**World Drug Day: Pakistan from Bad to Worse**

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“Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the narcotic be alcohol or morphine or idealism.” –Carl Jung The moment a problem surfaces, instantaneously one looks for an appropriate remedy for its resolution. Consequently, unless the issue is of an incurable nature, it gets settled long before it blows out of proportion. The same formula applies to all governing bodies, whether they are restricted to the home front or relate to countries. They say that if the evil is nipped in the bud, chances that its tentacles spread far and wide are reduced to the minimum. Human nature is such that good habits are difficult to adopt compared to bad and damaging ones to which this race is most vulnerable. Suppressing urges while surrounded by an environment inviting all kinds of negative behavior is perhaps a feat that calls for strength beyond perception and which elevates a person’s status from a mere animal to that of a glorified human being. More than remaining steadfast on the righteous path we are prone to engage in survival tactics. As per Cassandra Brene Brown, an American research professor: “If you trade your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, blame, resentment, and inexplicable grief.”

Having said that, many a times people find themselves in situations from which there is no escape other than to surrender before the forces that be. This can be likened to a person in a deep water pool and expecting him not to swallow a single drop of water. Finding no way out, there is no choice left to the affected but to yield, which can be in terms of silent acquiescence or rebel, by resorting to perversity that can exist in various forms but the most popular one is addiction to psychoactive substances, which can range between opium and cigarettes (milder forms) to cocaine and heroin (highly addictive). By the way, because of some physical or mental disease, sheer curiosity, entertainment or even peer pressure one can become an addict. It is much easier to indulge in addiction but extremely difficult to give up this habit for which there is need to attend specialised institutes and under expert supervision.

Drug trafficking was fast becoming a popular business that brought in millions of dollars for the beneficiaries of this illicit trade.

Wendell Berry, in one of his Agrarian Essays, beautifully sums up the cause and effects of drug abuse: “People use drugs, legal and illegal, because their lives are intolerably painful or dull. They hate their work and find no rest in their leisure. They are estranged from their families and their neighbours. It should tell us something that in healthy societies drug use is celebrative, convivial and occasional, whereas among us it is lonely, shameful and addictive. We need drugs, apparently, because we have lost each other.”

Not that people in Pakistan never indulged in addiction nor were there any fatalities prior to 1979, but the numbers were low and the moral control over society by the people themselves, prevented the younger generation from getting hooked onto substances. Another factor that was then available was the use of alcoholic drinks, which were openly available and barring a few, majority population either abstained from drinking or restricted intake to certain occasions. After the imposition of ban on alcohol and closure of all known bars, including those in five-star hotels and our national airline, things started taking a bizarre turn. With the Russians in Afghanistan in 1979, reliance on extremely hazardous drugs, particularly heroin, began to take place with the number of addicts recorded at one million.

As the war escalated, arms and ammunition became the most sought-after trade commodities, the exorbitant price of which could only be procured through sale of heroin that was being produced in secret laboratories in tribal areas adjoining Afghanistan. Not only were huge shipments of the drug being smuggled outside Pakistan but even within the country, the demand also started growing. Drug trafficking was fast becoming a popular business that brought in millions of dollars for the beneficiaries of this illicit trade. Besides causing serious health damages, this dirty money began to infest the moral fabric of society leading to corruption and other ills that have since resulted in exceptional illegal enrichment of a few at the expense of reducing the government to an impoverished level from which we have yet to recover. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Pakistan has 6.7 million drug users out of which about 2 million are addicts which is amongst the highest number for any country in the world. This figure includes educated university students who are any country’s most precious asset that is now vulnerable to destruction at the hands of addiction.

Adding to this misery, 2020 brought with it Covid-19 pandemic that engulfed the entire world in a terror that was worse than the terrorist attacks occurring after September 11. It not only consumed a disproportionate number of human lives but also left many families and countries in dire economic crisis. In this situation when governments are struggling to restore their economy, it has becoming all the more difficult for them to pay due diligence to the ever-growing menace of drug abuse. Perhaps this is the reason that the theme for 2022 is “Addressing drug challenges in health and humanitarian crises.”

USA State Department’s latest released Report sketches a bleak picture in relation to Pakistan.

The 2019 National Risk Assessment (NRA) identified drug trafficking, corruption and bribery, smuggling, tax crimes, illegal financial transfers, and terrorist financing as significant financial risks because of which financial sector remains vulnerable to financial crimes, in part due to insufficient implementation of regulatory oversight. Designated non-financial businesses and professions (DNFBPs) are involved in money laundering using the financial system. Consequently, Pakistan has yet not been removed from the grey list of Financial Action Task Force (FATF). It has been stated that Pakistan does not have a formal mechanism to exchange records on narcotics investigations or court cases and that there are no legal ways of allowing other governments to access these records.

Experts insist on world collaboration to overcome this heinous trade to prevent people from indulging in addiction as aptly stated by Mr. Sabino Sikandar during the launch of the third phase of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime work programme in Islamabad on 7 June 2022: “Given the complexity and international nature of illicit drug trafficking, no country can win this war alone.”

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