

Reading A

India's Battle to Ban Chewing Tobacco




In September 2010, Mahadev Prasad Sharma, a potato and onion vendor from the eastern Indian state of Bihar, was diagnosed with stage four mouth cancer. In Mumbai, where he went for surgery, the central portion of his lower jaw was removed.

Less than three years later, the cancer returned, this time as two marble sized, yellowish lumps on the inside of his left cheek. When his surgeon, Pankaj Chaturvedi, told him that the only treatment was another surgery, the 57 year old man started to sob.

He asked for the operation to be put back a month as his daughter was studying for her computer course exams and he didn't want to give her the bad news.

Mr. Sharma's cancer is caused by chewing 'khaini,' a mixture of tobacco and lime that is popular in Bihar, said his surgeon Mr. Chaturvedi, Associate Professor and head and neck surgeon at Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai.



Around 14% of Indian adults smoke cigarettes and ‘beedis’ (hand-rolled cigarettes), but nearly 26% use smokeless tobacco, including chewing tobacco, according to the Government of India and World Health Organization Global Adult Tobacco Survey of 2009-2010.

“Approximately 85% of the oral cancer patients I treat are either smokers or tobacco chewers,” Mr. Chaturvedi said, “After years of treating thousands of patients, I decided to take action to stop people from using a substance that is proven to cause cancer,” the surgeon added.

He launched a campaign called *Voices of Tobacco Victims* in 2008 to advocate for more stringent tobacco control in India. The campaign empowers cancer survivors to tell their stories to influence policy makers and raise awareness among other tobacco users about the damaging effects of tobacco on health.

The campaign’s greatest success has been to ban the manufacture, storage, distribution and sale of ‘gutka,’ a form of chewing tobacco commonly consumed in India.

The opportunity to advocate for the gutka ban arose with the *Food Safety and Standards Act of 2011*, under which the central government prohibited the use of tobacco and nicotine as ingredients in any food product.


Gutka is a crushed preparation of tobacco and ‘paan masala,’ a mixture of areca or betel nut, sugar, spices and perfume.

Under the FSSA, gutka can be categorized as a food product, and therefore should not contain substances injurious to health, like tobacco.

The implementation of the FSSA lies with the health ministry of each state. *Voices of Tobacco Victims* directed its efforts to have the gutka ban implemented at state legislatures and in April 2012, Madhya Pradesh became the first Indian state to ban gutka, said Mr. Chaturvedi.

With the support of other doctors and cancer survivors, he launched similar campaigns and filed public interest litigations in other states and union territories. This month, Karnataka became the last Indian state to make the manufacture and sale of gutka illegal.

The ban’s effect on stopping Indians from chewing tobacco is limited. Pure chewing tobacco and paan masala continue to be sold as two separate packets that users can mix for themselves before consumption, according to Mr. Chaturvedi.



“But (the ban) has drawn widespread attention to the public health epidemic tobacco has caused. Until it was banned, gutka was marketed as a mouth freshener to target youth,” he added.

In the western Indian state of Maharashtra, the ban on gutka has been more effective than in other states because the manufacture and sale of paan masala has also been prohibited since July 2012.

“In Maharashtra, manufacturing units of gutka and paan masala have been closed and the state government has seized 16 crore rupees (\$ 2.9 million) worth of tobacco products, more than all other states combined,” said Mahesh Zagade, Commissioner of the *Food and Drug Administration* in Maharashtra.

“There are no figures for the decrease in consumption yet... but the general perception is that consumption of gutka and paan masala has significantly decreased,” he said.

However, boundaries between Indian states are porous, and paan masala that is manufactured in other states can illegally be brought into Maharashtra, Mr. Zagade added.

The Maharashtra FDA must also submit a report to the state government each year to renew the ban on paan masala. This is because it is banned under a different section of the FSSA than the one that bans gutka. Paan masala has addictive and carcinogenic properties itself, but it is prohibited because its magnesium carbonate content is above the permissible level. The Food Commissioner needs to demonstrate annually if the amount of magnesium carbonate is above the permissible level. The state ban on paan masala is up for renewal on July 19.

“Many children are as young as 12 when first exposed to gutka and paan masala... they don’t even know what cancer is, and by the time they realize it is bad for their health, they can’t stop,” said Mr. Chaturvedi.

“Once diagnosed with cancer, even if a patient stops chewing tobacco, the genetic damage is irreversible,” he added.

Patients stream into his clinic, their faces disfigured and stitches running from their lips to necks. Many have had part or all of the tongue removed and can barely speak. Pradeep Kumar Sharma, a 52 year old coalfield worker from Madhya Pradesh, has been consuming liquids through a tube in his nose since March. A patch of flesh the size of a golf ball was removed from his thigh to replace cancerous cells in his cheek.

“He’s in a lot of pain. But his children and I are in even more pain... they used to beg him not to chew gutka but he never listened,” said his wife, Durga Sharma.

Shanoor Seervai

About the Author



Shanoor Seervai is a freelance writer based in Bombay.

Meanings in context

lump	:	small hard swelling
launched	:	started
campaign	:	a planned activity
stringent	:	strict
empowers	:	encourages
survivors	:	those who continue to live despite being close to death
litigation	:	process of fighting a case in a court
consumption	:	eating or drinking something
carcinogenic	:	substance that can cause cancer
genetic	:	related to genes
stream	:	rush to a place in large numbers

Comprehension

1. What difficulties might Mr. Sharma's family have suffered because of his illness?
2. List the activities carried out under the campaign called 'Voices of Tobacco Victims'.

3. Mr. Chaturvedi filed public interest litigations against the use of gutka in many states and union territories. Who helped him in this effort?
4. Which state has been most successful in banning tobacco? Give evidence in support of your answers.
5. “He’s in a lot of pain. But his children and I are in even more pain...” Who is ‘he’? Who is ‘I’?
6. Which line in the lesson suggests that a person suffering from mouth cancer can pass on the disease to his or her children?
7. How is gutka popularized among the youth?

Vocabulary

Rewrite the following sentences using appropriate forms of the words given in the brackets for the words/phrases in bold. One has been done for you.

Example: You must start **drinking** more water. (**consume**)

You must start **consuming** more water.

1. Hundreds of vehicles are **moving in large number** towards the Kisan Mela (stream).
 2. I do not eat gutka because some of the ingredients in it **can cause cancer**. (carcinogenic)
 3. Duleshwari was the only **one who came out safe from the plane crash**. (survivor)
 4. School will **begin** a campaign against alcoholism in July. (launch)
 5. The Principal has announced that **severe punishment** will be given to those who do not follow the school rules. (stringent)
 6. The government has **given** women the right and freedom to work in the most challenging positions in the military. (empower)
 7. The forest department is **doing many planned activities** for spreading the awareness of the need for planting trees. (campaign)
 8. Many a times the only symptom of cancer that a patient reports is a **hard growth** of flesh. (lump)
 9. Full form of FSSA
- FDA

Grammar

Reduced Relative Clauses

Read the following sentence from the text and notice the phrase in bold.

In September 2010, Mahadev Prasad Sharma, **a potato and onion vendor from the eastern Indian state of Bihar**, was diagnosed with stage four mouth cancer.

This phrase can be expanded into the following relative/adjective clause and the sentence will be rewritten as below.

In September 2010, Mahadev Prasad Sharma, **who was a potato and onion vendor from the eastern Indian state of Bihar**, was diagnosed with stage four mouth cancer.

As you can see from the example, the relative clauses begin with relative pronouns such as who, which, that, those etc. It is preceded by a comma (,) and ends with a comma (,). Here is another example of the reduced relative clause which does not have a comma before and at the end.

The man **hiding behind the curtain** is perhaps the thief.

Underline the reduced relative clauses. Rewrite them after expanding them into relative clauses. You may begin the relative clauses with who/ which.

1. The progress he has made in the last one year is remarkable.
2. The boy talking to my daughter is her class fellow.
3. The person dragged by the police is the killer.
4. The road closed for the Republic Day Parade is now open to the public.
5. The cyclist hit by the speeding bus is admitted to the hospital.
6. The English text book prescribed for ten years has at last been revised.
7. The desk next to you is broken.
8. The seat reserved for the Chief Guest is lying vacant.

Writing

1. Write a slogan against the use of gutka.

Example :

‘Say no to gutka. Say yes to life.’

2. How does mouth cancer disfigure a patient? Describe in 30 words.

Listening

This morning Radha has listened to the symptoms of influenza on the radio. She has written them down for the class. She has made some mistakes in it.

Now you listen to it and tick the symptoms that you have listened to.

Symptoms of Influenza

People who have the flu often feel all of these signs and symptoms

- Someone with flu will have fever
- Stuffed nose
- Some peoples will have diarrhoea
- Some may have headache
- Some may have pain in the body
- Some will have swelling in the leg
- Some people may get boils on the face
- Hairfall
- Vomiting

Speaking

Work in groups. Given below are opinions of different people. Which of these opinions do you agree or disagree with? Give reasons.

All my friends eat gutka. So I too eat gutka.

Why waste money on a harmful things like gutka.

I will not stop taking gutka. It is my freedom. It is my decision.

85% mouth cancer patients are smokers or gutka chewers.

Taking gutka is thrilling.

Not everybody gets cancer from gutka.

Chewing gutka is stylish.

Eating gutka is harmful like smoking beedi or cigarette.

Gutka is a kind of dangerous drug.

Study Skills

Look at the poster and answer the following questions.

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY-2013

Do you know ?

4000

Poisonous substances in tobacco can cause

- Hair loss
- Cataract
- Tooth decay
- Lung Cancer
- Heart disease
- Stomach ulcers
- Discoloured fingers
- Deformed sperm
- Gangrene

... and a painful death

QUIT TOBACCO TODAY!

In co-ordination with: POLICE Department Government of Andhra Pradesh.

INDIAN YOUTH SECURED ORGANISATION, KARIMNAGAR-(A.P), INDIA-505 001

Issued in public interest by: IYSO Team INDIA, Karimnagar-(A.P).

1. In which different forms is tobacco sold in the market?
2. What makes tobacco dangerous?
3. What are the after-effects of consuming tobacco?
4. Which parts of the human body are affected by tobacco?
5. What are the visible and invisible damages caused by tobacco?