

Poison in my bloodstream

VOYAGER

DRUG addiction is a major problem in Bangladesh. The most alarming thing is that various types of drugs like marijuana and heroine, as well as alcohol, are available on university campuses around the country. I myself was addicted to marijuana, commonly known as *ganja, sukna* or *potla* and alcohol.

In August 1999, I got into Dhaka University as an Honours student. Life was full of hopes and dreams. The days were spent pleasantly in *adda*, and singing songs with friends (which, I am sure intimidated the crows nearby!). Some of my friends used to smoke cigarettes. I could not stand cigarette fume, let alone smoke. Some of my friends said that without smoking you can't be grown up. But to me, smoking seemed like a stupid thing to do. But even my views on life soon began to change. I fell in love. But the girl belonged to a different religion, which is why I did not express my feelings to her.

In August 2001, we all went on an excursion to Rangamati and Bandarban. They were beautiful places. I saw some of my friends taking marijuana and a locally prepared hard drink named "*mohua*". The smell of *mohua* was horrible. The first time I smelled it I lost my appetite. Perhaps it was the beautiful surroundings of Bandarban that made me want to express my love to the girl I had grown so fond of. But one of my friends stopped me from doing so. I was shocked to learn that he too was also interested in the girl. He was drinking *mohua* in the hotel room that night. I still do not know what possessed me. I forced myself to take a swig from the bottle and ended up drinking some of it. My friend was also preparing marijuana for smoking. He showed me how to smoke it as well as cigarettes.

That was the beginning of the darkest period of my life. I came to know that there were many places in Dhaka University where marijuana was sold openly, in front of the police. Hard drinks and cough syrup were also available. I became addicted to marijuana. I used to smoke marijuana several times a day and became a chain smoker. Maybe this was what made me desperate and I proposed to the girl I loved. She rejected me. I realised that I really did not have any positive qualities which would attract a girl.

My grades were declining, my health deteriorating, and I was in terrible despair. I was stoned most of the time. The affect was terrible. I got a bad headache, lost my appetite. I still find it very difficult to talk clearly. I start a sentence and forgot how to finish it. I did not want the girl I loved to find out about my condition. I would wait for hours only to see her smile and for her to pass me by. Day after day I walked through the streets of the campus in great sorrow and despair and would drive around like a madman. I needed some company but all my friends were busy with themselves. I could not talk to my parents about it either. I thought about committing suicide several times, but could not do it. The physical pain and mental agony were overwhelming.

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Then came the biggest shock of my life. My uncle died in the backseat of my car. He had a heart attack and I was taking him to the hospital. I felt his heartbeat stop. He was a chain smoker.

That incident changed my life. I began to think positively about life and stopped smoking marijuana.

But the after-effects have also been painful. Sometimes it feels like something poisonous is running through my bloodstream. I get intense headaches. I went to a doctor but could not tell him in front of my father that I was a drug addict. So he gave me some painkillers but I still have a permanent headache. I have heard of certain procedures for rehabilitation from drug addiction. But I did not go through them systematically and now, at 24, am having to bear the consequences. I still have not been able to quit smoking and sometimes still feel the urge to smoke marijuana again.

Drugs are not the solution to people's problems. They only make things worse. Parents should observe their children carefully, noting symptoms of addiction like sleeplessness, partial loss of memory and irritability. They should be open to talking to them and listening to their problems. Besides proper medication, drug addicts need love and affection to cure them of the vicious disease. Drug addicts are not sinners but victims of circumstance. The sinners are those who sell drugs.

I still love that girl with all my heart. But winning is not everything, I guess. For anyone who feels the urge for whatever reason, please say no to drugs. Life is beautiful and definitely worth living.