



Cite this article as:

Ms. Aarambhi Kureel, "**Poisoned Power: The Decadence Of Narco-Politics In India**", Vol. I, Special Issue (July-Sept) Nyayavimarsha (e-ISSN: 3048-5134), Pages 21 to 31 (28<sup>th</sup> Sept 2024), available at <https://nyayavimarsha.com/detail/poisoned-power-the-decadence-of-narco-politics-in-india>

Publisher Details Are Available At:

<https://nyayavimarsha.com/journal>

Editorial Board Members Details Are Available At

<https://nyayavimarsha.com/editorial>

**| Copyright © 2023 By Nyayavimarsha |**

*All Copyrights are reserved with the Authors. But, however, the Authors have granted to the Journal (Nyayavimarsha Journal), an irrevocable, non-exclusive, royalty-free and transferable license to publish, reproduce, store, transmit, display and distribute it in the Journal or books or in any form and all other media, retrieval systems and other formats now or hereafter known.*

*No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.*

*For permission requests, write to the publisher, subject of the email must be "Permission Required" at the email addresses given below.*

*Email: [publisher@nyayavimarsha.com](mailto:publisher@nyayavimarsha.com) or [shailendar@nyayavimarsha.com](mailto:shailendar@nyayavimarsha.com)*

*Phone: +91-9159111938*

*Website: <https://nyayavimarsha.com/>*

*Contact Timings: 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM.*

**DISCLAIMER:**

*Nyayavimarsha and Its Editorial Board Members do not guarantee that the material published in it is 100 percent reliable. You can rely upon it at your own risk. But, however, the Journal and Its Editorial Board Members have taken the proper steps to provide the readers with relevant material. Proper footnotes & references have been given to avoid any copyright or plagiarism issue. Articles published in Volume 1 & Issue 1 are the original work of the authors.*

*Views or Opinions or Suggestions (if any), expressed or published in the Journal are the personal point of views of the Author(s) or Contributor(s) and the Journal & Its Editorial Board Members are not liable for the same.*

*While every effort has been made to avoid any mistake or omission, this publication is published online on the condition and understanding that the publisher shall not be liable in any manner to any person by reason of any mistake or omission in this publication or for any action taken or omitted to be taken or advice rendered or accepted on the basis of this work.*

*All disputes subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of Courts, Tribunals and Forums at Tamil Nadu only.*

NYAYAVIMARSHA

## **POISONED POWER: THE DECADENCE OF NARCO-POLITICS IN INDIA**

### **INTRODUCTION: CRIMINALIZATION IN NARCO-POLITICS:**

When we talk about the criminalisation of power or politics, the first question is, "What does it mean?" It means that people with criminal records or charges become politicians or enter the political arena and are elected to office. This behaviour jeopardises the fundamental values of democracy, such as electoral integrity, accountability, and adherence to the rule of law. This issue jeopardises the core foundations of the democratic system and has become a major source of concern for society. This behaviour jeopardises the fundamental values of democracy, such as electoral integrity, accountability, and adherence to the rule of law. This issue jeopardises the core foundations of the democratic system and has become a major source of concern for society.

In recent years, India has faced serious issues of criminalization of politics, where the criminal elements are increasingly influencing the political arena. This criminalization is extremely evident in the phenomenon of 'narco-politics', where the drug cartels and the narcotics trade are interconnected with the political power. Narco-political landscape in India is marked by the presence of drug kingpins and traffickers in the arena of politics, which frequently results in politicians who promote drugs or who engage in drug-related activities to gain political power. This worrisome convergence weakens democratic values, harms societal well-being and disrupts governance. In India, the nexus between narcotics and politics is starkly evident in the regions of Punjab, Northeastern states, and Goa, where the drug cartels and insurgent groups have abused their powers to influence the political arena and secure protection for themselves.

### **WHAT IS THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE AND THE GOLDEN CRESCENT?**

India's geographical location is sandwiched between the key drug-producing regions, which makes it a pivotal hub of international drug trafficking networks like the **Golden Crescent** and **Golden Triangle**.

The Golden Crescent includes Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. It is one of the key transit routes of illegal drug trafficking mainly opium and heroin. This came into the picture during the 1950s as a major drug trafficking hub. Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium and supplies heroin, which is smuggled in the northern states of India like Punjab and

Jammu & Kashmir through Pakistan. These parts have seen a rapid growth of drug addiction, violence, and crime because of the influx of drugs. Drug trafficking has also led to political corruption, the collusion between the local politicians and the drug traffickers is common. Politicians may accept and give bribes and also give protection to drug traffickers in exchange for political support and financial benefits. This drug problem often becomes a major issue during the time of elections, when politicians accuse each other of having ties with or being involved in the drug cartels and facilitating the drug trade.

Another largest network of drug trafficking is the Golden Triangle which consists of countries like Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. This zone is also one the largest producer of drugs like opium and methamphetamines. The Golden Triangle has made its way to India through the northeastern states like Manipur and Nagaland. Drug trafficking in the northeastern states has increased the addiction rates, and funding of the insurgent groups and also led to social instability. The insurgent groups use drug trafficking to finance their illegal operations, which led to the creation of a dangerous nexus between drugs and politics. The local politicians have connections with these groups and may exert control over the local governance, these connections of politicians have often led to corruption, destroyed the trust in political institutions and hindered effective governance.<sup>1</sup>

### **NORTHEAST INDIA'S DRUG DILEMMA**

The northeast region of India particularly Manipur and Nagaland, being close to Myanmar becomes the vital transit zone of drug trafficking. Because of the geographical characteristics of these states, it makes it easier for the traffickers to smuggle the drugs across the countries which are often facilitated or controlled by the insurgent groups who are deeply ingrained with the socio-political landscape. The link between the insurgent groups, politicians and drug trafficking has created a complex socio-political environment.

There are many drug lords in the northeastern states that control or facilitate illegal drug smuggling across the country and interstate borders. One of the drug kingpins Baharudin was arrested in Sonitpur, Assam. This significant accomplishment was achieved because of the close coordination between the Nagaland and the Assam police forces after months of investigation. His arrest has made a significant blow to the narco-trafficking network, many

---

<sup>1</sup> Nag, S., *Northeast India's Battle Against Drugs*, THE DIPLOMAT (Sep. 4, 2024. 4:00PM)  
<https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/northeast-indias-battle-against-drugs/>.

cases were registered against him across the area involving in dealing of substances like sunflower, marijuana, and other narco-substances, he was also accused in the acquisition of transportation and financing. Baharudin was also known for using numerous phone numbers, identities, and hideouts to escape the police for many years. After his arrest, it was a relief for the authorities battling against drug trafficking, which has harmed many families and especially youth across the state.<sup>2</sup>

The politicians or the political candidates who are funded by these insurgent groups had deeply affected the governance of the respected regions. Politicians who are financially backed by these groups often sideline the efforts to put an end to drug smuggling, and focus more on the interest of these groups, which in the end forms a vicious circle of crime and politics that feed into each other. Judicial delays and corruption are also major issues because they complicate the efforts to prosecute those who are involved in drug smuggling and even after the arrest of these people, long trials and lack of political efforts weaken the cases which makes them less likely to stop the drug trafficking, allowing it to continue growing.

In recent times, the government has restricted the free cross-border movement of the people and in April 2024 heroin worth Rs. 3.5 crore was seized by the forces in Manipur from a drug cartel.<sup>3</sup> The central government has launched major operations for tackling the cross-border smuggling of drugs using better technologies and advanced surveillance like drones and satellite mapping, but the problem persists because of the underdevelopment of the region and networks of narco-smuggling are deeply ingrained, with the local communities often tied to the drug trade.

### **PUNJAB'S VULNERABILITY TO THE DRUG CHALLENGE**

Punjab is another example as it lies near the Golden Crescent, and its location is vulnerable to drug smuggling from Afghanistan, Pakistan and it is facing the nexus between drug trafficking and corruption has emerged as a significant problem that is leading to political instability and social decay. Narcotic substances like heroin, opium, and other synthetic drugs are easily available in the state through cross-border smuggling. The most who are affected

---

<sup>2</sup> The Assam Tribune, Nagaland, Assam Police Nab Northeast drug lord in Joint Operation, THE ASSAM TRIBUNE. (Sep. 4, 2024, 8:30PM) <https://assamtribune.com/north-east/nagaland-assam-police-nab-northeast-drug-lord-in-joint-operation-1527011?infinitescroll=1>.

<sup>3</sup> Nag, S., *Northeast India's Battle Against Drugs*, DOWN TO EARTH (Sep. 4, 2024, 12:30AM) <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/governance/northeast-indias-battle-against-drugs>.

by drug addiction are the youth of the state, which has burdened the healthcare services, and led to higher crime rates. The ongoing drug problem in Punjab has earned an unfortunate nickname i.e. 'Udta Punjab,' signifying the seriousness of the problem.

A major political controversy arose in Punjab when Jagdish Singh Bhola, a former wrestler who turned into a drug peddler, accused Punjab Revenue Minister Bikram Singh Majithia's involvement in a multi-crore narco-trafficking racket. Jagdish was arrested in connection with a Rs. 700 crore drug case, he also claimed that the political campaigns held in Punjab were funded by drug money, implicating several politicians. The dismissal of Bikram Singh Majithia and CM Sukhbir Singh Badal was demanded, citing their alleged ties with the drug network and the Congress party also demanded the CBI investigation. Majithia denied the accusation and said that it was a conspiracy of the Congress party. The very scandal also reveals that for the smuggling of drugs, the government vehicles were used by the associates of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) party.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the above case many politicians have been accused of drug charges in Punjab, some of them including the members of the prominent political parties, have been accused of either benefiting from the drug trafficking or ignoring it altogether. There have been some cases in which it was claimed that some political leaders from significant political parties may use the money from the drug business to finance their election campaign. And in some other cases, it is believed that political parties get money from the drug cartels in exchange for their protection in the region.

One of the most high-profile cases is of Jagjit Singh Chahal, a politician who has ties with the drug business, he was one of the accused in the multi-million drug racket case. He owns a pharmaceutical unit in Baddi, Himachal Pradesh. He faced charges from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for accumulating assets worth several crores through questionable means. Chahal's brother, Paramjit Singh Chahal was also implicated in this case. After the ED's investigation it was revealed that Chahal had invested in luxury properties and vehicles, some of them in his name and others in his firm, Montek Biopharma and Chahal Retreats, these assets were acquired in 6 years. Chahal was previously booked by the Punjab Police in 2013-2014 for a major drug racket with national and international links, that led to the registration

---

<sup>4</sup> Sehgal, M., *Den of drugs: How Punjab Politcos are linked to rs 700-crore drug racket*, INDIA TODAY (Sep. 5, 2024, 11:00 PM) <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/punjab-politicians-in-dock-for-alleged-connections-to-drug-lords-176476-2014-01-12>.

of multiple FIRs under the NDPS Act, IPC, and Arms Act. Authorities seized a large quantity of illegal drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, and opium along with Rs. 1.92 crore, foreign currency, luxury vehicles, firearms, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The drug crises that have been going on in Punjab have corrupted not only the political sphere but also the social and economic landscape of the state, particularly the youth. Most of the region of Punjab rely on agriculture, but because of the drug addiction has crippled a significant portion of the young farmers, leading to the decline of the economic growth. The youth is trapped in the vicious cycle of drug addiction which is creating a hindrance, as they would have normally been involved in farming and other labour-intensive jobs. We can an increase in drug-related crimes, including theft, and violence because of the drug crisis, overburdening law enforcement.

To tackle the drug crises in Punjab, the government has used multifaceted approaches, including stronger law enforcement, and making new policy changes. With the widespread drug addiction and political corruption tied to drug smuggling, law enforcement has increased anti-drug operations and made significant seizures of drugs, particularly targeting synthetic substances like heroin etc. During the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections, drug addiction was a major issue, the political parties introduced many stricter laws, policies and better programmes in their manifestoes to curb the problem of drug addiction. Although law enforcement has made some improvements, the issue is so large that it needs long-term efforts from different sectors.

The drug issue in Punjab remains the key political problem during the 2017 Assembly elections, where the different political parties pledge to address the drug crisis but offer fewer concrete issues. Both Congress and AAP swore to subvert the drug cartels during the 2017 elections. The former CM of Punjab, Amarinder Singh vowed to "break the backbone of drugs" within four weeks. During his tenure as a CM, his government instituted Special Task Force (STF) and, opioid-assisted treatment (OOAT) centres, but the smuggling of drugs and its abuse remains the major concern. Punjab being near the international drug trade route, it becomes easier to facilitate the smuggling of narcotics like heroin, opium, cannabis, and other synthetic substances. The Former MP of Patiala, Dr Dharamvir Gandhi contended that

---

<sup>5</sup>TNN, *Drug money laundering: Chahal in two-day police custody: Chandigarh News*, THE TIMES OF INDIA. (Sep. 6, 2024, 3:40PM) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/drug-money-laundering-chahal-in-two-day-police-custody/articleshow/58706658.cms>.



political patronage has ignited drug smuggling, advocating for decriminalization of natural drugs like opium and marijuana. He also claims that after the criminalization of natural/traditional drugs by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985<sup>6</sup> (NDPS Act), leading to the formation of drug cartels and because of how the natural drugs become expensive in the black market, they got pushed by the synthetic substances, which are more dangerous than the traditional drugs. The involvement of law enforcement in the drug trade is a significant issue, former DSP Jagdish Singh Bhola was sentenced for being involved in the drug racket and Akali Dal leader, Bikram Majithia faced charges under the NDPS act as discussed above.<sup>7</sup>

Punjab's drug crisis in short is the menacing confluence of corruption, geopolitical factors and lack of law enforcement.

### **MUMBAI: THE CITY OF DREAMS OR THE UNDERWORLD OF DRUG MAFIA**

We know Mumbai as the city of dreams, but its underworld has been historically intertwined with politics and social dynamics, particularly in the drug mafia. The influence of the drug mafia on the political arrangements has been deeply rooted in the city's history as the hub of organized criminal activities, particularly the notorious underworld that turned out in the 1970s and 1980s. During this time infamous figures emerged one of them was Dawood Ibrahim who shaped Mumbai's underworld. Initially, he used to smuggle gold and contraband but with the expansion of the international drug business and Mumbai being the important hub, especially for the drug smuggling that has been sourced from the Golden Crescent to the ports of Mumbai. Dawood's illegal trade extended internationally, and connected drug smuggling with arms trade and terrorism, which led to the expansion of his political influence.

Dawood Ibrahim's younger brother Anees Ibrahim, who was accused in the Mumbai serial blasts, is under police investigation for his involvement in drug smuggling and manufacturing. Kailash Rajput who is a high-profile drug lord based in Dubai and the right-hand of Anees is wanted by the NCB (Narcotics Central Bureau) and Mumbai police. He also is linked with a Mexican drug cartel and handles D-company's drug trade in Europe. After

<sup>6</sup> Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, No. 61, Acts of Parliament, 1985 (India).

<sup>7</sup> Mukherjee, O. and Arshi, A., *No lack of politicking over drugs in Punjab, but political parties fail to come up with concrete plan*, NEWS18 (Sep. 10, 2024, 10:45PM) <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/no-lack-of-politicking-over-drugs-in-punjab-but-political-parties-fail-to-come-up-with-concrete-plan-4790543.html>.

the arrest of Arif Bhujwala, another associate this information came into light through investigations. Previously D-company's drug business was overseen by Chhota Shakeel and is now managed by his brother Anees Ibrahim.<sup>8</sup>

In another case where Dawood's brother Iqbal Kaskar has been remanded by the NCB for involvement in a drug trafficking case. Later he was arrested in 2017 for multiple extortion cases and was also linked with the seizure of 17.3 kilograms of hashish. After the investigation it was revealed that Kaskar was the main supplier and 2 accused travelled from Punjab to Mumbai with drugs, the drugs were believed to have originated from Kashmir. Kaskar previously used to manage Dawood's real estate operations and also faced additional extortion charges in multiple cases.<sup>9</sup>

The nexus between political corruption and Dawood's drug business is hard to ignore. In Mumbai, many police officers and politicians have been accused of receiving bribes, ignoring his activities and helping in elections in exchange for providing him protection. It became difficult to break the D-company's drug network because of the relationship between law enforcement, politics, and organized crime. Even though law enforcement tries to fight drug trafficking with raids and arrests of the people in D-company, because of the strong ties between the people of the underworld and some political figures hold back progress. The real estate sector is another major sector where the drug money and politics are incorporated. The drug cartels used their illegal money to take control over the land, while the politicians supported the cartels in exchange for money and favours in elections. Despite the steps taken by law enforcement, like NCB to control the drug crisis, the persisting linkage between politics and drugs is still a tangled issue that is affecting the social and political arena of Mumbai.

### **CONCLUDING REMARK**

In conclusion, we can say that how crime has become a part of politics in India, particularly with the rise of narco-politics. The drug cartels have gained political influence, in the regions

---

<sup>8</sup> Mumbai Mirror, *Agencies Trail Dawood's brother Anees Ibrahim for striking drug deals in India via Dubai*, MUMBAI MIRROR (Sep. 2, 2024, 4:45PM) <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/crime/agencies-trail-dawoods-brother-anees-ibrahim-for-striking-drug-deals-in-india-via-dubai/articleshow/82045821.cms>.

<sup>9</sup> Mengale, G.S. and Pathak, M.K., *Dawood's brother Iqbal Kaskar remanded to NCB custody in drugs trafficking case*, HINDUSTAN TIMES (Sep. 3, 2024, 11:50AM) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/ncb-takes-dawood-s-brother-iqbal-kaskar-in-custody-in-drugs-trafficking-case-101624604754064.html>.

like North East, Punjab and Mumbai, aggravating more corruption, and social instability and undermining democracy. Even after the efforts of the authorities and law enforcement, like NCB to combat drug trafficking and political corruption, their deep-rooted ties become a big hindrance for the government to continue effectively.

NYAYAVIMARSHA