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An Historical Overview of Opium Cultivation and Changing State Attitudes towards the Crop in India, 1878–2000 A.D.

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The opium trade yielded enormous profits to the British imperialists during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. While China was forcibly converted into the largest market for opium by the British from the early nineteenth century, India emerged as a fertile ground for the cultivation of poppy and manufacturing of opium under British monopoly during the colonial period. British rule in India and British control of the Indian princely states ensured a steady supply of opium from India to China, thereby facilitating the transfer of economic surplus from China to Britain. So profitable was the opium trade that the cultivation and production of opium in India was carefully monitored by the colonial state. The aim of the colonial state in India was profit maximization from the production and sale of opium but gradually, under growing international pressure after the First World War, feeble measures were contemplated to scale down the opium trade. The Indian nationalists, however, were firmly opposed to opium and tirelessly criticized the colonial discourse and policy on opium. Following this, after independence, the government of India became committed to the imposition of severe restrictions on poppy cultivation and opium production. From 1947 poppy would be grown in India under strict government control and only for medicinal purposes. Thus opium production was subjected to state monopoly during the colonial period and in independent India for different reasons. On the other hand opium smuggling, as a breach of state monopoly, remained widespread during the colonial period. Similarly, and despite the costly efforts made by the post-colonial state in India, substantial leakages into the illicit opium market have been reported by the sources since independence. This article narrates the story of attempted state control of poppy cultivation and opium production in modern India in the context of the challenges posed to the eradication of opium addiction by the politics of the Cold War and globalization eras.

Owing to the system of advances and the large amount of ready money brought into the villages, poppy cultivation will always be looked upon as advantageous both to ryots and zemindars. There is always a market for the produce which commands a steady price, there is no danger of its becoming a glut on the market or of its being left on the cultivators hands like sugar a few years ago.¹

—W. Kemble, Esq. Opium Agent of Behar, 1887

¹ RAOD (1888), Opium Department. Annual Report for the year 1886–87 [to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue].

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We do not think that human nature in the East is different from human nature in the West.²

—C.F. Andrews, 1925

I have determined that the following are major illicit drug producing or major drug-transit countries: Afghanistan, the Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, *India*, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Thailand, Venezuela and Vietnam.³ [emphasis added]

—William Jefferson (Bill) Clinton, 2000

An Appraisal of Opium Affairs in Modern India

It is pertinent to start this article with a simple observation related to the United Nations (UN) Protocol for limiting and regulating the cultivation of the poppy plant adopted after the UN Opium Conference of 1953. Under this Protocol and the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, India is one of the seven states permitted to export opium produced in their own territories.⁴ These states can also produce opium for their domestic needs. Of these seven picked states, India was the only ex-colony in 1953.⁵ Given the colonial record of opium production, trade and consumption in Asia and the role India played in this process, why was it selected by the UN as a legitimate producer of opium?

This question becomes even more important in the context of pre-1947 India. Opium was not merely grown in British India, where controls were tight, but also in several princely states which were not under direct British rule. At least one author claims that administrative and trade controls designed by the British to curb illicit opium in the vast opium growing areas of central India failed in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁶ The nexus of opium traders and opium smugglers had grown strong enough to resist British attempts at monopolizing the opium trade long before the administrative re-organization of British rule in India was necessitated by the Revolt of 1857. After that another opium story of British India began with the Opium Act of 1878 and ended with India's independence in 1947. In this period, despite mounting international opinion against opium abuse, the British continued to maintain that Indians were generally judicious in their use of opium and moderate intake of opium did not harm their Asian subjects.⁷

² ACER (1925).

³ Clinton (2000: 95).

⁴ United Nations (1971: 486).

⁵ The other six were Greece, Iran, Turkey, USSR, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

⁶ Farooqui (1998).

⁷ These were the conclusions of the Royal Commission on Opium, 1894, and the mass of evidence brought before it. This illuminating, sociologically rich and somewhat ambiguous evidence is available

The British position was helped by the fact that most of the international efforts to curb opium, usually initiated by the drug conscious USA before the Second World War, amounted to being recommendations more than binding treaties or protocols.⁸ Scholarship also claims that during the 1920s and 1930s, as depression prevailed and state revenues fell, the movement against opium trade remained weak. Hence, opium conferences and opium diplomacy in the inter-war period ended up producing more paper than action despite the best efforts of committed professionals.⁹ Till the end of the Second World War and the formation of the UN, opium remained a domestic matter of countries. Matters were also not helped by the fact that the colonial powers, and even the USA, used opium extensively during the Second World War to attain a variety of objectives in the eastern theatre.¹⁰ Unfortunately this trend continued during the Cold War period when drug diplomacy was made subservient to superpower strategic interests. Hence, the present poppy problem being faced in regions like Afghanistan is basically a gift of the Cold War politics to our times. A number of studies actually show how the western powers even now are complicit in promoting drugs although they are officially committed to eliminating drug trafficking.¹¹

The members of the international community, including those interested in curbing the use of opium, were aware of the history of modern drug control in 1953. Then why was faith reposed in the new republic of India by the Conference and Protocol of 1953? Eight years later, when the results of the steps taken in 1953 were reviewed, this faith was reaffirmed. Did the UN believe that India had inherited a system of successfully cultivating and simultaneously controlling opium from the British? Was it convinced that the new republic of India, with its commitment to upholding all UN conventions and protocols, had the will and administrative capacity to regulate opium in the larger interests of the world community? Probably both these are true.¹² If this will was perceived, this article highlights its

in Royal Commission on Opium (1894), *Proceedings Vol. V*. In India the Botham Committee Report of 1913, released to the public in 1925, also took the same position. Useful extracts of this report are present in the ACER (1925).

⁸ Musto (1992).

⁹ McAllister (2000).

¹⁰ CBN, 'Opium throughout History—Opium Poppy—An Overview', article available at <http://www.cbn.nic.in/vsccb/html/opiumhistory1.htm>

¹¹ The modern history of opium and the promotion of other drugs during the twentieth century by agencies such as the CIA in the context of the Cold War is examined by three excellent studies by McCoy (1991, 2000, 2003).

¹² It is well known that the position of Indian nationalists on the opium question evolved over time in colonial India. The early nationalists were not necessarily opposed to the opium trade which enriched a large section of Indian traders including some well known Parsees in Bombay. Over time, however, the social ills of opium addiction inveighed against this position and Indian nationalist opinion changed in line with the Chinese position on the subject. By the 1920s the Indian National

genesis and denouement. If the British had indeed laid down a successful system of managing cultivation of opium and controlling its illicit production and trade, this article will present its salient features.

But before proceeding further, the atmosphere in which opium had to be cultivated after 1945, and its spread and ill-effects controlled, must be touched upon. The UN Protocol of 1953 allowed the seven countries selected to produce and export opium under conditions of severe regulation. They were 'required to establish a governmental machinery which would amount to a national monopoly of the production of, and international and wholesale trade in, opium.'¹³ Only licensed farmers, with each license fixing the average under the crop, would be permitted to grow opium–poppy. Countries permitted to grow opium could not take the international arrangements for granted. A UN Drug Supervisory Body was set up to advise the governments concerned 'as to the desirable size of the opium crop and thus as to the acreage to be cultivated.'¹⁴ Opium growing governments had to file statistical returns with the Permanent Central Opium Board (PCOB). If the PCOB was dissatisfied with a producing country's performance it could authorize to arrange a local inquiry with the express consent of the concerned government. It could also recommend a trade embargo of opium if such a need arose. These supervisory measures went hand in hand with the reliance of the Protocol's execution 'on the good faith of the Parties and on the strength of public opinion resulting from criticism by the board.'¹⁵

But was the UN's faith in the Government of India's (GOI) capability to deliver on the opium front justified by the available facts in 1953? Between 1949 and 1953, probably with the exception of the People's Republic of China, India led the offensive against opium. After independence (1947) the GOI and all state governments in India were bound by the 1948 International Convention on opium and the 1949 Indian Conference on opium. In accordance with the aims of the Protocol of 1948 they were committed 'to close down supplies of opium for oral consumption after 31st March, 1959.'¹⁶ All states were taking vigorous action against opium which was identified as 'one of the worst debilitating agents in the list of drugs.'¹⁷ Consequently the number of registered addicts declined rapidly and the consumption of opium plummeted. In 1925 the per capital consumption

Movement was also guided by Gandhi who opposed drug consumption and addiction in any form. Ultimately this was the tradition which the Indian Republic inherited from the Indian National Movement although its approach to liquor seems to have departed from Gandhi's insistence on temperance.

¹³ United Nations (1971: 486).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 486.

¹⁶ GOI (1955: 52–53).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

of opium in India had been 18 grains or 1.1 grams. This was in excess of the 0.45 grams of opium at 10 per cent morphine content prescribed for quasi-medical use by the medical committee of the International Opium Conference of 1925. In 1952, this came down to 0.349 grams.¹⁸ The sale of opium to addicts and possession of opium by them was being limited and the quantities issued to them were declining with each passing year. Most of the states had prohibited opium smoking by 1953. In Orissa the consumption of opium declined by 50 per cent between 1948–49 and 1953–54. In Assam, to which we will refer in detail later, 13,000 addicts were registered in 1949. Of these only 30 per cent were on the rolls in 1953–54. In contrast there were 98,000 registered opium addicts in Assam in 1927–28 and 30,366 in 1938–39. In Bombay and Madras too, consumption fell drastically between 1949 and 1954. In the former, 29 *maunds* 15 *seers* of opium were released to the public in 1952–53 as against 471 *maunds* 15 *seers* in 1946–47. In the latter, 2,449 *seers* of opium was made available by the government in 1952–53 compared with 19,642 *seers* in 1945–46. In Hyderabad too, which was integrated into the Indian Union in 1948, consumption fell from 4,531 *seers* in 1951–52 to 2,690 *seers* in 1954–55. The encouraging data convinced the Prohibition Enquiry Committee of 1954–55 that opium was ‘marching to its doom slowly but surely.’¹⁹

This initial success against opium, we may observe, was also helped by the fact that by 1953 the integration of the numerous princely states with the Indian Union had been achieved. Many of these states had been sources of illicit opium during the colonial period.²⁰ Others had generated a substantial demand for both licit and illicit opium. The geographical and agricultural areas covered by these states fell under the narcotic jurisdiction and regulation of the GOI in the early 1950s. Between 1949 and 1953 the Indian state made good use of the federal ‘governmental’ machinery left behind by the British in its fight against opium. The legal framework it worked under had been created by the British between the Mutiny and the Second World War. This framework was finally superseded, and the Acts of 1878 and 1930 repealed, by the comprehensive Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (Amended, 1988) and The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988.²¹ But, to begin with, the determination to exterminate the opium habit in India came from the critique of British opium policy in India developed by the Indian nationalists in the 1920s and 1930s. We now turn to these two aspects of the history of opium in India to deepen our understanding of the struggle against opium.

¹⁸ UNODCCP (1953).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁰ For details see Farooqui (1998).

²¹ Copies of these Acts have been published by the Directorate of Publications, Customs & Central Excise, New Delhi.

The Opium Act of 1878, British Opium Administration and Contradictory Ground Realities

The Act of 1878 was passed to establish complete state monopoly over opium in British India keeping in mind the failures alluded to earlier and the revenues generated by the drug. The Act related to opium including poppy heads, preparation of opium and all intoxicating drugs prepared from poppy.²² It brought into force the prohibition of poppy cultivation and possession of opium without express government sanction. Under the provisions of the Act no one could cultivate poppy, manufacture, possess, transport, import, export or sell opium without government permission. The Governor General in Council was the supreme authority in opium matters in India and Local Governments could permit opium cultivation, subject to conditions, only according to the provisions of the 1878 (1894) Act. The Act also brought opium trade, its duties, export, import and warehousing under the direct and supreme authority of the Governor General in Council.²³ It also laid down specified and harsh penalties in the form of fines, confiscation and prison sentences for opium offences including illicit cultivation, storage and smuggling.²⁴ For the purpose of enforcement, quite like the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985, it gave sweeping powers of search, detainment and arrest to Excise, Police, Customs, Salt, Opium and Revenue officers superior in rank to peons and constables. Section 9 of the 1878 Act states the following: 'Any person who, in contravention of this Act' cultivated poppy, manufactured, possessed, transported, imported–exported, sold or stored opium would 'on conviction before a Magistrate be punished for EACH SUCH OFFENCE with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees or with both.'²⁵ Where a fine was imposed and the offender defaulted, an additional period of imprisonment extending up to 6 months in 'excess of any other imprisonment to which he may have been sentenced' was to be awarded. Further, all illegal opium was liable to confiscation. The economic costs of being caught in possession of illicit opium were considerable in a poor colony like India. In lieu of confiscation of animals, conveyances, storage and transportation vessels additional fines could be levied. These effects could also be disposed off by the Magistrate trying opium cases if the need arose.²⁶

The Act of 1878 laid down the policy guidelines for future opium legislation in India and gave the administration necessary powers to curb the illicit cultivation

²² GOI, Legislative Department, (1894), *The Opium Act, 1878 As Modified up to the 1st July 1894*, Calcutta [NAI].

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

and smuggling of opium. The system of restricted licensing, checking and monitoring of poppy crops, experiments with opium yields, calculation of average yields and continuous surveillance of poppy growing peasants by the officials of the Opium Department came into existence almost simultaneously and, with minor modifications, remained intact till 1945.²⁷ This 'governmental' machinery survived the colonial period well into the twentieth century.²⁸ But how effective was this system and what lessons did it leave for posterity? The British were more delicately poised in their attempts to curb illicit opium compared with the GOI in independent India because of one fundamental reason. British attempts at curbing illicit opium were counterbalanced by their attempt to encourage the opium habit through the system of licensed opium shops selling 'excise' opium. This was done in the interest of state revenue, opium duties and certain other factors beyond the scope of this article. This policy created and sustained a comparatively high demand and supply of opium in the Indian domestic market although, ostensibly, excise was levied 'with the two fold object of raising revenue and restricting the use of intoxicants and narcotics.'²⁹ Moreover, by creating a large pool of opium addicts in many parts of India, British policy indirectly encouraged smuggling. This opium policy invited increasing nationalist censure and active opposition in the 1920s and 1930s. This unambiguous opposition to opium, demonstrated by the Indian nationalists led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920s, formed the backbone of the Indian Republic's uncompromising stand on opium.³⁰ The evident results of this between 1949 and 1954 have already been briefly surveyed above.

Available accounts indicate that the peculiar problem of opium smuggling in colonial India emanated from the contradictions between the official permission to grow poppy, the measures taken to stop its leakage into illicit channels and the widespread opium habit encouraged by state policy. Smuggling across the Indo-Nepal border was common and seizures of Nepal opium meant for destinations in India were often made with the help of alert *chowkidars*.³¹ Rewards were regularly

²⁷ Ellen N. La Motte (1920), *The Opium Monopoly—India*, p. 1, mentions that from 1910 the whole Department came under one Opium Agent with his HQs at Ghazipur. The cultivation of poppy and manufacture of opium, regulated by Act XIII of 1857 (amended by Act I of 1911), were under the general control of the Lt. Governor and the Board of Revenue of the United Provinces and the 'immediate supervision' of the Opium Agent at Ghazipur.

²⁸ The Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, GOI, Terminal Report on UNDCP Funding Project Nos. AD/352 & AD/353, Narcotics Control Bureau, West Block-1, Wing-5, R.K. Puram, New Delhi, tells us that the GOI's attempts at curbing illicit opium predicated upon the experience of the British system. Under the NDPS Act of 1985 the Narcotics Control Bureau had been established as the apex administrative, intelligence, investigating and coordinating agency in the GOI's war on illicit opium.

²⁹ La Motte (1920: 4).

³⁰ Picketing of licensed opium and liquor shops was an important activity of the Non-Cooperation Movement and underpinned the Congress opium enquiry in Assam in 1925.

³¹ RAOD (1888), report from the Behar Opium Agent.

given to informers and offenders were prosecuted. For instance, in 1886–87, Rs 7,679 were realized from fines imposed by criminal courts and Rs 6,084 were disbursed to informers and apprehenders in the Benares Opium Agency.³² But despite the fines and a network of carefully cultivated spies and informers, in places like Awadh the opium laws were violated quite often. Opium agents frankly admitted that most districts covered by the Benares Agency were ‘liable to the suspicion of extensive smuggling.’ It was well known in official circles, and society by and large, that illicit opium was consumed in most districts and the violation of the opium laws was more common in poorly policed districts.³³ The anti-smuggling drives of the colonial state were made more problematic by the fact that its collaborators often ended up harassing honest poppy cultivators. Despite the best enforcement efforts smuggling remained widespread in the years leading to the Great War. Reports of opium smuggling came in regularly from many districts like Lucknow, Benares, Sitapur and Hardoi. Usually carriers possessed not more than 5 *tolas* (roughly 50–60 grams) per person although larger hauls of more than a *seer* were not unknown.³⁴

While the peasants and urban population in large parts of British India violated opium laws in an individual capacity on a substantial scale, organized smuggling also occurred. Often hauls of larger quantities of 5 *maunds* or more indicated the presence of smuggling groups trying their best to overcome the government monopoly of the drug. The demand for cheap opium was high enough in British India and several princely states to promote smuggling. In 1889, the Opium agent for Benares appeared categorical on the subject: ‘Whether the opium comes from Nepal or from our own territories, there is good reason to suspect that an organisation exists for the smuggling of opium on large scale into the Punjab.’³⁵ The observations of K.G. Gupta, Esq., Secretary to the Board of Revenue, also seemed ‘to point to the existence of an organised system of opium smuggling between Nepal and some of the native states in the Punjab.’³⁶ On the Indo–Nepal border daring Sikh opium smugglers from Native States like Patiala were very active and were sometimes apprehended and sentenced to long terms. These Punjabi ‘professional traders’ in opium, posing as camel traders, made frequent use of the

³² RAOD (1888), report from the Benares Opium Agent. The amounts realised as fines approximately equalled the money paid as rewards to informers. In this way the British tried to defray the cost of detection by no additional charge to the government revenues. The results of such parsimony are rather easily perceived.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ RAOD (1889), No. 245–6180, Ghazipur, Opium Agent Benares to Secretary, Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Communication to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, 3 February 1891 [NAI].

porous Indo–Nepal border in districts like Champaran in Bihar.³⁷ Illicit opium frequently passed through Meerut, Saharanpur and Gorakhpur, after entering India from Nepal through the densely forested *tarai*, on its way to the princely states of Punjab and beyond.³⁸ At the end of the nineteenth century large scale, well organized, trans-border smuggling and small-scale domestic illicit opium dealings were officially acknowledged facts of the opium scenario in India. While the sale of licit opium was growing, official attempts to completely eradicate illicit opium dealings were not entirely successful. Though large-scale smuggling amongst the opium cultivating ryots was most probably absent a realistic assessment of the pitfalls inherent in British policy suggested the obvious: ‘But with all that has been done, it is not pretended that the department has yet succeeded, or is ever likely to succeed, in preventing petty pilferings on the part of hundreds of thousand cultivators. This, considering the vast area of land over which the cultivation extends, the large number of men engaged in the industry, that is, not only in cultivating but in collecting and the admittedly weak staff at the command of the department, is an impossibility.’³⁹

Despite the impossibility of liquidating opium smuggling the British tried almost everything in the book to minimize illicit opium dealings. These methods comprised an integral part of the overall opium administration in British India inherited by free India in 1947. Paying informers and employing spies has already been mentioned. To identify and check smugglers, special registers were opened and maintained at each police station within the opium producing districts. In these registers names of all persons convicted of opium smuggling were entered.⁴⁰ Further, all such persons were carefully investigated before being heavily fined and sentenced. Greater co-operation and co-ordination was always sought between the police, general administration and the Opium Department to keep opium offenses and suits low.⁴¹ These methods were not peculiar to the poppy growing areas of northern and eastern India. They were also followed by the opium

³⁷ Revenue Department (1890), No. 398, Bankipore, 11 December 1890. From W. Kemble, Esq., C.S., Opium Agent of Behar, To Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces: Annual Report of Behar Opium Agency 1889–90 [NAI].

³⁸ Revenue Department (1890), No. 55N. Camp Benares, 3 December 1890. From J.H. Rivett-Carnaq, Esq., C.S., C.I.E., Opium Agent, Benares to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, L.P. Annual Report on the operations of the Benares Opium Agency, 1889–90 [NAI].

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Revenue Department (1881), No. 402, Bankipore, 28 November 1881. From A. C. Mangles, Esq., Opium Agent of Behar to Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Calcutta. Annual Report on the operations of the Behar Opium Agency for 180–81 in Bengal Opium Admn. Reports (1880–81 to 1883–84): Report on the Administration of the Opium Department, inclusive of the Operations of the Bihar and Benares Opium Agencies, During the year 1880–81, Calcutta, 1882, 1883, 1884 [NAI].

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Revenue Department (1882), Calcutta, 20 March 1882; No. 327, Bankipore, dated 1 December 1882 and No. 344–3038; Ghazipur, dated 30 November 1882.

departments of other presidencies like Bombay.⁴² The measures taken to check the supply of opium into possible illicit trade at source need special mention here. The overall strategy concentrated on reducing the area under opium cultivation to manageable limits in the poppy growing tracts and increasing yields. This, it was believed, would enable the 'department to watch with greater efficiency and success persons of suspicious character, and to scrutinize more successfully' the turn over of cultivators and suspect villages.⁴³

Other important steps comprising the control of opium supply at source were as follows. The returns of opium suits were carefully checked in the agent's office and cases with rewards and punishments were revised if the need arose. Cultivators with a record of any violation of the Opium Act were prohibited from growing opium. Even their relatives were screened carefully and if they happened to live in the same house as the violator they were treated similarly. An extremely detailed record of average yields per village based on a variety of productivity related factors was kept by the department. On this basis the averages (of both production and yields) of all poppy cultivators of a village in which an offender resided were scrutinized. A significant variation from the average, unless explained by specified reasons, was taken as evidence of pilferage. A register was kept in which the names of all indifferent cultivators with averages 'suspiciously low or below those of the other men of the same license or village' were entered.⁴⁴ Investigations with the aid of spies, it can be presumed, normally followed to detect and punish offenders. The system of maintaining records in detail was followed at each level of the Opium Agency from the village upwards. During winter, opium officers were supposed to make special enquiries into all cases of cultivators suspected of illicit dealings so that necessary preventive steps could be taken before the fresh crop came in. By the late nineteenth century the Opium Department had improved the system of keeping opium records considerably and additional staff was made available by the re-organized department to improve the methods of measurements, test measurements and inspection of poppy growing villages. The area under cultivation and output of crude opium were closely and regularly monitored before the harvest.⁴⁵

These efforts were often made by numerous sincere officers who spent a large part of the winter months in the fields with the assistance of a network of civil

⁴² 'Report on the Administration of the Opium Department of the Bombay Presidency including Sind and Aden for the years 1904–05, 1906, 1907 (with appendices)' [NAI]. This report does not mention smuggling of opium at all.

⁴³ Revenue Department (1890), No. 55N, dated 3 December 1890, Camp Benares. From J.H. Rivett-Carnag, Esq., C.S., C.I.E., Opium Agent, Benares to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, L.P. Annual Report on the operations of the Benares Opium Agency, 1889–90 [NAI].

⁴⁴ RAOD (1889), No. 245–6180, Ghazipur, 30 November 1889. Opium Agent Benares to Secretary, Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

informers and police spies. But all these measures were unable 'to prevent cultivators keeping back small portions of the produce of their field' to be used, presumably, for ceremonial and recreational purposes.⁴⁶ Although large scale smuggling did not exist in many areas, as it did in some, the highly experienced and skilled poppy cultivators did manage to retain small, but socially significant, amounts of opium in violation of the Act of 1878. In the absence of hard evidence in most cases of potential pilferage it was difficult to estimate the amount of illicit opium retained by the clever peasants. Nonetheless this was often done by observing the sale of excise opium at licensed opium vends. Low sales in certain suspected districts were quite often 'attributable to the illicit retention of portions of the drug by cultivators.' On the other hand, in districts where drinking alcoholic beverages was widespread the sale of licit opium was known to be normally low.⁴⁷ This could only mean that the sale of licit opium was not always contingent upon smuggling. However, the peasant-consumers of opium were aware of the high price of licit opium. This was especially true of those peasants who grew poppy, extracted crude opium from it and knew the difference between the cost and price of opium. Hence, for the large majority of these poor peasants it made perfect economic sense to pilfer a little for the traditional moderate use of opium sanctioned by their communities.

It is true that during the colonial period between 1878 and 1947 the licensed opium shops selling excise opium to all and sundry did profitable business for the state in India. The Opium Department records show that an increase in the sale of licit opium was always mentioned with pride by the opium officials. The net revenue from these outlets was an important factor which militated against the emergence of an unequivocal policy on opium in British India. What British policy did was to keep the price of excise opium artificially high in the treasury's interest. In the ultimate analysis the demand for opium in society, and especially amongst the opium addicts who could not be satisfied for long by the expensive opium dispensed at the licensed shops, remained high and could not be met by official supplies alone. This, *inter alia*, encouraged opium smuggling. The problem became more complicated because of the demand for opium in the princely states of India where the Opium Act was not applicable. Many of these largely non-opium growing states were dependent upon smuggled opium which was cheaper than opium imported with duties from British India. Faced with this prospect, the colonial state could not punish the opium growing *ryots* beyond a point for fear of killing the goose which lay the golden eggs. Raising poppy and extracting the latex from the poppy bulb was, and still is, a highly skilled operation.⁴⁸ In the poppy growing

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ For details of poppy cultivation and extraction of crude opium see the following: UWMC, 'Opium Production in India', http://www.marathon.uwc.edu/political_science/opiumprod.html;

tracts experience, skill and tradition blended into an economic activity mutually beneficial to the peasants and the colonial state. Hence prosecuting too many peasants carried the risk of disaffecting a large number of poppy growers who could not be changed every year. This, the British were loath to do given the profitability of their opium enterprise in Asia.⁴⁹

The Road to Free India and the Future of Opium: The Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report, September 1925—a Critique of British Opium Policy in India with Multiple Manifestations

In pre-colonial India traditional opium use was a well documented fact. Opium, like hemp, was grown in limited quantities for medicinal, recreational, ritual and ceremonial purposes.⁵⁰ It was not a great commercial crop. British rule changed these conditions. Due to the China trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, opium became a valued commercial crop in India. Second, the large scale de-industrialization and pauperization of the Indian sub-continent under British rule created the socio-psychological conditions of large-scale opium addiction. These two processes and the lucrative opium duties informed the British monopoly of opium in India. Since extensive opium addiction in British India was produced by British policies, the Indian nationalists asserted that discontinuing these policies was the first step in setting up a new opium regime in India. The Congress conducted the Assam enquiry in preparation for the World Conference on Opium (Geneva, 1924–25). The Geneva Conference was committed to the complete abolition of opium smoking and the reduction of opium consumption to the medicinal and scientific needs of the world. This agenda was particularly relevant to India where opium consumption was quite high in the rural areas of Assam, Orissa, Godavari Delta, central Punjab, Sindh and Gujarat. Among the labouring classes of urban India the ‘dangers of excessive consumption’ of opium were ‘already alarming.’⁵¹ According to the League of Nations the full medical requirements of

Bartholomew, ‘Opium for the Masses— Photo Essay on Cultivation of Opium in India’, *The Indian Economy Overview*, http://www.ieo.org/opm_mass.html ; details of soil type, experiments and methods are also given in some Annual Reports of Opium Agencies in RAOD; several technical and methodological details of poppy growing, the opium extracting process and problems of growing a delicate crop like poppy can be found in CBN, ‘Opium Throughout History—Opium Poppy—An Overview’, <http://www.cbn.nic.in/vscbn/html/opiumhistory.htm>

⁴⁹ RAOD; on numerous occasions the Opium Agents expressed concern at instances of innocent growers being harassed by informers for ulterior motives.

⁵⁰ For details of traditional opium use see; UNODCCP (1953), ‘Quasi-Medical Use of Opium’, *Bulletin on Narcotics*; the Royal Commission on Opium (1894), referred to the traditional use of opium in Asia and the inability of most poor Asians to access modern medical treatment to justify British policy. As a measure of concern for Asians it did not want them deprived of this drug. Also see Deshpande (1998).

⁵¹ ACER (1925: 4).

each 10,000 of the world's population were 6 *seers* or 12 pounds avoirdupois. In Assam, by comparison, the rates obtained in 1925 have been given in Table 1:

Table 1
District-wise Consumption of Opium per 10,000 of Population in Assam in 1925

<i>District</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Issue of opium in seers</i>	<i>Consumption/10,000</i>
Kamrup	762,671	3,472	45.524
Darrang	477,935	5,101	106.729
Nowgong	397,921	6,909	173.627
Sibsagar	823,197	9,133	110.945
Lakhimpur	588,195	11,176	189.972
Sadiya Frontier Tract	39,531	937	237.029
Balipara Frontier Tract	3,819	52	136.161

Source: ACER.

The inspection of villages in Assam led the Committee to establish 'beyond a shadow of doubt, that the opium evil in Assam is regarded as a national disaster, under which our whole national life is darkened.'⁵² This had happened because the British had followed a 'policy of drift' towards opium in much of the nineteenth century. This policy, to begin with, had been dictated by the desire to introduce British opium for revenue to undersell the indigenous product available presumably in limited quantities. Between 1826 and 1860, opium was grown freely in Assam and opium addiction developed deep roots.

However, due to increasing public opinion against opium addiction, and the publication of Mr Moffat Mills' Report in 1853, the drug was made a state monopoly in 1860.⁵³ But the monopolization of poppy-opium was, as examined earlier in the context of north India, accompanied by an ambivalent policy. On one hand revenue remained the main criterion of policy, and on the other, licenses for retailing vendors selling government opium were granted 'free of charge' to all respectable persons applying for them. Through this measure the drug became easily available in every village. In the event most of these shops became opium dens in which opium smoking continued unchecked till 1892. In 1874 the government introduced the system of fixed license fee which enabled a person to open any number of shops after paying it. Between 1877 and 1883 the so called *Mahal* system was introduced. Under this 'the right to sell opium in a particular *Mahal* was put up to auction' and the purchaser was given the exclusive right to sell opium at a definite number of places. The sites of sale were moveable within the area auctioned off. Between 1883 and 1894 individual shop licenses were once again sold and the price of opium was raised to increase revenue. Despite this raise, and

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 20. This Report 'was emphatic in its condemnation of the opium evil'.

also due to the softening effect of the Royal Commission on Opium's submissions (1894–1913), the consumption of opium kept rising. Following this, between 1913 and 1921 the Botham Committee worked on the opium problem in Assam. Its report echoed the findings of the Royal Commission although it was critical of opium smoking. As a consequence the treasury price of opium was raised to discourage smoking and certain other changes, including rationing, were implemented in accordance with the Botham recommendations. These steps did not significantly affect the consumption of opium. The figures in Table 2 show how even a policy guided by the view 'Maximum revenue with minimum of consumption' did not work against opium addiction:

Table 2
Opium Revenue and Consumption, 1875–1921

<i>Year</i>	<i>Revenue in rupees</i>	<i>Consumption in maunds</i>
1875–76	12,25,141	1874
1885–86	16,75,363	1446
1895–96	19,55,706	1377
1905–06	30,53,933	1415
1915–16	38,37,125	1560
1919–20	44,12,308	1748
1920–21	–	1614

Source: ACER, p. 24.

In the period when opium addiction grew in Assam the price of opium kept rising. This proved the nationalists' assertion that rising prices alone could not counter addiction. Table 3 shows the price of opium in Assam between 1835 and 1924:

Table 3
Price of Opium in Assam, 1835–1924

<i>Year</i>	<i>Price/seer in rupees</i>
1835	5
1860	14
1874	22
1884	32
1894	37
1904	37
1914	45
1924	65

Source: ACER, p. 24.

The data gathered by the Congress Committee and the difficult fieldwork accomplished by its members suggested that in British opium policy the 'weight of

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revenue considerations' had 'continually overbalanced moral and humanitarian considerations.'⁵⁴

Faced with this criticism, based as it was on growing international, medical and scientific opposition to opium, the British defended their opium policy on untenable grounds. First, the government claimed that a reduction in opium sales beyond a certain limit would increase the use of *ganja*. Second, it also contended that any further reduction in consumption and rationing of opium shops would lead to increased smuggling of opium. Third, the government repeatedly asserted the classic orientalist discourse. People in India required opium to fight diseases prevalent in damp and malarial climates. Re-sounding the submissions of the Royal Commission it stated that in such circumstances 'to deprive people in remote villages of their unrestricted use of opium would be to subject them to great hardship and even danger of fatal illnesses.'⁵⁵ This argument was presented by the government in the Assam Legislative Assembly and also used in defence of the GOI by one Mr Clayton at the Geneva Conference. Going beyond this the government expressed the opinion that the denial of opium to Indians would mean interfering with their liberties. This would be 'resented by the Indian villagers themselves.'⁵⁶

The government's arguments in favour of opium were refuted by the Enquiry Committee on several grounds. It quoted contemporary medical opinion in favour of controlling and finally abolishing opium sales. Surprisingly, a great number of exhaustive reports made to the Royal Commission (1894) tended to support the opponents of opium.⁵⁷ The other official arguments were similarly taken care of with reference to data available in 1925.⁵⁸ Having presented a comprehensive critique of British policy, the ACER made the following recommendations to the GOI. To begin with, the Committee wanted the sale of opium to be limited only to medical and scientific needs. Second, it wanted all opium addicts above forty to be registered and given progressively declining rationed amounts of the drug. Third, it wanted the government to competently deal with all opium addicts under forty as medical patients in dire need of treatment and rehabilitation. Finally, it suggested that the three earlier recommendations be implemented in five years

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Rich economic, historical, anthropological, sociological and psychological information on opium use and abuse is present in Royal Commission on Opium (1894) [NAI]. The ACER (1925) took into account the opinion of numerous practicing doctors while pronouncing judgement on opium.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–46. Regarding the connection between opium and ganja sales the ACER conclusively proved that with declining sales of opium, ganja sales were also declining between 1919 and 1924. This, the ACER held, was seen happening largely due to the temperance activities of the Non-Cooperation movement. Figures between 1914–15 and 1924–25 were also provided to counter the claim that reducing opium sales would increase its smuggling.

after which opium would be classed a poison by a Dangerous Drugs Act. Readers will notice that these recommendations reveal the nationalist genesis of the opium policy followed in independent India. But these arguments failed to influence government policy towards opium which remained predicated upon the conclusions of the Royal Commission of 1894 till the Second World War. As late as 1939 the GOI opposed the suppression of opium eating in the following words. The change in policy could not:

...be undertaken until the organization of medical services throughout the country has been greatly advanced since at present it is an administrative impossibility to distinguish between quasi-medical use of opium and its use as an indulgence; nor indeed have they felt themselves to be in a position to undertake the complete abolition of the eating of opium as an indulgence, even if it were practicable to distinguish between such use and the quasi-medical use of opium in sickness.⁵⁹

Curbing Opium in Independent India, 1949–2000: An Overview

The Early Years

The opium administration and problems created by British rule were both inherited by independent India. The medical infrastructure was poor and, the GOI stated, in such circumstances it was nearly impossible and ‘impolitic’ to suddenly exterminate the use of opium in Indian society. However, after the transfer of power the new GOI appeared committed to phasing out opium use keeping these limitations in mind. In 1948 it declared that it had decided to suppress the production of opium except for medical and scientific purposes. As a consequence the Central Government, Provincial Governments and even the numerous Indian Princely States ordered the gradual reduction in opium production within a specified period. In July 1948 the GOI requested the Provincial Governments to decrease their purchases of opium from the Ghazipur factory by ten per cent annually. A new opium policy finally emerged at the All India Opium Conference held at New Delhi in 1949. This Conference was attended by Provincial and States Excise Representatives and was presided over by the Minister of Finance, GOI.⁶⁰ The resolutions of this conference comprise a repudiation of British policy on opium followed in India till 1945. They also militated against the traditional wisdom associated with opium use in the colonial officialdom. The formal resolutions of the Conference were as follows:⁶¹

⁵⁹ UNODCCP (1953).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

1. The Conference recommends that, within a maximum period of ten years, the use of opium for other than scientific and medical purposes should be totally prohibited. It will, however, be open to each Province or State or Union of States to achieve this objective within a shorter period.
2. Recognizing that the quasi-medical uses of opium are not desirable, and should be stopped as early as possible, the Conference resolves that so far as such quasi-medical uses are concerned even within the foregoing period they should be subject to such restrictions as a Province or State considers reasonable and practicable. For reducing consumption of opium, such restrictions may provide (a) that the quantity issued even to registered addicts should be severely restricted, and reduced, and allowed under a strict permit system after obtaining a medical certificate; (b) that it would be open to the Provinces, the States and Union of States to prohibit in any selected area the use of opium by individuals except on medical prescription; (c) that it would be open to the Provinces, the States and Union of States to progressively reduce the quantity issued even for quasi-medical uses. In particular they recommend to the maritime Provinces, States and Unions of States the prohibition of the sale of opium non-medical purposes in the port towns and cities, at the earliest opportunity, compatible with effectiveness.
3. The Conference recommends that each Province, State, Unions of States in the Indian Union which already allows excessive consumption should within the shortest possible period, and in any case before four years, take effective steps to bring down the *per capita* consumption of opium to a level not exceeding the League of Nations limit.
4. The Conference recommends that, having regard to the possibilities of misuse or unauthorised consumption of opium, the Provinces, States and Unions of States should carefully regulate the grant of quotas to even registered medical practitioners and pharmacists.
5. The Conference recommends that exports for oral consumption and non-medical uses should be eliminated subject only to existing commitments being honoured.

Armed with this policy, the Constitution of 1950 and the merger of the Princely States with the Indian Union, the GOI made rapid progress in the suppression of opium from between 1948 and 1951. In 1949, to improve and coordinate various aspects of the administration of narcotics in India, a central authority—the All India Narcotics Board—was created. The consumption of raw opium for medical, quasi-medical and non-medical purposes declared to the PCOB by the GOI in 1953 is shown in Table 4. This consumption declined radically between 1946 and 1951.

Table 4
Consumption of Opium in India, 1936–1951 in Kilograms

<i>Year</i>	<i>Kilograms</i>
1936	222,700 (British India & Indian States)
1946	329,998 (British India & Indian States)
1947	238,580 (Dominion of India & Indian States)
1948	203,589 (Dominion of India & Indian States)
1949	122,527 (Dominion of India)
1950	150,571 (Republic of India)
1951	156,784 (Republic of India)

Source: UN ODCCP (1953).

The overall opium reductions between 1948 and 1954 have already been briefly surveyed. To assess the situation and developing policy further two more All-India Narcotics Conferences were held in 1956 and 1959 which reiterated the 1949 resolutions mentioned already.⁶² From 1 April 1959, the oral consumption of opium for non-medical purposes was prohibited except in the case of addicts registered on medical grounds. Since 1950 the quantity of opium released for oral consumption declined steadily from 150 tonnes to 2.5 tonnes in 1966. Simultaneously the number of registered addicts dropped from 200,000 in 1956 to 124,904 at the end of 1963. The number of opium smokers went down from 2,504 in 1953 to 1,822 in 1966.⁶³ Some of these figures may not be exact but they certainly reflect the state resolve in independent India to overcome the ill-effects of British opium policy in the shortest possible time. In an endeavour to supplement demand reduction with efficient control of supplies the GOI started lowering the number of opium cultivators. By a combination of strict licensing, cash rewards and other measures the opium yield went up from an average of 20.12 kg/hectare in 1953–54 to 30.60 kg/hectare in 1963–64. Simultaneously the area under opium cultivation also declined in favour of better policing and greater narcotics control in India.⁶⁴

The Effects of New Policy and Opium Regime in the 1970s

The results of the strict opium policies followed in the 1950s and 60s became evident soon. Illicit opium cultivation was more efficiently detected and successfully curbed. As the supply of excise opium fell, opium addiction declined rapidly in comparison with the British period. Studies indicate that in the 1960s and 70s opium use dropped drastically in states like Punjab and parts of rural north India.⁶⁵ In Assam, where the opium habit had become deeply entrenched before 1947,

⁶² Kohli (1996).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Singh and Lal (1977).

opium abuse continued to decline in 1980s.⁶⁶ The decline of opium addiction came about because of the prohibitively increasing opium prices, difficulty in obtaining illicit opium, social reforms and an increased awareness of the ill-effects of opium amongst people in general. Importantly, more and more young people were not taking to opium in the post 1947 decades.

In the 1970s the number of cultivators licensed to grow opium declined except for years of high international demand and the yield improved due to the efforts of the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN). Opium–poppy was cultivated in the traditional poppy growing tracts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in the interest of high yields. The ‘well organized’ system of licensing ‘based on a progressively increasing minimum yield as the criterion for continuity in the grant of license’ induced the poppy growers to give the maximum yield of opium to the government.⁶⁷ Simultaneously, ‘taking possession of the opium from the cultivators soon after the harvest through the system of mobile weighments-cum-collection centres and organizing checkmate operations in and around the growing areas’ minimized the flow of opium into illicit channels. Table 5 shows the trends of the 1970s:

Table 5
Opium: Area under Cultivation, Production and Average Yield, 1973–74 to 1976–77

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area under poppy cultivation (hectares)</i>	<i>No. of cultivators (thousands)</i>	<i>Production at 90 degrees centigrade (in 200 met. tonnes)</i>	<i>Average yield per hectare at 70 degrees centigrade (in kgs)</i>
1973–74	52,160	2,48,103	8,87,484	21.830
1974–75	43,713	2,11,302	10,33,243	30.390
1975–76	51,587	2,29,022	11,77,010	29.334
1976–77	57,010	2,23,942	11,63,774	26.242

Source: Opium–Poppy Cultivation in India, GOI, Ministry of Finance, CBN.

The authorities admit that despite the best efforts of the CBN ‘a small quantity [of opium] does trickle through due to the exorbitant prices available in the illicit market.’ But compared with the area of India, the number of opium cultivators and the general population this ‘illicit traffic is negligible and it is almost wholly domestic in character.’ To check and ultimately eliminate this traffic a Narcotics Intelligence Bureau (NIB) under the direction of the Narcotics Commissioner works round the clock. Following in the footsteps of the British system this wing of the CBN ‘maintains close liaison with the preventive agencies in the states and is responsible for coordinating national efforts at the Central level.’⁶⁸ Officials of

⁶⁶ J. Mahanta et al. (1977).

⁶⁷ CBN (n.d.), ‘Opium Poppy Cultivation in India’, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

the NIB keep dossiers of notorious drug smugglers, check traffic during the opium harvest and often use sniffer dogs to detect hidden supplies of illicit opium and other narcotics.⁶⁹ Officials showing exceptional enterprise in narcotics control are given incentives in the form of cash and other awards regularly. The success of these measures has often been noticed and mentioned by visiting and inspecting UN authorities. Due to these efforts and the high level of internal seizures of illicit opium almost negligible amounts of Indian opium flowed into the international channels in the 1970s. Table 6 shows opium cases and seizures in the 1970s.

Table 6
Opium Seizures—Cases and Quantities, 1972–73 to 1977–78

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of opium cases</i>	<i>Quantity of opium seized (in kgs)</i>
1972–73	621	8286.352
1973–74	396	4870.691
1974–75	646	8302.108
1975–76	640	5116.133
1977–78	570	5362.782

Source: CBN (n.d.), 'Opium–Poppy Cultivation in India'.

Intensified Battles against Illicit Opium Post 1970s

In the 1980s and 90s the political climate in India and its neighbourhood deteriorated in favour of drug smuggling and addiction. This was accompanied by the rise of a phenomenon called 'narco–terrorism' by security experts and strategic analysts.⁷⁰ While the problem of insurgency became acute in Punjab and the North East during the 1980s, in the following decade the Kashmir problem continued to attract national and international attention. In all three cases the links between terrorists and narcotic smuggling appear well established. On the other hand the increasing urbanization of the country and concentration of vast immigrant populations in the slums of cities and towns created fertile grounds for increased drug smuggling and addiction. The geographical location of India, which is sandwiched between the Golden Crescent in the North West and Golden Triangle of narcotics in the east, has always made the work of agencies like CBN difficult.

To counter the wave of 'narco–terrorism' and growing drug related crime the GOI enacted the NDPS Act of 1985 (amended in 1988) and The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (PTNDPS) of 1988. The latter was predicated upon the realization that the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs posed 'a serious threat to the health and welfare of the people and the activities of persons engaged in such illicit traffic have a deleterious effect on the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Dixit and Shah (1996).

national economy.⁷¹ On 14 November 1985 the NDPS Act, 1985 replaced The Opium Act, 1857, The Opium Act, 1878 and The Dangerous Drugs Act, 1930. This was done to equip the Indian state with a new legal framework to control narcotics. This change was necessitated by the emergence of a new context of the narcotic menace in the 1980s.⁷² In many parts of India the transition from traditional opium use to heroin abuse was well under way in the 1980s. This made the control of illicit opium imperative.

In pursuit of stricter enforcement in line with the NDPS Act of 1985 the CBN has conducted two projects to assess 'a fair average yield in field conditions to determine the qualifying yield for granting license for cultivation and also to estimate the amount of diversion of opium from licit channel.'⁷³ The findings of these projects are currently unavailable to the public. Nonetheless, from a CBN report released on the Internet we can infer the following. First, the government, despite its best efforts, has not succeeded completely in overcoming the illicit growing, leakage and limited proliferation of opium, even though the acreage under illicit cultivation of opium especially in the North East has fluctuated according to circumstances. Second, evidence suggests that undetected leakages may form the largest component of illicit opium and the base of other illicit opiates in India. At the moment the quantity of these opiates produced in India is almost negligible compared with their production in countries like Afghanistan. However, if left unchecked, this illicit production and traffic in opiates can snowball in the near future.

Several instances of illicit cultivation of opium have been recorded by the CBN and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) for the 1980s and 90s. Copies of the 'News From Narcontrol: War Against Drug Trafficking & Abuse', Bulletin of NCB, India, have regularly highlighted cases of illicit production and traffic of narcotics including opium. They have also underlined the regular destruction of illicit crops and manufacturing facilities. Sources claim that illicit cultivation of poppy is undertaken in far flung areas of Arunachal Pradesh and certain hill districts of Uttar Pradesh.⁷⁴ Upon discovery these crops have been routinely destroyed. In 1997 illicit poppy on about 30 hectares was destroyed in Arunachal Pradesh. In the following year the violation went up to nearly 100 hectares. In 1999 it was 250 hectares. The most affected areas are Tirap, Changlang, Lohit and Yingkiang areas of Arunachal Pradesh. So far no arrests have been made and the CBN is trying to 'work out a practical alternative development plan of action' to combat the problem with the financial assistance of the UNDCP in a hundred

⁷¹ The NDPS Act, 1985 and The PITNDPS Act, 1988 along with Central Rules and Notifications, Directorate of Publications, Customs & Central Excise, New Delhi, 1989.

⁷² For details see Deshpande (1998).

⁷³ CBN, 'Opium throughout History—Opium Poppy—An Overview'.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

affected villages of the Lohit district.⁷⁵ Reports of illicit cultivation of opium have also come in from Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. To overcome this problem the CBN is now using satellite imaging to detect illicit opium cultivation all over India with greater precision.

Successful CBN Operations against Illicit Cultivation of Opium in the Uttarkashi, Chakrata and the North East, 1958–2000

Uttaranchal

In several Himalayan villages of former Uttar Pradesh and current Uttaranchal the illicit cultivation of opium has had a long history. In Chakrata, for instance, the British had neither controlled the cultivation of poppy nor enforced opium legislation even with a modicum of seriousness. Further, the opium grown in this area was not collected by government agencies and this left its flow into illicit channels unchecked. However, after 1947 these realities changed in favour of efficient narcotics control as the Indian republic strove to meet its international opium commitments. Once the Opium and Revenue Laws (Extension and Application) were enacted in 1950, steps were immediately taken in consultation with the Government of Uttar Pradesh to restrict, and finally eliminate, poppy cultivation in Uttarkashi and Chakrata. It was decided that the people of these areas would be allowed to cultivate poppy for the purpose of collecting poppy seeds till 30 September 1957 in view of the extreme economic backwardness and poverty of the concerned hill region. But this decision proved counter-productive. A review of policy and survey of area under poppy carried out in 1958 revealed that opium–poppy was being cultivated in these areas on a large scale and clandestine opium extraction and sales were thriving. Quite obviously the opium growers were using the remote mountain hamlets, terraced fields and poor infrastructure to their advantage. In this context, and taking into account the omnipresent poverty of these peasants, the authorities realized that it would take longer to eradicate opium from these areas. Accordingly another extension was granted to the cultivation of poppy *both* for seed and opium in the Chakrata Tehsil, subject to annual reduction of cultivation by 25 per cent. The plan was to liquidate opium–poppy in this region by 1962. In Uttarkashi it was decreed that the cultivation of poppy would be allowed only for extracting seeds for a period of two years and all cultivation would finally end by October 1960. The reduction of opium–poppy in Chakrata during 1958–62 is given in Table 7.

The illicit cultivation of poppy in Chakrata was controlled by means of the system of village crop survey throughout the 1970s. In 1978–79 this survey was stopped. When resumed in 1981–82, the survey conducted by district authorities

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Table 7
Reduction of Opium–Poppy in Chakrata Tehsil, 1958–59 to 1961–62

Year	No. of cultivators	Area (in hectare)	Produce at 70	Average at 70 solids
1958–59	1632	113.089	340.873	3.01
1959–60	1571	40.726	182.071	4.47
1960–61	1502	34.713	99.082	2.85
1961–62	1303	16.491	69.275	4.75

Source: CBN.

revealed 92 villages with 146 hectares engaged in opium–poppy cultivation. The 1985 survey brought to light illicit cultivation on 132 hectares. The CBN sources point out that despite the passage of the NDPS Act of 1985 illicit cultivation of opium continued in the far-flung areas of Chakrata and Uttarkashi. More ground intelligence gathered confirmed the trend and in 1988 the NCB and CBN carried out a major operation in the area to detect and destroy illicit opium–poppy. A similar operation was undertaken by the CBN in 1992 with the following results shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Chakrata: Tehsil-wise Destruction of Illicit Poppy, 1992

Tehsil	Villages visited	No. of villages in which uprooting effected	No. of cultivators whose crop uprooted	Area uprooted (in hect.)
1	2	3	4	5
1-Bhatwari	8	6	95	2.679
2-Dunda	23	1	19	0.278
3-Barkot	25	2	7	0.138
4-Purola	23	2	12	0.277
Total	79	11	133	3.372

Source: CBN.

Although total destruction of illicit opium–poppy proved difficult throughout the 1990s, the CBN kept up the offensive against the law breakers. In 1992 reports were received by the CBN that illicit cultivation of poppy was going on in Barkot, Purola and Dunda tehsils of Uttarkashi. After a survey in 1993 a number of suspected villages were visited by the CBN officers. In 33 villages a standing flowering poppy crop of 335 cultivators on 18.177 hectares (approximately 0.51 lakh poppy plants) was detected and destroyed and 40 *panchnamas* were prepared on the spot against the violators. On site officers also noticed that illicit poppy grown on more than 18 hectares had been destroyed by the cultivators themselves in anticipation of the raid. They also noticed that in almost inaccessible spots not visited regularly by CBN and NCB officials illicit poppy was being grown with impunity on a large scale. Details of this 1993 operation are provided in Table 9.

Table 9
Tehsil-wise Destruction of Illicit Poppy in Uttarkashi, 1993

<i>Tehsil</i>	<i>No. of villages</i>	<i>No. of Panchmamas</i>	<i>No. of cultivators</i>	<i>Area in hect. in which poppy destroyed</i>	<i>No. of villages in which crop was already destroyed</i>	<i>Area in hect. in which crop was found already destroyed</i>
1-Barkot	7	7	30	0.435	16	15.670
2-Puroila	23	30	294	17.338	23	2.000
3-Dunda	3	3	11	0.404	11	0.455
Total	33	40	335	18.177	50	18.125

Source: CBN.

In the following year (18 May 1994) an aerial survey of Dunda, Purola and Barkot tehsils of Uttarkashi district was conducted by the Revenue Secretary (GOI) and the Narcotics Commissioner. Evidence of poppy cultivation was spotted in some of these areas upon which illicit cultivation on approximately 22 hectares in 46 villages was destroyed.

In the 1990s, data on illicit poppy cultivation have also been provided by satellites. The International Narcotics Control Strategy Report of 1995 prepared by the United States Government (USG) cites USG Satellite surveys of 1994 to suggest an illicit cultivation of opium in India on about 5,500 hectares with an estimated yield of 82 m. Tonnes. Most of this cropping was located in Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and the North East. But this estimate appeared exaggerated in comparison with ground realities reported by CBN surveys. No trace of illicit poppy was found in two of the four areas identified by the satellite in north Uttar Pradesh. In the remaining areas crops on only 64.50 existed and were destroyed. Around 100 hectares of the crop was located outside these areas in adjacent Uttarkashi. Negligible cultivation was found in Jammu and Kashmir in contrast with the 3,800 hectares reported by the satellite survey and no illicit cultivation was either found in Manipur or Mizoram. The overall position in 1995 is given in Table 10.

On the basis of these findings an extensive survey was undertaken by the CBN in 1995. The survey cum destroying mission lasted fifty-one days. The massive operation of 1995, covering four zones, was carried out with the objective of destroying illicit opium–poppy wherever possible, associating local revenue and forest officials in this task, exploring avenues of giving the cultivators economic alternatives to opium, prosecuting cultivators practicing illicit opium cultivation and finally increasing awareness amongst cultivators and people in general.

The first zone covered parts of Barkot, Purola and Dunda Tehsils of Uttarkashi District and parts of Tehri and Dhanaulti Tehsils of Tehri Garhwal district. Illicit cultivation was detected by CBN staff in 1995 on an area of 32.50 hectares covering 33 villages and large tracts of forest land. Most of the poppy crop was destroyed by the villagers themselves under the supervision of CBN staff. In some villages the crop was destroyed by the CBN staff in the absence of villagers who had fled. These villages, approached by bridle paths, were located far away from the nearest motorable road mostly at an elevation of 700 to 1,700 metres. The crop was found generally in the flowering and capsule stage in late April. No evidence of lancing was found anywhere. Opium–poppy is sown here not only for extraction of opium which is used as a medicine and a cash crop but also for poppy seeds which are used as a condiment. The villages, around which more than 1 hectare of illicit opium–poppy was detected, are shown in Table 11.

The second zone fell in Chakrata Tehsil of Dehradun district. The survey and destruction of illicit poppy crop over 76.718 hectares in 49 villages was undertaken by the Deputy Collector, Chakrata.

Table 10
Overall Comparative Position in 1995

State/Area	Illicit cultivation as reported by USG satellite survey			Area found under illicit cultivation on ground survey (in Ha.)		Survey agency
	Pocket/Area	Area (ha)	Yield (Mts.)			
1 Arunachal Pradesh	-	115	2	1	1	NCB
2 Eastern UP	-	-	-	-	-	-
3 North-west UP	4 (M to P)	1,140	17	64.5,100 (outside USG survey)	Report awaited	CBN/Distt. Admn.
4 Himachal Pradesh	5 (Q to V)	340	5			
5 Jammu & Kashmir	6 (A to E)	3,800	57	0.004		NCB/BSF
6 Manipur	1 (Area A)	85	1	No illicit cultivation		NCB
7 Mizoram	10 (Area B to H & J to L)	20	1	No illicit cultivation	Area J partially in Myanmar	Chief Secretary/NCB
8 Nagaland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		5,500	82	165,904		

Source: CBN.

Table 11
Villages with Illicit Cultivation

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of village</i>	<i>Area (in hectares)</i>
1	Bangaon	1.32
2	Kuakazwara	2.10
3	Kwata	1.15
4	Basangaon	3.21
5	Andi	1.69
6	Khasonsi	1.10
7	Bhatwari	9.15

Source: CBN.

The third zone covered the extreme northern part of Purola Tehsil of Uttarkashi district bordering Himachal Pradesh. Illicit opium cultivation in this area was scattered over nearly 100 sq. km. located at a height of 2,200 to 2,800 meters above sea level and was 18 to 36 km from the nearest motorable road. The terrain here is extremely hazardous and difficult to negotiate. Over 323 hectares of illicit opium cultivation was detected of which about 80 per cent was concentrated in the most inaccessible area. This entailed continuous trekking for upto 16 hours to locate the nearest area of illicit opium cultivation. The crop here ripens at the end of June. There were reports of poppy being cultivated for the purpose of opium trafficking. However, poppy is also cultivated for extraction of seeds, and opium addiction among the locals is not high. Most of the illicit opium–poppy is cultivated on forest lands. The villages in which more than 1 hectare of illicit opium–poppy cultivation was detected are given in Table 12.

Table 12
Villages with more than a Hectare of Cultivation

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of village</i>	<i>Area in hectare</i>
1	Seva	25.00
2	Gawalgaon	4.05
3	Silara	2.05

Source: CBN.

The fourth Zone did not fall in the USG Satellite survey area. Based on intelligence gathered, 24 hectares of illicit opium–poppy cultivation found in fourteen villages was destroyed in Purola Tehsil of Uttarkashi district. The cultivation here was scattered and not confined to a few isolated pockets. These villages, located at an attitude of about 1,900 metres to 2,600 metres, are 5 to 6 kms from the nearest motorable road. No evidence of lancing was found in May albeit available evidence indicates that some of the villagers do indulge in illicit opium trafficking. The villages around which more than 1 hectare of illicit opium–poppy cultivation was found are given in Table 13.

Table 13
Villages with more than 1 hectare of Illicit Cultivation

<i>S.No</i>	<i>Name of village</i>	<i>Area (in hectare)</i>
1	Duchanu	5.00
2	Kiranu	4.00
3	Myunda	2.00
4	Balawat	1.50
5	Makuri	1.50
6	Rawadhar	4.00
7	Kiroli	1.50
8	Jutari	3.00

Source: CBN.

During this operation efforts were made to educate people about the ill-effects of illicit opium cultivation on society. Several meetings were held and pamphlets were distributed in the affected villages.

A campaign to locate and destroy illicit poppy cultivation in the hill districts of Dehradun, Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal of U.P. was undertaken in 1996 by the CBN in collaboration with officers of local Revenue and Forest Departments. The results were quite heartening and no illicit poppy cultivation was detected in the villages which had previously indulged in illicit poppy cultivation. The extent of illicit poppy cultivation located and destroyed during the campaign is given in Table 14.

Table 14
Destruction of Illicit Poppy, 1996

<i>District</i>	<i>Tehsil</i>	<i>Villages with area under illicit poppy cultivation</i>	
Tehri Garhwal	Dhanaulti	Beltal	82 Sq. mtrs
		Jhangori	600 sq. mtrs
Uttarkashi	Dunda	Kuakjuweda	700 sq. mtrs
	Purola	Math	30 sq. mtrs
Dehradun	Chakrata	Kanad/Chatan	424 sq. mtrs
		Punning	4,170 sq. mtrs
Total			6,006 sq. metres or 0.60 hectares

Source: CBN.

In Chakrata, illicit cultivation in an area of 25 hectares mostly on forest lands was destroyed whereas in the previous year 76 hectares of illicit cultivation had been destroyed. Furthermore, intelligence gathered suggested that illicit opium in these areas can be obtained at Rs 400 per *tola* (11 gm), i.e., about Rs 36,000 per kg. This opium is moved clandestinely to the interior of the country through Himachal Pradesh. In 1996, in Chakrata Tehsil, 25 hectares were reportedly destroyed by the District Magistrate, Dehradun whereas CBN destroyed crops over 4,594 sq. metres.

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In 1997, the District Magistrate, Dehradun reported a destruction of 14.452 hectares area under illicit cultivation, of which 12.127 hectares were uprooted by the revenue officials, 0.1556 hectares by the CBN and the remaining appear to have been uprooted by the cultivators themselves prior to the arrival of the CBN teams in Chakrata Tehsil. The CBN prosecuted three offenders and the cases are being tried at the NDPS Court, Dehradun. Details of the 1997 operations are given in Tables 15 and 16.

Table 15
Details of Seizures Effected by CBN in Chakrata in 1997

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of village</i>	<i>Area founds own with opium poppy</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1	Buraila (Bulhad)	5.56 acres	About 16,000 plants, height 1.5 metres, having capsules on its heads but unlanced
2	Jagthan (Bulhad)	5.00 acres	-do-
3	Saij (Tuni)	2.00 acres	About 3,500 plants, 50 cm. in height, no capsules, at flowing stage
4	Saij (Tuni)	3.00 acres	-do-

Source: CBN.

Table 16
Details of Areas under Illicit Cultivation in Chakrata Surveyed and Intimated by the District Magistrate, Dehradun in 1997

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of Patwar area</i>	<i>Area surveyed/intimated</i>
1	Chilhad	1.528 hect
2	Mashak	1.015 hect.
3	Bhandroli	1.130 hect.
4	Kandoibharam	0.900 hect.
5	Anu	0.750 hect.
6	Chhajad	1.518 hect.
7	Tuni	0.230 hect.
8	Jadi	1.950 hect.
9	Kwanu	4.756 hect.
10	Bulhad	0.675 hect.
Total		14.452 hectares.

Source: CBN.

In the following year intelligence did not reveal any illicit cultivation of opium. Survey reports from Chakrata and other parts of Uttarkashi did not report any illicit opium cultivation. A year-wise result of CBN led operations in the area is given in Table 17.

As a result of the near continuous operations of 1992–97 and improved all round enforcement efforts in and around suspected areas, the illicit cultivation of opium has significantly declined in the hills of Uttaranchal. These years have also

Table 17
Comparative Data of Illicit Poppy Cultivation Detected and Destroyed

<i>Tract of illicit Poppy cultivation</i>	<i>Area detected and destroyed in the year (in hectares)</i>							
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	
Distt. Uttarkashi								
Tehsil Bhatwari	2.679	—	Survey conducted by	Nil	—	—	—	
Tehsil Dunda	0.278	0.404	Distt.	9.08	0.0700	—	—	
Tehsil Barkot	0.138	0.435	Administration	Nil	—	—	—	
Tehsil Purola	0.277	17.338		56.56	0.0030	0.15	—	
Distt. Dehradun								
Tehsil Chakrata	NA	NA	22.170	76.718	25.2500	14.52	—	
Dist. Tehri Garhwal								
Tehsil Dhanaulti		Survey not conducted as no intelligence received by CBN	—	22.46	0.0682	—	—	
Tehsil Tehri		18.177	22.170	—	—	—	—	
Total	3.372			164.818	25.5912	14.67	—	

Source: CBN.

witnessed greater policy co-operation and active co-ordination between the District Administration, Revenue Officials, NCB and the CBN in the fight against illicit opium. To provide poppy cultivators economic alternatives a number of steps are being taken. District authorities have initiated sowing of substitute crops and other development activities in this area as part of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

- (i) The promotion of substitutes like Soyabean, Sunflower, 'Rambans' and 'Ringal' are being considered.
- (ii) The cultivation of herbs like 'Atish' and 'Koot' are being explored.
- (iii) The promotion of local handicrafts, cottage industries, horticulture, fruits and fisheries is under consideration.
- (vii) The development of roads, provision of electricity, irrigation and modern communication facilities must be considered a top priority.
- (viii) Substitutes of poppy grown by the peasants must command a good support price and assured markets.
- (ix) Subsidies are being provided to the cultivators to switch over to alternate activities.

North East: Arunachal Pradesh

Poppy cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh, called the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) earlier, has a long history. Generally illicit poppy is grown in East Siang, Tirap and Lohit districts of the state. At present opium addiction is high. The illicit cultivation of opium poppy was highlighted by a survey conducted by the Customs Department of Shillong in 1991. After this a massive destruction operation was launched jointly by the NCB and Shillong Customs in February 1992 and the state government was asked to pursue the matter continuously. Since Arunachal Pradesh has not been notified for licit poppy cultivation, all poppy cultivation in it is illegal. Another destruction operation led by NCB and CBN was carried out in Upper Siang and Lohit districts in March 1997. The aim of this operation was also to educate the people. During the operation 44 lakh opium plants in 72 plots spread over 29 hectares was destroyed. A similar operation was repeated in 1998 when 100 hectares of illicit poppy was destroyed in East Siang and Lohit. The following year crops over 250 hectares were destroyed. In 2000 the survey teams located and destroyed crops over approximately 154 hectares in some parts of the state. The details of the 2000 operation are given in Table 18.

In the affected parts of Arunachal Pradesh opium has been traditionally used for medicinal and ceremonial purposes since pre-colonial times. It is now grown as a cash crop with several negative implications for the region. Given the topography and political sensitivity of the region it is difficult to stamp out illicit poppy in the state. Consequently the destruction operations mentioned above have not yielded the desired results. Each year the skilled practitioners of *jhoom* cultivation

Table 18
Destruction of Poppy in 2000 A.D.

<i>Areas covered under destruction operation</i>	<i>Dates of destruction operation</i>	<i>Number of plots</i>	<i>Areas under illicit opium crop destroyed (in hectares)</i>
Upper Siang Distt.	23.2.2000 to 2.3.2000	137	46.1480
Tirap & Changlang Namsai Sub-Division of Lohit district	21.2.2000 to 3.3.2000	183	85.4300
	8.3.2000 to 13.3.2000	99	21.5858
Total		419	153.1638

Source: CBN.

shift to more inaccessible areas. Finally, due to the absence of economic development and opium substitutes the dependence on opium remains strong.

There are aspects of opium cultivation in India which require greater attention in the context of national *and* international conditions mentioned in this article. Finding opium substitutes is one, and contemplating a total ban on cultivation is another. The lobby of opium growers may not make this easy. The illicit production and traffic in opium depend upon a variety of factors like law and order, 'narcoterrorism', unemployment, the state of economic development and the national and international political context of drug peddling and crime. There is enough reason to believe that the authorized opium cultivators are not as innocent as the sources would have us believe. The following quotation taken from a volume written by two eminent IPS officers suggests that the problem may be more acute in the traditional opium growing tracts of north India than in far off Arunachal Pradesh where illicit opium is generally consumed locally. This citation should be read along with drug seizures reported from various parts of the country in newspapers on a daily basis. Assuming that only a small proportion of illegal opium and heroin is actually confiscated by the police and other agencies the problem appears immense. 'In Rajasthan,' the authors write,

...every year a large number of old clients are removed from the list which indicates that they fail to satisfy conditions laid for the license. The required amount of opium is not delivered by the farmers to the collection centre. This indicates that a large quantity of licit opium leaks into the illicit markets in Rajasthan and Gujarat. No reliable survey has been conducted in Rajasthan but it is common knowledge that rural people, specially tribals, consume opium.⁷⁶

A sample survey of Gujarat conducted by the Drug Abuse Information Rehabilitation and Research Centre (DAIRRC) and the Bureau of Narcotics and Drugs Control (BN & DC) tells us that the number of opium addicts in four major

⁷⁶ Dixit and Shah (1996: 78).

cities of the state is about 80,000. In Ahmedabad there are 30,000, in Baroda 20,000, in Surat 17,000 and Rajkot 13,000 addicts. A similar survey conducted in 173 villages of Banaskatha district of Gujarat reveals nearly 1,200 opium addicts.⁷⁷ In other parts of India too the problem appears serious and can be addressed by even development, honest governance and improvement in enforcement:

In northern India, Delhi, followed by Varanasi, Agra, Lucknow, Moradabad and cities of Punjab are other important centres both for internal and external trade in drugs. The opium producing belt of U.P. includes Ghazipur, Barabanki, Shahjahanpur, Badaun and Bareilly districts. Poppy grown in U.P. zone is diverted to an alkaloid factory at Ghazipur. The leakage from licit cultivation is quite sizeable and growers with connivance [of] smugglers develop indigenous methods to by-pass the law. A large number of cultivators get cases registered for dacoity and robbery with respect to opium which normally remains untraced. If the cases so registered are correct then the criminals take this opium to illicit markets otherwise the cultivators by lodging false cases dispose of this opium in the illicit market at a higher rate and thereby augment their income, and the operators thus get the raw material for clandestine factories which cater to the needs of consumers in big cities.⁷⁸

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⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* The media has also constantly highlighted the dangers of illicit traffic in opium and opiates. Newspaper reports have concentrated public attention on the GOI's opium policy, the strength of the opium growers lobby, opium smuggling and certain weaknesses in the government control mechanisms which the smugglers exploit. For instance the *NORTH EAST SUN*, 1–14 January 2001 carried the following flashback from its issue of 16–22 July 1994: The entire north east is being targeted by the ISI of Pakistan in a new 'Opium War' against India. Sources close to the NCB claim that Manipur alone consumed 2,000 grams of heroin every day worth Rs 2 crore in the international market. The report also carries a photo of illicit opium cultivation in progress in Arunachal Pradesh.

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