

INSA- Guwahati Conference -

Report on Illicit Cultivation and recommendations-

Some illicit cultivators from Lohit and Anjaw had come. Their names are: Gosailum Ama, Ms. Marap and Ms. Tawsit. A Gaon Burah – Gawaso Ama did not come as he had injured his leg. They were accompanied by social activists Ms. Basamlu Kiskro and Ms. Rashmi Kiskro, who kept quiet during the discussions.

The cultivators who came for the meeting (Gosailum Kri, Ms. Yekhilu Marap and Ms. Khamai Tawsit) justified cultivating opium poppy as it has got rid of their poverty. No credit was given to Government's education schemes of the 80s & 90s that subsidized their studies all over the country with generous grants.

The products of the 90s are now doctors, bureaucrats, engineers, scientists, pilots, professors, traders, shop keepers, entrepreneurs, doctors and contractors etc et al and in one laudatory case curator of the Gwalior Museum (Ms. Rige Shiba). This list gives an idea how many Digaru and Taraon Mishmis have prospered and spread all over the country with Government's help.

The opium cultivators who attended the Conference were those who cultivated opium on a commercial scale. They are roughly less than one fifth of the opium growing cultivators, but produce most of the opium. The majority opium cultivators are still subsistence ones and live in villages that are more than 4 hours walk away from the tarred roads. Less than 3 hours walk from the road are vast commercial fields.

Opium is now grown everywhere. Even in the vacant lands next to the airport at Tezu and inside the Indira Gandhi Government College, whose students have justified opium cultivation in their college magazine.

At these sessions there were representatives of the neighbouring affected community of Idu Mishmis. They said that till 6 years ago they had no history of opium use or cultivations. Now they have. And the former are in plenty. They blamed the Digaru

and Taraon Mishmis for this and especially the policemen and para military men, who have been posted in Anjaw and Lohit districts for introducing opium addiction to the Dibang Valley Districts.

Shri S. Shinde, Special Secretary to the Governor spoke about his efforts to remove opium cultivation from Tirap District where he was earlier the Deputy Commissioner. But his claims that he de-toxified opium addicts in seven days are unbelievable. There is opium cultivation in Changlung, Yingkiong and Tirap districts of E. Arunachal Pradesh too. The extent needs to be surveyed. .

Alternative Development was also discussed at a session. In 1987 when eradication first started in the then undivided Lohit district (as also in Siang, Tirap and Changlang) it was extremely backward. There was one rough main road that would crumble at many places in even moderate rain. This road was the approx 240 kms long Tezu to Walong road. There was only one bus service in a week. There was no market for the few vegetables that they produced. Nearly all the houses were shabby thatch that let in rain and the cold wind. All the farmers were of subsistence level. Opium was used for ritual, medicine and relaxation. The young were not addicted and most were against it. By the end of the 90s constant eradication, awareness and development by the State Government had reduced the opium cultivation to small patches grown for addiction mainly. Medical and Veterinary Centers had opened up in several areas.

By the beginning of this century there were many good roads snaking off into many side valleys, health centers, mini and micro hydel projects, free electricity, more schools and many more job opportunities and self employment. There were several daily bus services between Tezu-Hayuliyang-Hawai-Walong as well as private mini buses, taxis and private cars and motorcycles plying. There are mobiles with most of the adult population and there's internet too. A sign of improved living conditions is that in the small sub division town of Hayuliyang there are two jewelers now, when earlier there were none.

But now there is opium cultivation, and the young are involved in it, using it and supporting it. Development has only whetted their appetite for more money, by any means whatsoever.

At the Conference we heard Mr. Hkam Awng formerly a Colonel in Myanmar CDAC and now a Director in charge of the Alternative Development programmes of Mae Fah Luhang Foundation in Myanmar. He spoke about the success in Doi Tung in the NW of Thailand. The AD in that region started in 1990 by which time the opium production in that area was down to less than 1 ton because of strenuous enforcement. Though the area appears to have benefited from AD there is also the fact that many of these former cultivators have started consuming amphetamines and metamphetamines. Further, the AD in Doi Tung has not encouraged people to break out of the traditional confines of their society and specialize in other productive vocations. Unlike in Anjaw and Lohit distts where education has given the people the freedom to choose from many professions or be self employed.

Comments and Recommendations:

Eradication:

From the defiant and sneering attitude of the cultivators we can only recommend eradication. But to even attempt to eradicate all fields is impossible. What could be done is to separate the *commercial* fields from those of the *subsistence* level cultivators. The latter have yields as low as 2 kgs. The former have yields of around 20 kgs. And target only the larger fields, some of which are well away from the road – like those of Raliang village two hours off the Hayuliyang – Chalagam subsidiary road along the Dah river.

For the subsistence level farmers we suggest that they need not be touched. They are growing opium for their own use primarily and also for bartering for better quality cereals, kerosene oil and utensils. To target every small field will be unproductive. It will also cause serious health problems for quite a few of them. Some of these cultivators consume as much as 3 gms (and more even- unbelievably) of opium a day!

If their fields are cut they will die as there is no treatment facility closer than 600 kms away.

To collect intelligence to pin point the commercial sized fields is impossible in the traditional way of going along the road and chancing upon fields with the help of binoculars. It cannot be done. The few people from CBN who know the area in Lohit only well are well known and can be harassed too. Satellite Survey is well nigh impossible too, as during the opium flowering season there are clouds on most days and then the mountainous terrain makes survey quite difficult.

Survey by helicopter in the third week of February when the opium flowers start blooming will be more effective. Within a week of the survey being done, large teams ought to be ready to move in quickly. They could operate from three bases- Tezu, Hayuliyang (Karu) and Anjaw.

For the subsistence level farmers the only option is to *revive Opium Registry* first and then cut their fields.

Alternative Development (AD):

AD is an another name for development, which these two districts - Anjaw & Lohit have benefited from. So far it has been limited to where the roads are. Development has covered only about 20% of the population. The rest are waiting for development and - an opportunity to cultivate opium on a large scale.

Some steps have been retrogressive. The free and easily accessible educational and agricultural financing schemes of the 90s have been replaced by a much stricter, time consuming and often corrupt, multi form and verification regime. As a result most are being denied such scholarships. This has been one of the reasons for the proliferation of opium cultivation.

AD is no comparison for the economic advancement of the entire region, which State intervention is doing, but rather slowly. Opium cultivation in Anjaw and Lohit cover almost all of the 600 or so villages.