

Media Pedagogy for Drugs: A Qualitative Study from the Movie Udta Punjab

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ABSTRACT: *India is the second most populous country in the world at present. With its 40% of population falling below the age of 18, there is a growing concern for the youth succumbing to the spiralling scourge of drug abuse and addiction. While many prevention programmes for drug abuse are in plan, with some of them already in function, there is nevertheless an increased need to spread awareness about the devastating consequences of drug addiction. In this regard, the use of mass media comes in handy. Media has a powerful impact in shaping young people's perceptions and guiding them to change their behaviour for better or for worse. Therefore the present study attempts to delve into the area of drugs and media pedagogy i.e. imparting education to masses through the potential of media vis-à-vis illicit drug intake and addiction. For the same, the movie Udta Punjab was taken up and a qualitative analysis done via life history approach onto one of its characters named Balli who is involved in drugs in the Indian state of Punjab.*

Keywords: *addiction, drug use, media, media pedagogy, Punjab, youth, qualitative analysis, life history*

Date of Submission: 20-10-2019

Date of acceptance: 03-11-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Punjab is a landlocked state in the Asian country of India. It is bordered by other Indian states like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and J&K. However, it also shares its border with the neighbouring Pakistan towards the west. Pakistan, on the other hand, shares its border with Afghanistan which is a key opiate producer. Thus, using the internal corridors of Pakistan, illicit drugs from Afghanistan are supplied into the region of Punjab, rooting serious problems in the state. The use and abuse of drugs has become rampant in the region and escalated manifold. The situation is particularly alarming and being compounded as more and more youth, even as young as 8 year olds are falling prey to drug menace every day. However, in this context, it becomes imperative to understand the variables that affect or increase the vulnerability of drug intake. Age, gender, peer pressure, family structure and accessibility of drugs are the most prominent predisposing factors for drug abuse. The consequences of drug intake and addiction are disastrous both proximally and distally (Brown, 2000).

In order to curb the widespread menace of drugs, prevention programmes at the community or governmental level are often run. However, the role and the power of media in this regard cannot be overstated or emphasized enough (Flay & Sobel, 1983). Although media can be a potential risk factor for the intake of drugs, nevertheless movies and films provide a platform where a dose of awareness about their use and catastrophic consequences can be communicated (Flay & Sobel, 1983). The term exactly used for this is 'media pedagogy'-a simple amalgamation of the words 'media' and 'pedagogy'. The former is self-understood but the latter implies a theory of education. In simple words, media pedagogy illustrates a process or a phenomenon through which media consumers come to know or learn about the world through the lens of media. Thus, the media creates an external influence through which it imparts education in order to its change the object that the consumers are influenced by (Qvortrup, 2007).

II. METHODOLOGY

The broad purpose of the present study is to understand the widespread use of drugs, addiction and its impact on the life of an individual. The trend of drug abuse is a widespread phenomenon and affects millions of people globally (Singh & Gupta, 2017). Therefore the present study attempts to investigate the phenomenon of drug abuse and its related subtleties in the state of Punjab in India by employing the use of life history approach. Life history approach follows the course of one's life, the events and subjectivities as they unfold in one's life. Utilizing the life history approach, rich source of qualitative data was gathered by subjecting the character of 'Balli' from the movie 'Udta Punjab' to analysis. The analysis was guided by the following objectives:

- to highlight the widespread prevalence of drugs in Punjab
- to highlight the succumbing of youth to drugs
- to highlight the factors and machinery behind drug intake

III. DISCUSSION

As the title itself suggests, “udta” means flying/high; thus Uda Punjab, the movie presents a dark depiction of people succumbing en masse to drug abuse in the state of Punjab. The present analysis follows the life of Balli. The reason behind choosing Balli’s character is straight and plain. Balli is a young adolescent who is addicted to heroin. His character is important because he represents the youth of Punjab in the movie and sheds light on the grim menace of drugs in their lives. However, Punjab’s drug problem is not confined to the usual demographic of unemployed folks. It is almost maniacally unrestrained amongst all divides-be it of age or gender or class for that matter. Thus, approaching and doing an analysis of Balli’s character is almost impossible and mostly futile if the larger frame that includes all the other characters, the context of age and media, the political nexus via trade and police and most importantly the setting of the movie, which is Punjab is not discussed.

Balli is a young adolescent, living with his brother, mother and grandparents in a Punjab village. His father has recently passed away and is being taken care of by his brother, Sartaj who is a junior police officer. His mother and grandparents remain worried about his lifestyle. He sleeps till late and often misses studies. Balli is a drug addict and has been doing drugs for quite some time. But his family including his brother are oblivious of the addiction he’s fallen into. There seems to be a lot of neglect on part of his family. Although he is sharing the same house as that of his other family members, yet they’ve never come in to check on their son/brother who is in the most vulnerable years of his life. Poor relationship or neglect from the family is one important factor in the maintenance of drug abuse.(Somani & Meghani, 2016).

We meet Balli first when his brother knocks at his room’s door, but before that we know that he is strongly influenced by one thing- the pomp and the lifestyle of the rock star-Tommy Singh. Balli idolizes Tommy whose poster is stuck at his door on the outside. Tommy is a craze amongst his young fans. However, Tommy himself is indulged in uncontrolled consumption of cocaine and is popular for his adrenaline-rushing songs that glorify drugs and violence. Teenagers are often negatively and adversely affected by such music and popular stars who they imitate as they are alluring them(Jiloha, 2009). Same goes for Balli and other youth in Punjab. They are hooked on to drugs while listening to Tommy’s songs. Even Balli’s cell phone ring has Tommy’s song subscribed to it. Such massive is Tommy’s influence in his life. Thus it seems that a well-oiled promotion gizmo works behind the drug problem in Punjab. Punjabi songs have euphemized, glamourized and danced around drugs for years. Drug songs are consumed as much as love songs. Punjabi music including songs of singers like Tommy Singh is a huge propaganda for drugs. The music industry has vitiated the popular culture so much in Punjab that the state government at one point had to set up a commission to monitor the content of these songs.

Drugs have been a nuisance in Punjab for many years. Punjab was once just a shipment point for illicit drugs but is now the hub of the drug industry. Drugs are a flourishing, money-making business in Punjab. Illegal use or misuse of pharmaceuticals is rampant(Somani & Meghani, 2016). Drugs sell over the counters like hot cakes. Balli simply goes one fine day to the medical shop and asks for “chaand” which is a locally made drug. When the chemist gives one, Balli immediately asks for another. It is not shocking to see the pharmacist giving two bottles without any hesitance as he is aware of the abuse happeningsince he doesn’t ask Balli for a doctor’s prescription.

One day, when Balli goes to his fixed spot for taking drugs, where his friends are also present for the same purpose, he overdoses on Chaand. Today, we are living in a highly competitive world and it is difficult to grow in such world. There is always a peer pressure in young which is either partially visible or not visible at all. A lot of young people expect to experience the pressure to use drugs, smoke and drink alcohol. They find it difficult to be the person who doesn’t drink or smoke(Jiloha, 2009). As they feel isolated and like a social outcast, they make a habit of taking drugs. Balli has become so addicted that it was his second injection within less than an hour. Often with drug addicts, there is a turbulent desire to consume drugs, as a result of which they get arrested in compulsive behaviour of drug intake. Thus the addict develops dependency for a particular substance(Singh & Gupta, 2017). A person may have sufficient money for discretionary consumption when he usually begins. But once someone is addicted, the consumption of drug is no longer strictly discretionary. Also attached often is tolerance and subsequent more and more intake and also sometimes cross tolerance that drives people to try new drugs and get engaged to multiple drug addiction.

As soon as he injects the drug, he becomes unconscious. He lands up in DrPreetSahni’s clinic who is a doctor and runs a rehabilitation centre. Balli’s brother is shocked to see his condition in the hospital. The doctor finds his nails and eyes turned blue and prescribe a double dose of medication. It is painful to see Balli in such a condition. It is evident that he is unable to endure the physiological effects of drugs. Balli as the doctor informs, has been taking a combination of pheniramine and buprenorphine. However, what we see is that his brother is in denial; unable to accept the fact that Balli is actively involved in doing drugs. He realizes that the cost of Balli’s life is a mere 50 rupees, the cost at which the locally made Chaand is sold over the counters.

Balli's brother knows about the smuggling of drugs his seniors are allowing on a large scale. But when it affects his family, his brother, he realizes the grave situation. The supply routes of drug peddlers are not often plugged up by the police. There is hardly any clampdown on drugs by them. Dr Preet shows mirror to Sartaj about the drug supply via police connection and problem in Punjab. The background for the involvement of police in the menace goes like: parcels of drugs from the neighbouring countries are often flung into Punjab's fields. The migrants working in the fields pick up these packets and supply them inside the territory through different distributors. However, along the route the local police and agencies help the smugglers in easy transport by taking bribe. Balli's brother was aware of this kind of smuggling happening every day and night on Punjab's roads but had never thought that the same nexus would destroy his brother's life. Balli was therefore the last person in the drug distribution network.

The consequence of Balli's drug addiction is seen later when he stabs Dr Preet in the rehab while he's trying to run away from the clinic. Balli's thinking and perception is affected. His decision making functioning is clearly impaired. A lot of people do not realize the damage caused by drug addiction because the effects are not apparent at first. The individual may feel quite invincible and unaware that drugs can actually affect and destroy their lives-both physical and social. At the end, we see him curling up and crying. Two explanations account for this: He may either be filled with remorse. Else, he may have this overarching sense of abandonment like most young people of his age. He feels ostracized. But we know that he was powerless over his actions and in need of treatment rather than ostracism.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus the analysis of the character of Balli through life history approach brings awareness about the wide prevalent problem of drugs in Punjab. Balli is like any youngster out there. However, due to a number of factors, like age, peers, popular media-related products like celebrated stars and their songs, drug trade and its easy accessibility and other factors like the involvement of police in the easy transport of drugs in the interiors of the city, youngsters like Balli are fast falling victim to the scourge of drug intake and addiction. Thus, the movie Uda Punjab excellently sheds light and imparts the audience about the gravity and the need to tackle this spiralling monster menace of drugs. It is an intelligent use of media pedagogy.

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Zarnab Zahoor" Media Pedagogy for Drugs: A Qualitative Study from the Movie Uda Punjab"
International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 08, no. 10,
2019, pp. 42-44