CHAPTER-5

SOURCES OF DRUGS

INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF DRUGS

The international drug abuse scenario is extremely grave, ranking in the top of the pressing problems of the globe, as global cultivation of opium-poppy, coca, cannabis, etc. continues to expand in spite of multifaceted effort to curb them. There are many illegal organisations engaged in the cultivation, production and trafficking of modern illicit drugs, but the following areas are more particularly notorious for this vice.

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The Golden Triangle is the name given to an area of about 75,000 sq miles spreading over Burma (Myanmar), Thailand and Laos—in the Southeast Asia. The Golden Triangle covers kachin in the shan hills of northeast Burma, some mountain crests of northern Thailand and a high plateau in Laos. Much of this mountainous region, interrupted by deep valleys and covered by dense forest, is virtually impenetrable. The majority of the inhabitants of this area are belonged to the same Chino-Tibetan ethnonlinguistic family. Cultivation of opium is the only source of livelihood of these poor tribes.

Historically, most of the world’s illicit opium for heroin production has been grown in the Golden Triangle area. Led by Burma which typically has contributed more than 90 percent of the region’s opium production, Southeast Asia reached record highs of opium production between 2,500 and 2,800 metric tons per year through most of the 1990s¹. However, in the last decade,

¹ Global Heroin Threat to United States, July 2000, P.-39
Territorial Control of United Wa State Army

- Controlled by United Wa State Army
- Opium poppy growing area

in the absence of sustained alternative crop substitution programmes and consistent narcotics crop eradication efforts (except in Thailand), only weather fluctuations have had a significant impact on opium poppy cultivation and production in Southeast Asia. Major droughts in 1994, 1998 and 1999 were the primary factor causing the opium poppy cultivation and production to drop for the third consecutive year to the lowest levels. Besides this, eradication in some key growing areas also contributed to the decline in poppy cultivation and potential opium production in the Southeast Asia. The effects of drought, however, make it difficult to determine the exact impact of Burma’s eradication effort. In Thailand, aggressive eradication and effective crop substitution programmes have reduced Thai opium production to less than 1 percent of the region’s total. Thailand is now a net importer of opium to meet the demands of its addicts. However, Thailand remains an important brokering and transshipment hub due to its advanced communication infrastructure.

Without a meaningful eradication effort of its own and with little changes in the UN-supported crop substitution projects—Laos remains the world’s third-largest producer of illicit opium. Opium production in Laos was also less affected by drought than Burma’s. The profitability of growing opium as a cash crop and lack of resources and commitment of the regional governments to implement the crop-substitution and alternative development programmes or to pursue aggressive eradication efforts are the key factors that may lead to significant rebound in Southeast Asian opium production. Remote location and rugged terrain of the poppy growing areas in Burma and Laos are the major obstacles to establishing viable crop-substitution programmes. In addition, the lack of a transportation infrastructure in most of the opium growing regions further complicates the efforts to encourage crop-substitution. Besides these many of the hill tribes are dependent on opium poppy cultivation and have not been taught the modern farming techniques that could improve yield of legitimate alternative crops.

2. *Global Heroin Threat to United States*, op. cit., P. 41
Besides producing the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asian opium, Burma (Myanmar) is at the centre of the drug-trade because of the dominance of the powerful drug-trafficking armies in heroin production and the permissive environment within which the heroin industry is able to operate. The key suppliers of Southeast Asian heroin are powerful drug-trafficking armies—particularly the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the ethnic Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army that largely control Burma's primary opium-growing regions. The UWSA has dominated heroin production and trafficking in Burma since Khun-Sa negotiated the surrender of his Mong Tai Army to Rangoon in 1996. The Wa and kokang insurgents army are now engaged in the lucrative business of drug trafficking. They control most of the Burma's heroin refinery operations and provide well-armed escort for drug-shipments being exported through remote border crossings with China or Thailand. In addition to heroin, they have diversified their drug business to include production and trafficking of amphetamines and methamphetamines which has been increasingly popular and profitable in the Southeast Asian drug market.

Burma's heroin trade prospered since the military crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in 1988. Burma's military regime also negotiated cease fire agreements with the UWSA and the Kokang army that allowed it to focus on suppressing the pro-democracy movement in the cities and to combat the ethnic karen and kachin insurgencies that were more immediate threat to the military authority. The ceasefire agreement also gave the UWSA and Kokang drug-trafficking armies virtual autonomy in the areas they control, including a free hand to continue and expand their drug-trafficking activities. Although the military regime in recent years demanded that the minority ethnic based groups of Burma has given up drug-trade, it has taken steps against the weaker drug-trafficking armies, such as raiding the refineries associated with

3. Global Heroin Threat to United States, op.cit, P.-42
Kachin insurgency. Rangoon appears to be unwilling to take steps against the more powerful UWSA and Kokang armies.

THE GOLDEN CRESCENT

The Golden Crescent comprises an area spreading over the border regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran—in the Southwest Asia. In the late 1990s Southwest Asia displaced Southeast Asia as the world's largest producer of illicit opium for the international drug market. Southwest Asia produced an estimated 1,707 metric tons of opium in 1999, compared to an estimated 1,236 metric tons in drought-striken Southeast Asia.4

Opium poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan have sky rocketed since the Soviet military withdrawal in 1989. Reaching a new record high in 1999, Afghanistan has overtaken Burma as the world's single largest source of illicit opium for the international narcotic industry. The area of land in Afghanistan devoted to poppy cultivation is substantially lower than in Burma, but the opium yield in Afghanistan is two to three times that of Burma because of better soil, superior farming practices and developed irrigation systems. The high profits for growing opium, continued disrepair of the country's war-ravaged economic infrastructure, and the policies of Taliban which virtually control all opium growing areas in Afghanistan—are the major factors driving the Afghan opium industry. Continued fighting since the Soviet pullout and widespread damage to roads have made it difficult and costly for farmers to move legitimate agricultural crop to city markets. This significantly increases the incentive to grow highly profitable opium. Moreover, an opiate processing infrastructure has become well established and continued to expand in the major opium growing regions of the country.

The UNDCP and US-funded alternative development programmes including crop-substitution projects had virtually no effect in reducing poppy


Drug-Trafficking Routes From Northern Afghanistan

Map showing drug trafficking routes from northern Afghanistan to countries in the region, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The map highlights key cities and routes, such as Ashgabat, Mary, and Tehran.
cultivation in several areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban has given only token support for alternative development projects and has not made any serious effort to eradicate illicit poppy cultivation. While opium cultivation has been increasing exponentially in Afghanistan, Islamabad’s crop-control programmes have reduced Pakistan to a marginal producer. Since the early 1990s, Pakistan has been implementing tough measures to impose ban on opium cultivation. The UNDCP and US-funded attentive development programmes have played a major role in building roads into previously remote opium growing areas, thereby encouraging the farmers to grow legitimate crop and facilitating the government’s eradication efforts. Successful eradication has nearly wiped out opium cultivation in the three major historical growing areas of Pakistan—Bajaur, Mohmand Agencies and Dir district. The remaining poppy cultivation in Pakistan is being driven into increasingly isolated and difficult terrain in the North-West-Frontier Province.

Besides the tremendous increase in Afghan opium production, the most significant development in the Southwest Asia in the 1990s was the buildup of an expansive opiate processing infrastructure in Afghanistan. By the mid-1990s, much of the region’s opiate processing refineries had been shifted across the border into Afghanistan. Multiton seizures of essential precursor chemical-- acetic anhydride-- for heroin production in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and United Arab Emirates and the sharp increase in seizures of heroin shipment from Afghanistan by the Central Asian countries and Iran, are the strong indicators that there has been a large-scale heroin production taking place in Afghanistan.

Another major development in the Southwest Asian heroin trade has been the emergence of a powerful network of traffickers. By the mid—1990s, the Southern Afghanistan became established as the source region for opiate

5. *Global Heroin Threat to United States*, op.cit. P-56
in the Southwest Asia. A powerful network of traffickers has asserted and consolidated control over much of the narcotic production, brokering and transportation. They also established a region wide trafficking network that made them the dominant trafficking organization in Southwest Asia. Ethnic and political affiliations of these trafficking groups allow them to maintain an extensive trafficking network that operates beyond Pakistan and Afghanistan into Iran, Turkey and Central Asia.

Besides the above trafficking groups, Dawood Ibrahim’s D’company has emerged as a major player in the Southwest Asian drug-trade. Dawood’s D’company has forged alliance with Osama Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Laskar-e-Toiba and other Islamic terrorist groups. This alliance is further strengthened in the post 9/11 (Sept.11/2001 attack on World Trade Centre, U.S.) period when Dowood helped route out drugs, money and Al-Qaeda cadres from Afghanistan. Reportedly, Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda has been deeply involved in drug-trafficking for raising fund to purchase arms and ammunition. Al-Qaeda’s drug operations came to the surface earlier in 2003, when three boats operated by Al-Qaeda linked persons and carrying two tons of hashish, 85 pounds of heroin and 150 pounds of methamphetamines were seized, the officials were quoted as saying by the “Washington times”.

COLOMBIA

The coca plant, from which cocaine is made, is an evergreen native of South America, particularly the counties of Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and Chile. About 4 lakh acres of land has been in use for illegal coca cultivation in South America alone. Peru leads with almost 2.4 lakh acres, Bolivia follows with about 90,000 acres and Colombia with another 60,000 acres. The neighbouring countries of Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Argentina have

smaller areas. However, not all the coca-cultivations are illegal, some are lawfully grown for chewing and for medicinal purposes. In Peru all coca leaves can be sold to ENACO, a government undertaking. But most of the leaves find their way to Colombia, as do leaves from Bolivia and other countries. Here giant laboratories convert these leaves into cocaine to be smuggled mainly to United States and the continent. 

Reports of opium poppy cultivation in Colombia was first surfaced in the mid-1980s, but significant cultivation had been confirmed only in the early 1990s. By the mid 1990s, the Colombian heroin industry was producing enough of high purity white heroin to capture the US market. The Colombian heroin trade, at present, closely resembles the heroin to industry in Mexico. Unlike in the Asian source countries, heroin processing laboratories in Colombia operate on a small scale; the heroin production is not dominated by large-well-armed trafficking groups. There are no multi-hundred kilogram internal movement of opiate products. The Colombian heroin is smuggled into United States in small, single-kilogram amounts, Like the Mexican industry, the Colombian heroin trade is focused almost exclusively on the US market, the production and trafficking of heroin are more fragmented with smaller trafficking groups playing major roles. However, Colombia Government's eradication efforts are likely to keep opium cultivation and heroin production from significant increase.

MEXICO

Mexico grows only about 2 percent of the world's illicit opium, but the entire crop is converted into heroin. An equilibrium has become established between opium cultivation and the Mexican Government's eradication efforts that appears to be holding the opium production in check. Unlike in the far

larger Southeast and Southwest Asian source countries, opium poppy cultivation in Mexico, as in Colombia, occurs year round because of favourable climate. With a 100 day growing cycle, single opium field in Mexico can yield three crops per year.

Despite having the lowest density of cultivation per hectare of potential growing area, the opium cultivation and production in Mexico have been relatively stable through most of the 1990s. The average annual production of opium in Mexico is about 54 metric tons which allow the traffickers to produce 5 to 6 metric tons of heroin per year\textsuperscript{12}. Mexico's extensive poppy crop eradication programmes has effectively balanced the cultivation, destroying about two-third or more of the crop annually. Mexico's eradication programme is the primary constraint to increase in opium production.

Mexican heroin industry is highly fragmented with many opium growers, heroin processors and small-scale trafficking groups operating independently. Mexican heroin trafficking groups operate differently depending on their size, structure, capabilities and resources. These groups run their own small-scale heroin processing operations, acquiring opium directly from the farmers or brokers. In some cases they sell heroin to large drug-trafficking organizations. Many of the smaller trafficking groups smuggle heroin into United State, mostly across the California and Texas border\textsuperscript{13}.

**NATIONAL SOURCES**

In India, apart from illegal cultivation of opium poppy in different pockets, particularly in the Kashmir valley and Arunachal Pradesh, about 25,550 hectares of land is used for cultivation of different narcotics plants under the supervision of the Central Government. Licit-licensed cultivation of opium is done in the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh under the control...
and supervision of the Central Government. The Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) is responsible for all facets of the opium industry. Illicit-unlicensed cultivation of opium poppy is reportedly done in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. According to a Lok Sabha debate, about 75 lakhs of farmers are engaged in the opium cultivation which is their traditional crop and main source of livelihood. At the time of harvesting the officials of the custom department use to come for collecting the produce after paying the farmers their dues. However, a kilogram of opium which is sold at prices between Rs. 5,000/- to Rs. 10,000/- in the illicit market, the poor farmers are given on the average a sum amount by the government. This amount being grossly inadequate for their survival, therefore, the possibility of a sizeable amount of their total production reaching the illicit market cannot be ruled out. The opium produced through illicit cultivation and that diverted from licit cultivation is reported to be converted into heroin in many clandestine laboratories operating in the country. These laboratories generally produce low quality brown heroin (referred to as brown sugar) for domestic consumption. But the recent seizures and intelligence reports suggest that heroin HCl including export quality white heroin is also produced in India.

Apart from opium, cultivation of cannabis plant and use of its products are illegal in India. Inspite of it, there are wide-spread cultivation of this plant in our country. However, the exact estimate as to the size of this cultivation is not available. Reportedly, illicit cannabis cultivation is done in the state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura. The majority of the ganja (marijuana) and hashish produced in India are likely for domestic use, although a percentage is destined for international market.
NORTH EAST INDIA

Illegal-unlicensed cultivation of opium poppy and cannabis plants have been noticed in many of the states of the North East region. Illicit opium poppy cultivation is reported to be done in the eastern most districts of Arunachal Pradesh and in the border regions of Mizoram. In Mizoram, it is mostly cultivated in remote hill slopes by the intruding tribals from Myanmar side. In many instances, Myanmarese traffickers have been found to have commissioned such cultivations for buying up the entire produce for converting into heroin for which laboratories existed in several Myanmarese towns. In Arunachal Pradesh, it is grown by the local tribals in the district of Tirap, Changlang, Lohit and Yingkiong. Eradication operations conducted over the years in these districts have not been very successful as each year the cultivators shift their cultivation to new more remote inaccessible areas in the jungles and higher up in the mountain sides. The reason being that in the absence of any alternative development programme, the ethnic people of these districts are increasingly dependent on illicit opium poppy cultivation for their livelihood.

Besides opium, large-scale illegal cannabis cultivation has also been noticed in the north eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. Manipuri ganja is well known for its quality. In the state of Tripura, it is cultivated in wide areas and a large part of the produce is used to be pushed into Bangladesh. Periodic raids and destruction operations conducted by enforcement agencies in these areas seemed to have little impact on cannabis cultivation.