CHAPTER—3

GENERAL CAUSES OF DRUG ADDICTION

A model of drug taking behaviour suitable for universal application cannot be developed because the reasons behind drug use vary from society to society and within the same society from time to time. However, the data generated by micro-level inquiries throws considerable light on the factors for the growing habit of drug use. Some explanation of the causal factors may be common to all abusers, but factors unique to a particular group of people or a place may, however, be equally important.

The causal factors responsible for drug use have been divided into five categories namely—psychological, social and cultural, economic and miscellaneous. Those factors which pertain to one's personality have been included under the psychological category. These causes are normally associated with the psychology of individuals and may be confined to their state of mind. On the other hand, social and cultural factors are determined by the institutional structure and values of the society. They are connected with social norms and values, family system, friendship patterns, customs and traditions, usage, beliefs etc. Since such causes are located in social structure, drug taking is usually discussed in terms of the elements of the social system. Moreover, certain factors affecting individual's behaviour are produced by their material existence. Economic factors emanate from this dimension of people's life. And finally all other factors or reasons that cannot be directly included under these categories, have been placed under the miscellaneous category.

From the above discussion, we can summarise the major causes/ reasons for the growing trend of drug addiction as follows;
Psychological: (a) Curiosity, (b) Frustration and anxiety, (c) For pleasure, (d) Insomnia, (e) Boredom, (f) Rebellion against parents, (g) Particular motivation towards life etc.

Social and cultural: (a) As a fashion, (b) Friend’s pressure/peer pressure, (c) Broken home, (d) Lack of parental care and control, (e) Youth sub-culture, (f) Break down of traditional values, (g) Influence of addicts etc.

Economic: (a) Unemployment, (b) Easy availability of money, etc.

Miscellaneous: (a) Easy availability of drugs, (b) Experimentation, (c) Uncertainty and lack faith in the future and so on.

There can be several reasons and ways in which a person can get into the drug habit. Some persons are attracted to drugs to satisfy their curiosity, while some others are driven to it by their friends and companions. Many individuals take refuse under the drugs to escape from the practical problems, tensions and frustrations of their personal and social life. In a fast changing society, they find themselves surrounded by various anxieties and uncertainties. In such a situation, instead of facing the challenge, they crave for the dream world of narcotic drugs. Again, for some individuals narcotic drugs provide a new experience, pleasure and excitement out of their otherwise boring and dull life. Some individuals may start taking drugs as pain relievers during long physical illness and ultimately become addicted to it. Some individuals may again start taking drugs due to insomnia and ultimately become addicted to it. The younger generation is attracted towards drugs either due to some dissatisfaction or because drug-taking become almost a fashion in their peer group. For adolescents, it is a symbol of having come of age, of being daring, courageous, rugged and adventurous. It is a common fact that teenagers are highly influenced by models, not by critics. Therefore, parents who take drugs can not prevent their children from taking drugs. However, it requires to be clarified that a person may not take drugs due to any one reason. Multiples of
factors may be involved in his final decision to use drugs. Causes such as curiosity, frustration, anxiety, pleasure seeking, rebellion against parents and definite or particular motivation towards life may go together.

Under the category of social and cultural factors, the reasons assigned include fashion, friend's pressure or peer pressure, family problems etc. To take up drugs as a fashion is another dimension that has been attributed by many youngsters. Adoption of new styles in music, dance, dress and even in interpersonal relationship is commonly found in them. Besides dating, boyfriend, girlfriend and all such things can be held responsible. Use of alcohol become as common as any other normal activity. It is under this kind of situation that the youths are spending their time and energy. Drugs have been introduced in the world of youths under such an environment. Tobacco, cigarette, alcohol and narcotic drugs form a kind of continuum in the process of becoming a drug user.

Family continues to be an important institution. Family being the most significant primary group acts as a unit to which human being feel a natural sense of belongingness. Once a person feels alienated from the family ties due to inadequate attention, excessive control or broken home, his reaction may be sharp and violent. Alienation, isolation and despair create an unfavourable family environment where things such as alcohol and other drugs are the normal resorts. Use of alcohol and other drugs becomes an instrument to escape from parental authority and indifference, besides a means of opposing the established order. Besides alienation from family, alienation from the society has often been referred to as a cause of drug addiction, which may not always be true. Because there may be more drug users who though not alienated from the society, do not share the views of the established social norms.

Apart from these, many other factors like the loss of social and moral values, disintegration of traditional family and community ties, breakdown of
traditional norms etc. are some of the contributing factors in the rising trend of drug addiction. The lack of cohesive family structure is another contributing factor. Today the family no longer exerts as much influence on the child as it did in the past. The extended family which consists of parents, children, grand parents, uncles, aunts and cousins, is no longer a cohesive unit that can exert influence and on which the child can depend for support and guidance. Only the nuclear family, which consists of parents and their own children or single parent with children, is prevalent today. If both the family and peer groups in the society have characteristics which are conducive to drug use, there is a strong likelihood of the youth's involvement in drugs. It is possible that widespread drug use results, in part, from the general lack of meaningful activities available to adolescents in society, and a related sense of boredom. Adolescents who do not feel a part of any of society's valued activities, such as work or relevant education, have no reason to avoid the use of drugs. The loss of social and moral values and extensive separation of youths from adults in our society very often result in peer group's considerable influence over the youths. This influence, in many cases, extends to alcohol and other drug use. Therefore, the family must help the youngsters make the link between adolescence and adulthood in an orderly manner so that the youngsters may become productive citizens. Through the family and the youngsters' initial relationship with their parents, they learn how to relate effectively to the outside environment. If the parents relinquish their rightful roles in guiding, supporting and teaching their youngsters, the peer group will become primary source of influence. The peer group is not always equipped to handle the problems of youngsters or satisfy their needs in a socially acceptable manner.

Certain patterns of interaction in the family appears to be particularly influential on children's eventual use of drugs. Some parents have by accident or design provided their children with material possessions but failed to provide an
emotional environment conducive to fostering future emotional stability and positive behavioural adaptation in the community. When this emotional support is not provided, the youngsters often see drug abuse as an alternative. Because many of the today's parents were materially deprived in their youth, they overreact by providing their children with material possession often at the expense of providing emotional support and guidance as the youngsters progress towards adulthood. This explanation of drugs use as a reaction to adolescents marginal status and their resultant boredom, is further supported by research showing that youths who avoid drug use are involved with society's institution. These institutions include religious institutions and the family, as well as the educational system, as a preparation for the adulthood.

Besides the above causes, strong superstitions are also very often responsible for the consumption of drugs. Myths like our "Sages" and "Sanyasis" in the Himalayas seeking inner truth by taking opium is an instance of such superstitions. Again, some others falsely believe that after taking a particular drug, the levels of their perceptions are heightened, they become more capable of self-insight, creative thinking and intellectual activity. In India cannabis and opiate narcotics have been used since the ages for medicinal and religious purposes apart from its normal function of causing intoxicating effect. Bhang and ganja are frequently taken by agricultural and non-agricultural labourers after a hard day's work to alleviate fatigue and to enliven things in an otherwise routine and dull life. It has also been estimated that a 50 percent increase in cannabis consumption occurs in certain parts of India during the harvesting seasons. The same motivation on the part of the labour classes has been reported from Aftica.¹

No single factor in drug dependence has been identified form the basis of predictions as to who is likely to become an addict. Scientists have

endeavoured to isolate pre-disposing genetic or biochemical factors in drugs dependence. Behaviourists have sought to identify character disorders and even the influence of the family and patterns of child rearing. Social scientists, on the other hand, have looked for socio-cultural origins.²

Apart from the above, the factors like rapid industrialization and urbanization, have incredibly increased the pace of human activity, aggravating the stress and strain of day-to-day existence. Coupled with this, the emergence of new values like individualism and society's permissiveness have eroded the age-old inhibition, taboos and attitudes of self restraint³.

It may, however, be pointed out that the above discussion is only illustrative and by no means exhaustive. As stated earlier, the degree of their applicability to particular situations will vary from place to place, and from time to time.

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