

# Opium for masses, a problem in Arunachal

**ENDEMIC** Never considered a taboo, the poppy cultivation and consumption has ruined generations in Lohit and Anjaw districts



**Nivedita Khandekar**

nivedita.khandekar@hindustantimes.com

**TEZU (ARUNACHAL PRADESH):** As the sun sets in the Mishmi hills, Asaso Dry, a 30-something man prepares for an opium session with his friends at his house.

Dry, along with his friends spends long hours since evenings in ecstatic state drawing from their favourite substance opium.

Introduced to the north-east by the British to appease the hostile tribes, the opium addiction — locally known as kaani — has now spread over entire Lohit and Anjaw districts, both with pre-dominant Mishmi population.

Talking about its medicinal values, Logem Manyu from neighbouring Loiliang basti said: "It is considered as a preventive measure. People who regularly consume kaani never fall sick."

A survey in 2010-11 by New Delhi-based Institute for Narcotics Studies and Analysis (INSA) in the area had revealed that a majority of villages (90%) in Anjaw had all families cultivating opium and in Lohit it was 63%.

"More de-addiction centres should be opened. The government should give more incentives," said Romesh Bhattacharjee from INSA.

At the only functional centre at Arunachal Pali Vidyapeeth Society at Chongkham, about



■ Youths consuming opium — locally known as Kaani. There is only one functional de-addiction centre in the region.

HT PHOTO

130-to-140-odd youth have been rehabilitated in last four years. "Our 15-day de-addiction programme includes meditation, sports, prayers and counseling," said Vidyapeeth's Bhikku Vimalananda.

The problem has aggravated during last five years. Since Arunachal Pradesh has not been notified for licit cultivation, all poppy cultivation in Lohit and Anjaw is illegal.

However, there has been no arrest so far. CS Jeinow, deputy commissioner of Anjaw, said, "All of Anjaw just has six police personnel, including the SP and the DSP. How can we keep track?"

It is clear that nobody is afraid of anti-narcotic operations. "Anti-narcotics team came twice in 2010-11, but there was no success as poppy is mostly grown in inaccessible areas," Jeinow added.

Selling kaani at R500 per kg has made poppy cultivation a profitable venture.

The administration plans to dissuade people from its cultivation and lead them to commercial horticulture like cardamom and orange.

(As part of Inclusive Media Fellowship by [www.im4change.org](http://www.im4change.org))

**Anti-narcotics team came twice, but there was no success as poppy is grown in inaccessible areas.**

CS JEINOW, Anjaw Police