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agenda

KERALA IS INDIA'S TIPPLER STATE. IT HAS THE HIGHEST PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION IN THE COUNTRY. OVERTAKING HARD-DRINKING STATES LIKE PUNJAB AND HARYANA. INCIDENTALLY, THE KERALA GOVERNMENT IS THE SOLE DISTRIBUTOR OF BOOZE.

New Delhi, October 28, 2012

Johns K Mangalam became alcoholic at a young age and suffered torture in the traditional de-addiction centres for long. Today, he runs an organisation in Kerala that has helped more than a thousand people get rid of alcoholism. VR JAYARAJ tells his story

Escape from hell

Well, my friends are gone, and my hair is grey; I take to the places where I used to play; I am crazy for love but I am not coming on; I am not playing my next everyday in the

Tune of Song, **Leonard Cohen**

The alcohol have exactly been The way philosophy teacher Johns K Mangalam, Head of the Department of Philosophy at the reputed Sacred Heart College in Thrissur, Kerala, an intellectual and above all a volunteer of alcoholics, was lulling while slithering through the expanses of the murky swamps of booze till his liberation from it over a decade ago. A lost cause. These were my friends, so it's no honour to come along, and the only thing possible with such a life was to cause pain and alienation to himself and to the woman and son who waited for him in the solitary house in the hill top village. Friends, seem to have been Thrissur city.

In many this fate is unavoidable in God's Own Country, which has already been turned into Alcohol Valley, with the highest per capita alcohol consumption in the country. In Kerala, where the Government is the sole distributor of booze that has virtually turned a good section of the male society into a marketplace of criminality, madness and irresponsibility, leaving is not an alternative but a horrible way of life. For Keralites, booze is no agent of relaxation or even intoxication and boozing is not an entertainment exercise. It is the shortest route to oblivion. They just want to overcome reality, for very strange reasons.

Alcoholism has been the reflection that it is not a disease and that a hooked on a man with social inhibitions, poems that enabled him to free himself from the clutches of booze over a decade ago. In the revealing light of the secrets days that followed this realization, he also understood that he was not alone in the world of booze and hallucinations and that Kerala was full of patients of alcoholism.

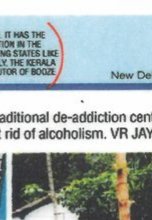
"In a sense, society itself is responsible for the fall of individuals into the vortex of booze. The reasons for the start of that journey could be varied, but the perspective on the drinker remains the same throughout the journey. The booze is a despicable sinner who cannot be salvaged. From my point of view, I can truthfully say that it is extremely difficult to cure a normal person to be a drunkard, but those who need that should know the pain with it and the will to bring him back to his life" says Johns who has the experience of being an alcoholic himself and now a liberator of drunkards. It is with this mission of helping the alcoholics come back to life and to realise their inner strengths and aspirations born again and live a meaningful life that he lives.

Don't think Johns is joking or boasting of anything when he says that the Thrissur's Chalakkudy Point for De-Addiction and Rehabilitation is the only one. Friends has no gates — no one ever to close. He just means that restrictions, regimentals or regulate drugs have nothing to do with redemption of alcoholics, for the essence of any cure is freedom, tolerance and love. The crossing gates are also a symbol. The alcoholic seeking deliverance is free to go back to his life of booze or to struggle out of it. Nobody is there to control him. Not even God. I must grant him his personality, its complexities and its richness. I know this because unlike other pedestrian counsellors, I have passed through the angst, pangs and the humiliations only another 'drunkard' can understand," says Johns.

In the philosophy who had made Mahatma Gandhi his role model long back, alcoholism is a disease but one with no drug cure just like the simple cold or pneumonia. But it can be treated, effectively. The rest depends on the sufferer himself. In that case, Johns would depend more on Jean Paul Sartre "I am condemned to be free."

Johns born 47 thousand he was born to mother brought up amid booze that bleed like brooks in the mountains by village where settles from southern Kerala chosen to build up a hilly head or agriculture at a time when everything in the world was being decided by the strength of the muscular arm. A plain teaching of his redemption not stopping by open autobiographical note.

Confessions of the alcoholic abused last month reveals that he grew up in a setting where alcohol, or booze was a boon or. For him, the origins of the disease were in his father who would munch



"The Punarjani De-Addiction Centre has already helped more than 1,300 men — mostly youth — to free themselves from the clutches of alcoholism"

by send him. where he was just six or seven, to buy country liquor from the teacher who worked among the three bushes for his customers.

"From the time I can remember, my father was a drunkard," writes Johns in his autobiography, and says the home and mood for the book and also for his life that was touched by memories of the helplessness of a mother who could not help her husband.

History would appear for the family when Johns himself became the sufferer, one of the age of his dad or for as his wife was concerned. But Johns would not let booze determine his life and just when he had reached the point of no return. He did return. He found himself from it and it enabled him to have enough determination to choose a path that would lead to the freeing of himself, to others those alcoholism in the same way he came out of it.

The academic is supposed to be the workshop where positive personalities are moulded but for Johns, the schools and colleges he studied gave him space mainly to dip into the pleasures of alcoholism. The University of Calicut from where he took his MA in philosophy and PhD in Gandhian Thought was the perfect setting for the formation of the life, dad and. A friend of Johns said that there was something in that terrain that had made most of the students of the varsity's Philosophy Department fans of TS Eliot for long-term. *The Waste Land*, during that time). The not very high academic standards of the varsity find it an excuse to swallow booze. Filled love, joblessness, complexities of marriage, penury and several other self-imposed conflicts. The net result was that life was in the gutter.

The law school and the court brought no relief. "I turned for myself the reputation of being a famous drunkard," he says. The friends were gone, there was no money, no reputable address and all this augmented the love for booze. Wisdom dawned later and then the search for help began. But that too was a huge disappointment," says Johns.

The de-addiction centres where he sought help were prisons where the doctor-counsellor was a jailer and the inmate a prisoner "I was nothing but a torture, persecution," he remembers. When he finally struggled free of the octopus clutches of booze with a dauntless love and ever-reacting passion, the world around had changed much. But the lecturer's job that would come to him at the right moment was a great relief. But the greatest relief was his wife ("who gave me reform by leaving pain upon me that my mother") who saved by him even when the entire society around from where I'm off.

Today Johns has reasons to feel proud. His Punarjani De-Addiction Centre at Ernakulam has already helped over 1,300 guys — mostly youth — to free themselves from the clutches of alcoholism without having to go through repellent drugs or sessions of exposition. The secret behind the Punarjani's success is the quest for truth — the reason "the alcoholic" is the wood spring from nowhere. There should be a reason behind every alcoholic. But the problem is that the drunkard does not normally find it. Punarjani helps them find those reasons for themselves and helps them get rid of them. It is a peace by tracing themselves, and not by the help of any de-addiction but rather individually, as Johns explains.

Set in a verdant valley with a vast pond adjacent to a reservoir in front, Punarjani is an experiment in a different kind of community living. There would be about 30 inmates at one time in Punarjani and it is a rule here that those should be at least one day after five — preferably the spouse — with the inmates. The addicts are given the freedom to do whatever they want. They discuss among themselves their past present and future of their lives and do the same during counselling sessions with Johns in chair. This process of self-discovery forms the essence of the "treatment" for alcoholics and all the while, the doors are being taught to be patient, tolerant and loving to each other. After all society is the ground from where the fellow germinates