get a job and resultantly falls into the web of drugs. This age group, being full of passion, tries to do something new. Out of curiosity, Mintu begins with cigarette and beer which gradually lead to falling in the trap of addiction, “Harmeet told me after full intoxication that corex syrup had been given to me by mixing it in cold drink for three months” (26). Gavy starts with beer and cigarette but becomes addict of heroin.

In B.Sc. 2nd year, he came into the contact with his classmates who were already addicts. By emotional blackmailing, they prompt him towards drugs by saying “Oh dear you are shying like girls, take it” (84).

In fact, for this age group, educational institutes can play a very significant role in channelizing their energies and satisfying their curiosity for the betterment of future as Pt. J L Nehru termed these institutions as “the temples of modern India” (Temples) [7]. In fact, the modern societies take leads from these institutions and backward societies take leads from family. But the stories of Mintu, Gavy, Parkash and Manga Singh depict that the institutions rather than playing constructive roles has impacted the society negatively. On the other hand, the families of these drug addicts are, somehow, successful in providing direction to them. Initially, most of the youth are unaware of the ill effects of the drugs on mind and body. It is also a significant fact that educational institutions fail to make them aware of the awfully dangerous consequences of drugs. Rather, the cut throat competition, rat race, excessively costly and commodified education generate a lot of mental tension and stress among the students. As a corollary, a lot of students deviate towards drug addiction as an escape from turmoil situation. Mintu describes the anti-educational environment of the city school, “Many incidents of fighting among the students have occurred these days. Students from the city along with students from 60-70 villages used to fight with each other in the school” (25). Manga Singh has done a diploma in a teacher training institutes and he describes the pathetic condition of education, “We did not attend much classes, many of my friends did not even know when it began and when it ended” (208). Gavy's dialogues also indicate the poor performance of the educational institutes, “We failed to attend required lectures, could not clear house test exams, got reappear in final exams. To pass these reappear exam, we spoiled one more year” (87). Parkash also says about the college where he studies, “It was doing business in the name of education” (59). It suggests that the educational institutes keep aside the idea of overall development of personality and limit themselves on reappear and lecture shortage. Some of the coaches, in these institutions, compel the players to take drugs for better performance in the games. It is very significant to note that drug addiction is not only related with physical problem but is also connected with mind, psyche, behavior and attitude. Though it is assumed that educational institute can orient the mind of the youth and change the thinking and attitude of the addict. Rather these institutes can relate them with society by reminding them their responsibilities. Therefore, the mental treatment is prerequisite than the physical. But in case of Mintu, Gavy, Parkash and Manga Singh, no such institutional support is provided.

Punjabi youth is in deep conundrum regarding feudal manliness, inclination for fan following and gangsterism. The demonstration of their manliness and the desire to be a gangster are the expected characteristics for youth in Punjab. For this, having drugs becomes essential. It seems that drugs are the symbol of traditional forms of Punjabi masculinity which have been endorsed by many bizarre and reappropriated legends, myths, singers and folk tales. They have further mystified and glorified drugs. However, it is a misnomer among the youth that drugs bestow self-confidence, power, vitality and increased sexual pleasure. Manga Singh was in illusion that without drugs, “I am not fully potent” (251). If any young person says no to drugs, he is even considered to be girl. Gavy's friend suggests him to take something more than beer and cigarette when a girl Mahi comes to his home. Gavy's friend challenges his manliness, “Last time Mahi complained that the performance of your friend was poor” (86). It left no option to say

no to the 'white magic' (Heroin). Besides, Nihangs, the army of the Khalsa Panth, drink marijuana to celebrate cultural festivals of Punjab. Similarly, marijuana is used by the devotees of Shiv to celebrate Shivratri. Market has used media for its own selfish motifs. Media has created an environment in which abuse of drugs is considered as status symbol. Generally, in Punjabi songs the intake of drugs is being glorified such as *ghar di sharab hove* (we need homemade liquor), *jini teri college di fees balia, ani nagni ni jaat tera khanda balia* (The opium a jatt consumes every day is more than a girl's college fee), *border ni tapda chita munda Ludhiane udeek da* (The boy is waiting for Smack in Ludhiana but it has not crossed the border yet). Parkash asks from his father, "Who eat out our dreams? These singers sing songs about the waist of our sisters and we use to dance on these songs" (67).

Mintu, Parkash and Manga Singh belong to a marginal peasant family having small landholding but Gavy belongs to a well settled business family residing in a city. They are not able to pay for the drugs because of being unaffordable to them. On an average, a heroin-dependent individual spends about Rs 1,400/- per day. For the unemployed Mintu, Parkash, Gavy and Manga Singh, it was not possible to arrange money for it. They cannot live without drugs as these drugs reach in the brain cells and change the chemical reactions of the addict. By doing so, they affect the way people think, feel, speak and move about. They change the working of the body in such a way that after some time the body becomes conditioned. If the drug is not given, the person becomes lethargic, listless and feels restless which also results in irritation and depression.

The brain chemistry becomes dependent on the drug and the addict has to intake drugs again in order to overcome it and, thereby, gets caught in the vicious circle from which one can never come out. As a result, to manage their finances they absolutely absorb themselves in all kinds of antisocial activities like illegal drug dealing, robberies, grabbing properties, snatching and sometimes murder also. Whenever Gavy was not able to arrange money for the drugs, he said "we used to work for Ravi (the smuggler) and supply drugs as per his directions. In return, we got material for ourselves" (87). Parkash tells his father that for the drugs, "One day we snatched the purse of an old lady of around 70-80 years" (68). Thus, like every addict, Mintu, Gavy, Parkash and Manga Singh become, in a way, a potential criminal. Often, they become violent and prove harmful for society. Consequently, they face many trials and even get imprisoned. Therefore, addiction is a curse not only to the addict but also a societal disgrace. But the unholy nexus among politicians, police and rich businessmen, who are making huge money out of drug trade, comes to protect them and get them released from police custody. Despite having strict laws regarding drug-trafficking, this unholy nexus limits their pungency. The politicians provide protection to the big drug peddlers, smugglers and manufacturers because the money earned in drug trade is used for elections. The police caught and threaten Manga Singh and his friends but they are released from the custody when the chairman came as they say, "The influence of the chairman was immense, the police not only released us immediately but also never called us again for the investigation" (131).

Parkash narrates that how the young people like him are made drug addict by the unholy nexus of politicians, police and mafias. In the story, a police officer and a local politician want to grab the house of the NRI in the city. The young students are provided drugs and money by the nexus and are used to terrorise the NRI. They are involved in many criminal activities under the direction of the politician. Besides, drugs are excessively used and distributed

during the elections to allure the voters. It suggests that drugs have become the part of politics and business. Market, for the drugs, has been created and constantly searched for to increase monetary benefits. A study by AIIMS has found that "opioid worth Rs. 7,500 crores are consumed in Punjab every year with a massive heroin's share of Rs. 6,500 crores" (PODS) [8].

The survey reveals that opioid-dependent people are spending approximately Rs. 20 crores daily on these drugs. The irony of situation is that in Punjab most drugs are seized while it does not produce such drugs which further clarify the point that almost all the drugs get imported. On the other hand, "roughly 60% of all illicit drugs confiscated in India are seized in Punjab" (Yardley) [9].

Even the institutions of police and jail have failed miserably to dent their addictive tendencies and to provide leads for constructive life. During the custodial remand, instead of counselling, Mintu was given third degree torture as if he had launched a war against country. Mintu and Manga Singh point out the easy availability of these drugs in jail. Moreover, the rehabilitation centers in Punjab are insufficient and some of these are very costly. There are many rumours about rehabilitation centers that they beat the addicts mercilessly. Further, many of the private drug treatment centers are run by quacks. All the protagonists in these stories were admitted in the rehabilitation centers but after attending the de-addiction and counseling centers for many days they could not de-addict themselves. Parkash said to his father when he was admitted to rehabilitation center, "Where have you brought me? What will these centers do? To tell the truth, they cannot do anything" (55).

In *Dakkua da Munda*, the incident of meeting a terrible accident while absconding from police after a robbery proves to be a turning point in Mintu's life. He remains bed ridden for many months and during this time he reads books like Gorky's *Mother*, Nanak Singh's *Chita Lahu* (White Blood), Jaswant Kanwal's *Sikh Jado* (Jahid), Boris Polevoi's *Story of a Real Man* etc. which transforms his outlook towards life completely. It is said that modern societies take leads from institutions and backward societies follow their family values and norms.

All the stories into consideration indicate that family plays the most significant role in shaping the personality of a person. It can construct good habits in human. But if the family has the culture of taking or smuggling drugs, the children are more prone to drug addiction. Mintu has the family history of addiction but in the family of Gavy, Parkash and Manga Singh, nobody is addict. Both Mintu and Manga Singh come out of drug addiction successfully with the support of their families. In both cases, the sensible support and counselling of mother and wife make them able to come out from the whirlpool of drug addiction. Manga Singh's wife says again and again while messaging his legs, "I am with you, have faith in me, I will not let anything happen to you" (243). McCormick from University of British Columbia also points out about the significance of family, "The substance abusers' family also plays an important role in effective treatment and prevention" (29) [10].

Gavy's parents died in an accident while he was driving car after taking heavy dose of drugs. He becomes guilty conscious and decides to struggle to come out of addiction. Parkash's father is a communist and an active member of a farmer union. He successfully leads many pro-people struggles and saves the land of the farmers from being confiscated. But he is helpless in front of the miserable condition of his own son. Parkash was admitted in a rehabilitation center. To know that it is very late, Parkash realizes

that his end is very near and out of guilt conscious, he remorse on his misdeeds. At the same time, he feels proud on his father's pro-people stand. But in the end, he forces his father to join and lead the farmers' struggle, "We have forgotten to fight that is why we are committing suicides" (67). He ensures his father, "Don't worry father, I am not going to die, you are my sun and Parkash (light) cannot go away from the sun" (77). However, in case of Manga Singh, an NGO 'Narcotics Anonymous' plays a significant role in his counselling" (249). Mintu ascribes importance to literature and 'Navan Zamana' newspaper in countering his drug addiction. Mintu finds his antidote to addiction in reading literature and writing. He realizes that the true meaning of life is in serving others and there is lack of role models who can be ideal among the youths to come out of the menace of drug addiction. He makes it a mission to create awareness among the addicts and seeks his regeneration and salvation through his service. In addition, the illness and death of his father also shatters him and fills him with remorse. His father has to go to jail because of him, "I consider myself as the murderer of my father. My relatives and even my mother also think so" (81). Without any support from any of the institutions, he comes out from the filth of drugs and other hellish malevolence successfully and establishes himself as a successful journalist. His daring and firm determination to get rid of addiction has made him a role model for addicts in particular and youth in general. Mintu Gursaria is acknowledged as a source of public inspiration and is hailed as a person who through his suffering and fight against drug addiction can serve as a pole star to motivate the addicts in their struggle, "to get rid of addiction is the matter of 72 hours, after that the intensity of craving remains half" (121). However, he never glorifies Punjab rather represents the dark realities of his times. The very purpose of this autobiography is to awake the army of drug addicts who are in deep slumber of drugs and transform them into warriors in the field of life, "If I would have been successful in doing so, my life is successful" (11). He further says, "What life has taught me the lessons, even the universities cannot teach" (118). The turning point in the life of Manga Singh came when he became the part of teacher organization and came into the contact with left-wing farmer unions. After the long struggle, he gets government job, "In the beginning of 2008...got government job having handsome salary...everything seems fine...more importantly, I was attaining the lost prestige.... all relatives and friends start saying that Manga has become a good man" (226). The embedded spirit of sportsmanship in Mintu and Manga Singh helped them to come out of addiction. It also suggests that the generation of employment can not only channelize the energy of the youth but also take them out of the web of drugs.

All the stories clearly indicate that failure of institutions and specifically educational institutions, easy availability of drugs, rampant unemployment, agrarian distress, environment/ecological imbalance, unholy nexus of smugglers, politician and police, lack of political will, brain drain and intervention of market profit in drug business are the important factors which are responsible for the trend of drug addiction in youth in Punjab. The unemployed people who belong to low-income group fall in the trap of smugglers for drug-trafficking. No doubt, the poor and marginalised strata of the society is the worst affected but in fact, no space, class, caste and gender has remained untouched from the devastation of drug addiction. The reflection of green revolution can be seen on these stories. After green revolution, Punjab was one of the richest states of India due to the productivity and growth in agriculture. But after a decade, the production became stagnant. Moreover, it destroyed the water resources and ecological pattern of the land. After getting education, no Punjabi youth wants to work in the

fields. After the Green Revolution and the speedy mechanisation of farming, Punjabi youth has been alienated from society although one cannot deny that fact of the mechanical development but one has to pay the price.

All these stories do not romanticise the addiction rather depict addicts' pain and search for compassion. The stories awaken the reader about the disastrous circumstances. All stories point out that addiction is not a disease but like fever, it is a symptom of the disease. Drug addiction is the symptoms of sick society and represents systemic failure and structural defects of the state. In this context, it can be said that the root cause of the problem lies somewhere else. If the drug addiction is treated as disease the proper solution is not possible. There is a dire need of employment generation, proper education for all, drug awareness programs, orientation courses and training regarding drug abuses. Drugs and its abuses should be the part of the school and graduate level syllabus. The advertisement of the drugs should be banned altogether. Besides, the rules and regulations to sell the drugs must be very strict. These stories also point out that instead of blaming the youth one must raise the questions to the society, political setup and educational setup and above all everything must not be converted into a commodity. One cannot deny the profit and capital but obviously not at the cost of youth. The youth are growing in our streets which need to be cleaned and made healthy. It is an obvious saying that if the future of the nation depends on youth's shoulders, then we have to consider that youth is an asset to the nation.

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