

'MUKTANGAN' FREEING PEOPLE FROM SHACKLES OF ADDICTION

PUNE

STANDING as a testimony to the missionary zeal of a social activist couple, the well known "Muktan-gan" de-addiction centre, that has treated about 19,000 victims of alcohol and drug abuse, completed 25 years of its existence this week, drawing applause from all quarters. Conceived by Anil Awchat, a doctor, and his late wife Anita, the city-based rehab centre, a pioneering venture of its kind in Maharashtra, started with moral and financial support of the legendary litterateur Pu La Deshpande, and takes pride in totally curing about 13,000 of its inmates. For Awchat, a social activist-cum-writer, Muktangan signifies and denotes the inculcation and propagation of a "positive lifestyle" that has become need of the hour in times of negative influences leading to addiction.

"When we started Muktangan, we came across and treated largely a section of people who turned to addiction of various kinds to seek relaxation after hard physical labour. Now we see affluent class turning to alcohol and narcotics as fashion and glamour," he said in an interview. "Earlier, those who needed and sought rehabilitation were men. But the latest trends show an alarming rise in the number of women ad-

dicts over the years which has necessitated opening of a new section in Muktangan called "Nishigandh" for treating the female inmates," Awchat noted. Awchat, who toyed with the idea of starting a de-addiction centre 25 years ago after a close friend became an addict, found a great support in "Pu La" (as the legendary writer Deshpande is popularly known) and his wife Sunita.

Muktangan gained its own identity as it developed de-ad-

diction therapy based on the tenets of Indian culture without just depending on medicinal aspect. "The addict here is not treated as a patient but a friend in need. The emphasis is put on understanding the domestic problems and initiating a continuous dialogue with the affected and responding to his anger with love and care," said Awchat, who is fondly called "Baba" by Muktangan inmates.

Mukta Puntambekar, Deputy Director of the centre at Yeravada, said there has been a spurt in the number of addicts in the age group of 10-12 years, while the most vulnerable group in the past normally fell in the 20-22 category.

Muktangan has also set up a group called "Sahachari" to facilitate participation of the wife and other family members in the rehabilitation of the addicts who can take jobs like housekeeping and catering on the premises, she added.

