

TEENS and TWENTIES

What's the Fear, Super-Druids are Here!

by Siraj-us-Saleheen Lovell

"Y my fellow countrymen! Come forward without hesitation and speak to me of thy illness, for I shall cure you in no time at all — with the help of my super power medicine." Does it sound like lines of a wizard from any Victorian period drama? May be so, but actually it is what those astounding medicine-men of nowadays, claim — that they can cure any kind of diseases.

Nowadays, when you open any daily news-papers, invariably your eyes will come upon very catchy advertisements of such diabolical healers. The most interesting fact is that, it doesn't matter how complicated your disease is; whether you have shown it to each and every doctor of the country and failed, these healers, networking in different complexes, have a sure antidote for all your diseases. So why won't people go for it?

Oh God! Save our souls. People going to these dispensaries, which are mostly for show, are ignorant about the originality of these complexes. They are either very frustrated or economically insolvent, either that or illiterate. Writings and features highlighting on the unethical use of such folk medicines have been published before many times. The aim of this feature is to shed a little more light on these so called super curing drugs and their practitioners so that people out there are not misled by their sweet talk, and do not threaten their own lives.

These type of medicines are mainly based on religious beliefs or super-natural powers gained by them through dreams (Hah! Big joke isn't it?). They are also called 'Mogha-Unani' medicines. Isn't it relieving to see that even after so many decades, the power possessed only by our prophets, is also achieved by these medicine-men. So what's the fear, the super-druids are here. However, it is very regrettable to say that, these super-natural human beings are as same as cheap magicians and are prescribing cures which are very unscientific and pose as a danger to the public health.

The main difference between modern medicine and these mock preparations is that, these folk version of medicines are not at all screened and you can forget about tests, whereas, modern medicines are scientifically tested for safety and efficiency. In our country, most traditional and folk drugs, which the practitioners claim was perceived through dreams, are excluded from any control under the existing drug legislation. As a result their ingredients are not properly examined. Some drugs even contain substances which could slow poison the patient's life.

Almost eighty two per cent of the population of our country are considering treatments of these 'Unani' medicines. Poor things! If only they knew what they were going for. In the sixty eight thousand villages, the villagers, have no medical facilities, and are very poor. These people, thus go for cheap medical treatments, and being illiterate belief bizarre stories about the origin of

these medicines.

Not so far away, if we just look at the picture in Dhaka, we may see that many of these clinics have mushroomed around the city, and more disappointingly, they are always crowded with patients, having various complicated diseases, mostly sexual. Just eager to receive some sort of remedy.

Another one of these fake so-called panacea makers is the 'Murhumay Jannat Malami', the shop situated beside the TNT office in Gullistan. A small van carrying just two things, a big poster advertising this drug (more specifically an ointment), and a cassette recorder from which a very alluring voice talks gibberish

and sexual diseases.

All the drugs for hypertension proved negative. More alarming were the results drawn from the drugs used for gastric problem. Most of these drugs contained some amount of alcoholic substance, moreover, they did not have any percentage of antacid. The drugs for sexual diseases also



whatever be the form, liquid, or tablet or an ointment or even in the form of some kind of holy-water distributed by so called 'Peers' and 'Fakirs'.

Some of the main spots are 'Kabiraz Dawakhana' of Motijheel, 'Shaheed Dawakhana' of Jatrahari, 'Mogha-Unani Complex' of Shamoli plus many other unknown organizations. The 'Shantinagar Dawakhana' is run by a Hakim called Moshleuddin. When asked, this 60 year old man said that he had forty years of experience in such a profession, achieving such a knowledge through Islam (such a religious person).

Moshleuddin prepares his antidote from a book called the 'Riaze Kabir'. His most popular cure is the 'Halua of Garlic'. Another one of his super-curable medicines is the 'Jungi Badastro' (What peculiar names!) which is made from a special organ of animals (My God!!). The funny thing is that both he and his assistants don't even know if these medicines are effective or not.

about the strong ability of this medicine. Any kind of skin disease can be cured by applying this wondrous ointment at a specific dose (so they say!). The most ironic fact is that most of these practitioners possess fake registration numbers which they proudly exhibit when asked for. Who knows! may be they got this also in their dreams. (Wish I had such dreams?).

Basically most of these medicines are fake and unhygienic. They are made up of earth-worms, animal intestines and barks of various plants and trees. (Sounds delicious, doesn't it!) People preparing these drugs are themselves unaware of hygiene. Some samples of these drugs were collected from different complexes or clinics and given to an expert pharmacist for a chemical analysis. The outcome was very devastating and distressing. These samples included drugs prescribed for hypertension, gastric problem

proved negative. Asked for an opinion on such an outcome, AKM Khairuzzaman Liton, who himself conducted the tests, said that most of these drugs are hazardous for health. It must be stopped at once. Some drugs even contained substances which, if improperly applied could kill a person. They have no scientific basis.

'Little Learning is a Dangerous Thing'. A perfect phrase for such practitioners. Doesn't the government look into the problem more intensely? If the existing Medical Board would filter such illegally registered complexes then some good would be done. Lastly, an earnest request to the good citizens out there — Please, please think twice before you step inside one of these complexes, or you might be victims of who knows what unthinkable consequences. Eat well, live right and be happy. You won't even need a doctor. Now isn't that nice!

Bad Fortune

by Sarah Shehabuddin

decided to meet at the front gate at 6 am. Meanwhile, I, Sarah Raja, was free to do whatever I wanted to!

After hanging out for a while, I went and sat on a bench. It was a quiet place, I started to count my money, when I suddenly got a feeling that I was being watched. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a scurvy man behind a tree. He was staring straight at my money! Something in his hand glistened in the sun and caught my eye. He was wielding a knife!!

As calmly as possible, I got up, put the money in my bag, and walked away. My knees were shaking and I was afraid they'd give away. Spotting a policeman, I ran toward him with my heart beating faster than ever before during my twelve years. As I approached the police man, I realised that I had no solid complaint.

Suddenly, I heard shouts and squeals of laughter. It was 3 pm and 2000 balloons were

about to be released. The crowd shouted, "one, two, three — RELEASE!" Balloons of all colours and sizes floated all over.

I probably lost myself in "the world of catching", then suddenly found myself near the fortune-teller's tent. I went in. The tent seemed empty. Then I felt a tap on my shoulder. I swirled around. A gypsy was smiling a toothless smile.

"Is there something you want to know, dearie?" she croaked.

"Well..." I started. "Sit down," she said, placing a crystal ball in front of her. She smiled eerily.

A cold shiver went down my spine.

"You afraid of me?" I forced a laugh. "Of course not. How can I be afraid of a lovely lady like you?"

"The gypsy jumped up. Her eyes glistened. "You lie!", she shouted "you dare lie to me?" She looked at my face and laughed. Now then, I have things to tell you. You think that almost getting robbed is terrible — don't look so surprised! I know many a thing. Anyway, my sources tell me that calamity awaits France and that you and another are to suffer the most. The other person is... Hajra Ilahi."

"Hajra Ilahi? She's my best friend!"

"Exactly, I don't know what misfortune awaits France but I do know that as Man invents, he destroys. Anyway, dearie, don't worry about the future. It'll come soon enough as Einstein said. Ten francs please."

I paid her, said good-bye and forlornly left.

On our way home, I poured everything out to Shakil, Kamal and Naureen. They tried to comfort me by saying that they'd never let any harm come to me. Like yeah-right!

Even now that I'm in bed, there's still that one question in my mind: What bad fortune does the future hold in store for me?

The writer Sarah Shehabuddin (14) is a student of Ecole Active Bilingue (E A B high school) Paris, France.

To be continued

Prescription Drugs? A Fallacy in Bangladesh

by Joy Alamgir

PRESCRIPTION drugs — a term some of us may have come across but few have ever seen a 'prescription drug' being sold with proper scrutiny of the prescription. In fact, almost all the drug stores in Bangladesh sell prescription drugs without even asking for the prescription — an action not only damaging our lives, our economy but also endangering those who are still unborn.

The government also seems reluctant to enforce this policy. In this article, I will try to point out how these 'prescription drugs' are being sold without prescriptions, what the effects are, a theory on why the administration is not acting properly and how to counter this malpractice.

To the still unenlightened, I would like to give a brief definition of 'prescription drugs'. These drugs are those that require to be prescribed by a certified physician or doctor for they, if used improperly, can do more harm than good. For the sake of public health, this policy has been in effect, though only theoretically.

Capitalistic Bangladesh has embraced the word competition. Almost every field has competition; no longer are the people subject to monopolies. The drug vendors have also fathomed this truth. They too realise that in order to survive in their field, they must outpace the others, sell more medicines to people. By doing this, many drug stores are selling drugs without proper prescriptions.

I've seen people come to the drug store and ask the vendor (who has no medical training) 'I've this infection somewhere, what should I take?' The vendor immediately hands him some antibiotics and takes the money. Such are the malpractices enveloping the medicine industry.

People even prescribe drugs for themselves. Not only the illiterate, but also some literate and well-educated people don't even bother going to a doctor, they just go to the store and procure some antibiotics or prescription drugs.

The vendor hands the pills or syrups over without hesitating. They even hand drugs over which can be used as addic-

tives without the least scrutiny, such as drugs containing diazepam. Poor devils are we who cannot control the sale of these drugs.

In my research I have come across only one drug store that refused to sell me sedative drugs, and guess where — in Cox's Bazar, far away from the main markets. The society indirectly lauds the stores that sell drugs without much or any scrutiny. These stores in time become popular among the people cause they can get prescription medicines without prescriptions in unlimited quantities whenever, wherever they want.

The effects of this malpractice are many. Ranging from mistreatment, unfinished doses to generating resistant microbes: from severe physical deterioration to unwarranted deaths; from deadly side-effects to irreversible damage.

Someone develops coughing. Simple remedy, take antibiotics. But not all antibiotics can obliterate all diseases. The person takes the medicine, no improvement. He takes another dose. By the time he realises that it's not working and actually goes to a certified physician and gets a prescription for effective drugs the simple coughing enhances itself to a pneumonia stage. He might survive, but after damaging his lungs and respiratory system. Such can be the mistreatments.

The microbes causing the disease might be highly reactive to penicillin but might not be reactive at all to other antibiotics. Unfinished doses might also result in resurgence of the disease. People might take antibiotics to counter a bacterial ailment. Some are tended to stop taking the drugs after the symptoms disappear simply because they are ignorant about the necessity of fulfilling the dose or they did not consult a doctor.

Taking into advantage the availability of drugs without prescription, they often fall into this trap. Some microbes survive the antibiotic attack and evolve into a more resistant one. Later in life the disease recurs and takes more deadly actions. The victim suf-

fiers more as conventional medicines fight in vain against it.

Bacteria readily take advantage of humans' ignorance about this. We have seen, heard, read reports of resistant colonies of microbes responsible for creating tuberculosis, pneumonia, typhoid etc. These are partially the results of human ignorance and the sale of prescription drugs without prescription, aids it. As bacteria are more sexually active than human beings, they intend to share their DNA. So a resistant strain might transfer its altered DNA to another and spread its deadly potentials and enhanced defenses.

A fever. It can be caused by bacteria or viruses or many other things. Sometimes we see people prescribing themselves antibiotics for these simple inconveniences. As a result, existing bacteria present in their body get an opportunity to develop resistant colonies. In the rapid and often unrestrained use of antibiotics it is difficult to name a single kind of bacterium that is not resistant to some antibiotics.

Some microbes have cut down their antibiotic foes to only one or two and it's a matter of a few years when they will be universally resistant. Once this happens, human beings will face a war. They will realise that they might have won the battle against these microbes in the past but winning the war in the impending future will be a painstaking task. All these can be traced back to or partially blamed upon the illicit sale of prescription drugs without prescriptions.

Some of these prescription drugs can be used as addictive narcotics. For instance sleeping pills, nerve soothing pills, pills containing sedatives were, are being used as dopes. As many drug stores sell these pills without asking any questions frustrated, angry youngsters, youngsters abhorring the way of the society take these drugs readily. Wanting to get a momentary lapse of cruel sensations, young men and women often take these readily available drugs. Again this destruc-

tive practice can be traced back to the loathsome, illegal sale of prescription drugs without prescriptions.

Why is the government reluctant to enforce this policy? Two surmises can be made on this aspect. One is that the Government might be neglecting its work, the other is that the influence of the affluent drug companies on the politicians is taking its toll. May be they contribute huge sums of money for the election campaigns of some political parties, may be favours are being returned from person holding top governmental posts. But all these are just guesses. Whatever it is, there must be something and someone should act to stop it before it's too late.

The economy of the country also suffers from this malpractice. We have to import a lot of drugs each year. This encourages our ailing economy. Hard earned foreign currency is spent in millions over this. If we don't practice frugality now, in near future we won't have much of an economy, just a big tab.

So, the question is simple 'what to do?' The answer, however, is much more complicated. The Government, the health officials, the concerned authorities along with the populace have to come forward and thwart a war against imminent pandemics. Control on prescription drugs has to be tightened in order to ensure proper usage and to foil any attempts for abusing or misusing drugs.

Random checks should be conducted covertly on pharmacies to ensure that drugs are not only sold for business reasons but also for curing people. Severe punitive measures should be taken against those who are breaching the rules. Only then we can see a drop on drug imports followed by a drop in the outpour of hard currency. If the populace stops its misuse of drugs then we can hope to thwart looming epidemics if it is not too late.

Adducing the facts I hope the concerned authorities will come forward and do something to stop this menacing, ominous practice of selling prescription drugs without prescriptions.

How Gods Came into Being

by Shamsad Mortuza

GOD made man while man made gods. From ancient times, human imagination has been responsible for deification of various objects. These gods came into being as primitive men tried to explain and accept the world that surrounded them. Most of these gods are now a thing of the past and belong not to theology but to mythology.

Interestingly, the deities we encounter in the mythical stories are depicted as human in form and in character. They often share the physical and moral weakness of their human counterparts: they are often deformed, crippled or insincere; they can steal, lie or even deceive with divine deftness. But in most cases the beauty and the vigour of these gods are idealised, and thereby gods are superior beings compared to their mortal counterparts. This belief, that gods resemble man, is known as anthropomorphism.

The nadir of such belief is, actually, an attempt to understand the mystery of the universe and an urge to attain the universal truths. Hence, the mythical gods of antiquity serve as symbols with profound hidden meanings. A close look at the genesis of these gods might help us to understand how natural objects or phenomena were attributed with godly characteristics.

For primitive agricultural society, for instance, rain was a wonder because of its link with the production of crops. So, riding on the wild horse of imagination, these primitive men began to think of rain as the seed of the sky which fertilizes the hungry earth and makes it conceive. Thus a natural phenomena was interpreted in human terms; the sky becomes a father figure and the earth a mother.

The marriage of the earth and the sky has ever since been treated as holy, and it is a recurrent theme in Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Sumerian, and Babylonian mythologies. Uranus, in the Greek mythol-

ogy, is the male principle, a god of the sky. His wife Gaia is the earthly female goddess of fertility. The union of these two deities brought forth the whole race of Titans (the Indian counterparts of Ashura). The youngest of these Titans is Cronus, another sky god. He married his sister Rhea (earth) and usurped the powers and the functions of their parents.

Hesiod, a Greek scholar living in the 7th century BC, in his Theogony, gives an account of how the Olympian gods were born to Cronus and Rhea.

Cronus, however, knew from his starry father, Uranus, that he would be dethroned by his own son. So he kept on swallow-

ing his children until Rhea took pity and managed to deceive her husband. She gave birth to Zeus in a cave of Crete — a rocky island in the Aegean sea — and fooled Cronus with a huge stone. On Crete island,

Zeus was fed by bees and nursed by nymphs. There were also some young attendants who made noise with their spears, to subdue the cry of the

infant Zeus. This noise making is reflected in the early rituals conducted by the devotees of the earth goddess.

When Zeus reached middle age, he waged a war against his father Cronus and forced him to return all the children that he had earlier swallowed. The battle between Zeus and Cronus was of epic proportions, spanning ten long years. (Incidentally, the same time span was recorded for the Trojan war.) Zeus had his siblings as allies in the war. After the war he shared his powers with his brothers and sisters — Zeus himself assumed the sky as his domain, Poseidon, the sea; and Hades, the under world. There came into being a circle of twelve major deities, who began to rule the universe from Mount Olympus. These gods were known as the Olympian gods.

In Greek myth, Zeus is portrayed as an amorous deity. He mates with countless goddesses and mortal women. This again can be interpreted as human desire to trace his ancestry back to the supreme god. In ancient Egypt, for instance, the Pharaohs were potent enough to claim them selves as gods. So did many of the oriental monarchs. The Greek kings, however, never claimed themselves as gods. But many of these kings had bards or court poets, to sign their glory. Quite likely, these songs were exaggerated and the heroes were projected almost as divine beings. The legend of Hercules and his 12 tasks can serve as a ready example for this sort of nationalization of myths. (No doubt, Alexander once wished that he had a Homer to sing his glory like that of Iliad.)

But, Hercules, too had his lineage traced back to Zeus. It was the mother of Hercules in order to seduce to Zeus turned her into a heifer, and thus hid her from his jealous wife Hera. Well, that is another story... Actually, these are stories which do not have any end; in their endings are their beginnings.



Jupiter, from a German engraving

Courtesy — Myths of Greece and Rome

Synopsis: In the South of France, a nuclear reactor melts down. Parisians are evacuated before the radiation drifts into the capital. However, two teenagers, Sarah Raja and Hajra Ilahi, miss the flights out and find themselves all alone in the city of Paris.

'Bad Fortune' consists of journal entries made by Sarah Raja, as she tries to find ways to survive.

21st Century, 1st January, Paris

It is a new century! Today, people danced in the streets. Fireworks were everywhere and everything looked simply GREAT!

After lunch my parents, who were off to a reception, gave me, my two elder brothers and my younger sister 550 francs each and told us to go spend the money at the Royal fair of the Tuilleries Gardens.

Leaving Shafu, the maid and the cook, Kancha, in our apartment we arrived at the fair at 2 pm. My elder brother, Kamal living up to his sixteen years decided to take care of my younger sister, Naureen. Shakil simply ran off to where he'd seen some friends. We'd