

INTOXICANTS IN MUGHAL INDIA

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OPIUM

According to Yule and Burnell, the word in origin is not oriental, but Greek, from which the Arabs took *afyūn*. The opium-poppy was introduced into China, from Arabia, at the beginning of the ninth century. Its earliest Chinese name is *a-fu-yung*, a representative of the Arabic name. The Arab *afyūn*, is occasionally called *afin* which is incorrect. The Bengalis derived it from *ahi-feno*, 'serpent-home'.

Writing in c. 70 A.D., Pliny says that 'opion' had the power not only to provoke sleep, but kill the consumer in sleep if taken in a great quantity. He himself had known many persons meeting with death in this manner².

In 1511 A.D., the Portugese General Alboquerque captured eight Gujarati ships having many rich stuffs, much merchandise and *arfūn*^{3a}.

It was also known as the 'milk of poppies'^{3b}.

It was called '*amfion*' by the Portugese, '*affion*' by the Arabians, the Moors and the Indians, and '*opio*' or *opium* in Latin³.

Opium was taken from a black, bitter extract, informs Manrique⁴.

Opium was made of 'sleepe balles of Poppie, and is the gumme which commeth forth of the same, to ye which and it is cut up and opened', writes the Dutch traveller, Linschoten⁵. The English factor John Marshall who wrote his account in 1669, says: 'Tis a large white flower about 1¼ yard from (the) ground. They sow the seed in October, and tis ripe in February. The flower closeth, and after a few days they cut 2 or 3 slits in the sides of it out of which cometh a white juice which they let dry, then wipe or scrape it, which is Ophium. Then they again slit it, till any juice will come out, which is not above 3 or 4 drops, and that which they preserve for seed, they cut not. Out of an acre of ground will not come above 40 or 50 seers, which sometimes is worth 700 or 800 rupees⁶.

Persons addict to the use of opium could not survive if they were deprived of it for four or five days. Similarly, those who took a big dose of the same for the first time, were sure to die as it was a kind of poison. Those who regularly consumed opium, always behaved as if they were half asleep⁷. Garcia (1563 A.D.) knew a secretary of Nizam-ul-Mulk who consumed 3 *tolas* worth of opium every day and always kept sleeping or dosing, although when put to business, spoke like a man of letters and distinction⁸.

Opium was mostly taken by manual workers to avoid the tedium of hard labour⁹. The people of Malabar were particularly fond of opium and got it from Cambay in large quantities¹⁰. Garcia is of the opinion that the opium of Cambay actually came from Malwa¹¹. The Malabar people got it from the Dutch in exchange for pepper supplied to them from the East Indies¹². They used it rather 'very greedily' and took the quantity of a 'bigness of a pea'. This they took either with '*uraq*' or alone. Some had accustomed themselves to use 'amsion' every day, some every two or three days. Its use made them forgetful of everything else. The Malabars liked to eat opium before engagement with the enemy as it blurred their memory and filled them with vigour and energy¹³. Pelsaert thought the same of the Rajputs who were excellent soldiers 'because the quantity of opium they ate excited them'¹⁴.

A letter written by an English factor, Oxenden, from Karwar on the Malabar coast to the East India Company on January 1, 1666, reads: "The natives of those parts not being able to live without opium, which they now cannot have but from the Dutch, who have already brought into such esteem among them, that they have all the pepper which is the growth of these parts in trucke for it giving their opium at such rates that the pepper comes in to them at 1½d and 1¾d per pound"¹⁵

Mandelslo writes (1638-39): "Soon after he (Governor) called for a little golden cabinet, enriched with precious stones, and having taken out two drawers, out of one he took offion, or opium, and out of the other *Bengi*, a certain drug, or powder, made of the leaves and seed of hemp, which they use to excite luxury"¹⁶.

Manrique observed that opium was used by the 'Orientals' to assist in the gratification of lust and lewdness, by increasing their sexual power¹⁷. His statement is endorsed by Linschoten who came to India much earlier. He is of the opinion that they used it "most for lecherie: for it maketh a man to hold his seede long before he sheddeth it, which the Indian women much desire, that they may shed their nature likewise with the man: although

such as eat much thereof, are in time altogether unable to company with a woman, and wholly dried up, for it drieth and wholly cooleth mans nature that useth it, as the Indians doe themselves witnes"¹⁸.

Mughal princes and nobles were known in certain cases for their fondness for opium.

According to John Marshall, the best opium came from Patna. That of Munghir was no good¹⁹. Linschoten says that opium was brought from Cairo and Aden, and the opium that came from Cambay and Aden was softer and reddish²⁰.

The English prosecuted a rich trade in opium and sent large quantities of the commodity from Surat to Persia, Arabia and Europe²¹. Later on, the East India Company enjoyed a monopoly in the opium trade²². The Dutch also carried on a flourishing trade in opium and enjoyed a monopoly on the Malabar coast²³. As these commercial activities in this trade continued in the reign of Aurangzeb, his orders prohibiting the use and sale of opium may have not been very effective²⁴. The large export and excessive use of opium resulted in the increase of its price. It sold at Surat in 1609 from 80 to 120 *mahmudis* per maund²⁵. The Misri or Egyptian opium sold at 16 *Mahmudis* per seer²⁶.

POST

Post was well mixed up in water until a black bitter extract was formed. This solution enormously increased sexual power, though it destroyed natural strength and after two or three years rendered the person using it absolutely impotent and unfit for any kind of activity²⁷.

BHANG

The word is derived from Sanskrit *bhāṅg*. It meant the dried leaves and small stalks of hemp, used for intoxication, either by smoking or eating mixed up into a sweetmeat, i.e. *majoon*. The Arabs call it *hashish*. According to Birdwood, it consists of the 'tender tops of the plants after flowering'²⁸.

Fryer calls *bhāṅg* a 'pleasant intoxicating seed mixed with Milk'²⁹. He says further: "...the Plant of which Bang is made...grows as our Hemp, the Juice of whose Seed ground in bowl like Mustard-seed, and mixed with other liquor, is that they equivocate with their Prophet instead of the Grape"³⁰.

According to Alexander Hamilton, it was made 'of a Seed like Hemp-Seed, that has an intoxicating Quality'³¹.

It had a sed like that of the hemp, though somewhat smaller and not so white. "Also the thing whereon it groweth is like Hemp, but it hath no substance whereof it make anything," says Linschoten³².

Mentioning the qualities of *bhāng*, Lockyer wrote in 1711, that being used "as Tea, it inebriates, or exhilarates them according to the quantity they take"³³.

Linschoten says that *bhāng* served the same purpose as the 'Amfion'. The Indians ate its seeds or its leaves after stamping them to stimulate their appetite. They, however, used it "most to provoke lust". It was sold in market mingled with some powder of the leaves and the seeds together. In order to intoxicate a person they put green areca into it. Occasionally they mixed it with nutmegs and mace which also inebriated a person. The rich and wealthy people mixed it with cloves, amber, musk and opium which made them pleasant and forgetful. The workers and labourers could do their difficult and arduous jobs "without once thinking of any pain ; but only laughing, playing, and sleeping quietly". It made the slaves forget their labour. It caused those who ate it "to reele and look as if they were drunk, and half foolish, doing nothing but laugh and been drunk, as long as it worketh in their bodies". It was a certain "small comfort to a melancholy person"³⁴. He says further that the Portugese also used *bhāng*. The common women or whores used it when they meant to 'have a mans companie, thereby to be lively and merrie, and to set all care aside'³⁵. According to him, it was first invented by captains and soldiers who had "layne long in the field, continually waking and with great travell" and desiring to seek comfort³⁶.

According to R. F. Burton, the "use of Bhang doubtless dates from the dawn of civilization, whose earliest social pleasures would be inebriants"³⁷.

Crawford John in his book, "Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Countries", opines that hemp, as a product of the Indian Archipelago, was first seen at Achin (Sumatra) by the observant William Dampier in 1688³⁸. In "A new Voyage Round the World", William Dampier writes that he found in Achin "a sort of Herb or Plant called Ganja or Bhang". "It is reported of this Plant," he further writes, "that if it is infused with any Liquor, it will stupefy the brains of any person that drinks thereof; but it operates diversely, according to the constitution of the person. Some it makes sleepy, some merry, putting them into Laughing fit, and others it makes mad ; : but after 2 or 3 hours they come to themselves again.....I know it is much esteemed here, and in other places too whither it is transported"³⁹.

Mandelslo's observation of the mixed use of *bhang* and opium has been recorded above⁴⁰.

Thomas Bowery, an Englishman, was in the East from 1669 to 1679 and wrote an interesting and informative account of his travels entitled "Countries Round the Bay of Bengal". While in Bengal, he, along with about ten of his companions, had an opportunity of enjoying *bhāṅg*. He has narrated the experience undergone by all of them. One of them, says he, sat down on the floor and spent the entire afternoon weeping bitterly. Another, overtaken by a certain fear, did 'runn his head into a Mortavan (*martabān*) Jarr, and continued that posture 4 hours or more, 4 or 5 of the number lay upon the carpets highly Complimenting each Other in High Termes, each man fancying himself no less than an Emperor. One was quarrelsome and fought with one of the wooden Pillars of the Porch, until he had left himself little skin upon the knuckles of his fingers. My Selfe and one Sat sweatings for the Space of 3 hours in Exceedinge measure". Prudently "we.....made fast ail dores and Windows, that none of us might runne out into the street, or any person come in to behold any of our humours thereby to laugh at us"⁴¹.

In 1609, Jahangir forbade the use of *bhāṅg*⁴². Later, Aurangzeb tried to control its use and sale⁴³.

Mention of *bhāṅg* occurs also in the contemporary Hindi literature and the poet Varinda has referred to its intoxicating effects⁴⁴.

DHATŪRA

The word is from Sanskrit *Dhattūra*.⁴⁵

It was a common herb that grew in almost every field. The leaf is sharp at the end. From the flower or blossom of this plant grew a bud, like that of poppy, containing small kernels or seeds resembling those of melon. The seeds, ground and mixed with meat, water or wine, created strange sensations in the persons who ate or drank the composition. It made him laugh without any understanding or induced him to sleep. Sometimes it made him sleep in a manner as if he were dead. He could continue in that condition for 24 hours. He regained consciousness only if his feet were washed with cold water.⁴⁶

Garcia de Orta mentions the common use of this by thieves in India. It produced in the victim 'temporary alienation of mind, and violent laughter, permitting the thief to act unopposed'⁴⁷.

“Garcias ab Horto..... makes mention of an hearb called *Datura*, which if it be eaten, for 24 hours following, takes away all sense of grief, makes him incline to laughter and mirth.⁴⁸”

According to Linschoten, the Indian and Portugese wives gave this herb frequently to their husbands whenever they were ‘disposed to bee merrie with their secret lovers.’ This enabled them to ‘performe their lecherie together in his presence’ and the poor fellow, in the meantime, kept ‘sitting with eyes wide open, not doing or saying anything, but laugh or grin like a foole, or a man out of his wits.’ On coming to senses, he was under the impression that he was only asleep all the time.⁴⁹

This is endorsed by the French traveller, Pyrard of Laval, who visited India during the reign of Jahangir. He writes that the women of the Indies made much use in their amorous designs of this herb which was called in Maldives as ‘Moet ol,’ i.e. ‘Madman’s herb’ and in India as *dhatūra*. Whenever they wished to ‘enjoy their amours in all security,’ they infused this herb in their beverages or in soup and gave it to their husbands. An hour later, they became giddy and insensible, ‘singing, laughing and performing a thousand antics.’ As they had lost all consciousness, the wives made use of the time ‘admitting whom they will, and taking their pleasures in the presence of their husbands’ who were aware of nothing. They remained under its influence for about six hours. They were overtaken by sleep and when they awoke they had the impression that they had been asleep all the time.⁵⁰

Men gave this drug to their women friends to have greater sexual pleasure, without the women detecting its use. When Pyrard was in Goa, ‘many were found to have become pregnant without knowing whence this happened to them.’ And all this had resulted as a consequence of this drug. An excessive use of *dhatūra* could result in the death of the person consuming it. Slaves and maid-servants, when bribed by soldiers and others, would administer the drink to their mistresses and sell them to those persons.⁵¹

Herbert Moll writes that occasionally *dhatūra* was drunk by some persons after powdering it in water. It intoxicated them like a strong liquor.⁵²

Maid-servants used it for robbing their mistresses.⁵³ Slaves and servants administered the herb to their masters whom they robbed by breaking open their chests.⁵⁴

TOBACCO

Mr. J.T. Platt, in his Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English (London, 1884), says that the word tobacco is from the language of Hayti,

and meant, 'first, the pipe, secondly, the plant, thirdly, the sleep which followed its use.'⁵⁵

According to Girolamo Benzoni, the use of tobacco was very prevalent in Gautemala and Nicaragua among the Indians in the middle of the sixteenth century. He himself found the smell of tobacco very offensive.⁵⁶

The author of *Māāsir-i-Rahīmī* makes us believe that tobacco came from Europe to the Deccan and from there to upper India, during the reign of Akbar. Soon it came in common use in the country.⁵⁷

Writing in about 1605, Asad Beg says that he had found some tobacco in Bijapur. "Never having seen the like in India," he brought some with him and prepared a handsome pipe of jewel work. When Akbar saw this pipe and its appertunances in a tray among the presents brought for him by Asad Beg, he felt surprised and fascinated; examined and then inquired about it. Khān-i-Āzam told him that it was tobacco, known in Mecca and Medina, and brought by Asad Beg for him. Under the Emperor's orders, Asad Beg prepared the pipe for him and Akbar started smoking the same till his physicians stopped him from doing so. As Asad Beg had brought large supply of tobacco and pipes, he sent some to several of the nobles and thus the 'practice was introduced. After that the merchants began to sell, so the custom of smoking spread rapidly.'⁵⁸

Smoking seems to have become common in India in the beginning of the seventeenth century. The English traveller Robert Coverte presented half a pound of tobacco to a Mughal officer near Agra in 1609.⁵⁹ In October, 1613, William Bidulph, an English factor, wrote to the East India Company that he had acquired the services of one mariner, Robert Clarkson who had attained special skill 'in making up of tobacco.' He was of the view that at Surat there was a great quantity of tobacco to be had 'at an easy rate' of about 12d. per pound 'all charges cleared aboard.' He was hopeful that it would prove a 'good commodity for England if the tediousness of the voyage did not spoil it.'⁶⁰ Another English factor informed the Company in his letter of November 9, 1613, that plenty of tobacco was available at Ahmadabad. He also referred to the expert knowledge of Clarkson in the matter of making tobacco. He thought it fit 'to put in practice, which I think will be the great benefit of the Company.'⁶¹

Sir Thomas Roe had written to Pepwell at Surat to purchase for him a supply of tobacco 'sweet, but not very strong, some 4 pounds, not exceeding 12s. per pound.'⁶²

The Portugese traveller Manrique was obliged to part with some money to enable the servants of *kotwali* at Thatta in Sind to smoke tobacco. He had been taken to the *kotwali* on some suspicion.⁶³

Edward Terry who was in India at the end of the second decade of the seventeenth century, found abundant growth and frequent use of tobacco in the country. The method of using tobacco here seemed to him strange, much different from that of the Europeans: 'for first, they have little earthen pots, shaped like our small flowerpots, having a neck, and open round top, out of the belly of which comes a small spout, to the lower part of which they fill the Pot with water; then putting their Tobacco loose in the top, and a burning coal upon it, they, having first fastend a very small straight and hollow cane of reed (not bigger than a small arrow) within that spout, a yard or ell long, the pot standing on the ground, draw that smoke into their mouths which first falls upon the Superfices of the water, and much discolours it. And this way of taking their Tobacco, they believe, makes it much more cool and wholesome. The Tobacco, which grows there, is doubtless in the Plant as good as in any other place of the world, but they not know how to cure and order it, like those in the West-Indies, to make it so rich and strong.'⁶⁴

Manucci saw the Burmese Ambassadors smoking tobacco through a long cane⁶⁵.

On the Coromandel Coast people smoked *bunco* (bidi ?) or *cheroot*. Writing at about the end of the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the English traveller, Thomas Bowery, has given an account of this habit of the people there. This is perhaps the first reference to the word. He says that the poorer sorts of inhabitants, viz. the Hindus and other Malabar people smoked their tobacco after a very 'meane' but 'original manner', 'Onely leafe rowled up, and light one end, and holding the other between their lips, and Smoke until it is soe farre Consumed as to warme their lips, and then leave the End away: this is called a *bunco*, and by the Portugese a *cherote*'⁶⁶.

Bowery found the 'natives' on the Coromandel Coast smoking 'much tobacco'. Even 3 or 4 years old children were smoking there in those early days. He found this habit very 'frequent' among them⁶⁷.

Charles Lockyer wrote in 1711: For want of pipes the inhabitants of the Coromandel Coast smoked in *buncos*. 'A Bunco is a little Tobacco wrapt up in the Leaf of a Tree, about the Bigness of one's little Finger, they light one end, and draw the Smoke thro' the other.....these are curiously made up, and sold twenty or thirty in a bundle'⁶⁸.

This was endorsed 15 years later by Valentijn. He found the people in the habit of eating areca nut and smoking tobacco. They did so after a meal and also on other occasions and regarded this as 'one of their greatest delights'. Women smoked with a 'Bungkos or dry leaf rolled up, and the men with a Gorregorri (a little can or flower pot) whereby they both manage to pass most of their time⁶⁹'. (By Gorregorri is meant Malay guri-guri, 'a small earthenware pot, also used for holding provisions⁷⁰.) According to Grose (1760 A.D.), *Buncus* was the 'tobacco leaf, simply rolled up, in about a finger's length..... andis of the same make as what the West Indians term as segar ; and of this the Gentoos chiefly make use⁷¹'.

Fryer says that *bunco*, i.e. tobacco was the product of the Malabar coast⁷².

Because of its harmful effects, Jahangir declared tobacco-smoking as an evil. He was convinced that its consumption created 'disturbance' in 'most' temperaments and constitutions'. Accordingly, he ordered in 1617 that 'no one should smoke it (literally draw it)⁷³'. He had perhaps taken the cue from the Persian ruler Shah 'Abbas who had already issued strict orders against the use of tobacco in his country⁷⁴.

Tobacco was not cultivated in Japan till 1605. In 1612 and 1615 the Japanese Emperor (Shogun) prohibited both the culture and use of tobacco⁷⁵.

In 1613, he ordered the apprehension of about 150 persons for carrying on trade in that commodity⁷⁶. By 1651, the law was so relaxed there that smoking was permitted, but only out of doors⁷⁷.

Jahangir's order seemed to have failed in its objective. Rather, a flourishing trade, both internal and external, developed in tobacco. That naturally was consequent upon its increasing consumption. The English factory records bear testimony to the growing trade in tobacco after the Emperor's order of 1617⁷⁸. Tobacco culture started in different parts of the country. Besides other places, it was found in abundance in Masulipatam from where it was shipped to Persia⁷⁹, Mokha⁸⁰ and other ports of the Red Sea ⁸¹ and also to England. In order to discourage the increasing private trade in tobacco, the President of the East India Company in Surat was obliged to issue orders that in no case "should tobacco be allowed to pester and fill up the ships⁸²". Later on the Company enjoyed a monopoly of tobacco in Bombay⁸⁴. The price of tobacco in 1619 was 4 *mahmudis* and 18 pice per maund⁸⁵.

An unknown Persian author of the seventeenth century, has left an interesting account of the culture and use of tobacco in the days of Shahjahan. He says that when in the beginning, tobacco was imported from Europe, its 'rarity prevented it from coming into general use'. Its culture, however,

became 'speedily universal almost within a short period after its introduction into Hindostan'. Its produce rewarded the cultivator 'far beyond every other article of Husbandry'. This was particularly the case during the reign of Shahjahan when the practice and habit of smoking pervaded all classes and ranks within the Empire. "Nobles and Beggars, Pious and Wicked, Devotees and Freethinkers, poets, historians, rhetoricians, doctors and patients, high and low, rich and poor, all! all seemed intoxicated with a decided preference over other luxury, nay even often over the necessities of life. To a stranger no offering was so acceptable as a Whiff and to a friend one could produce nothing half so grateful as a Chillum". The habit became so rooted that the confirmed smoker preferred to remain without food and drink rather than "relinquish the gratification he derived from inhaling the Fumes of this deleterious Plant! Nature recoils at the very idea of touching the saliva of another person, yet in the present instance our Tobacco smokers pass the moistened Tube from one mouth to another without hesitation on the one hand, and it is received with complacency on the other:... Without doubt the Hookah is a most pleasing companion; whsther to the wayworn traveller or to the solitary hermit. It is a friend in whose bosom we may repose our most confidential secrets; and a counsellor upon whose advice we may rely in our most important concerns. It is an elegant ornament in our private apartments; it gives joy to the bachelor in our public halls. The music of its sound puts the warbling of the nightingale to shame, and the fragrance of its perfume brings a blush on the cheek of the rose. Life in short is prolonged by the fumes inhaled at each inspiration, while every expiration of them is accompanied with extatic delight⁸⁶."

Tobacco was brought to Europe in 1558 by Francisco Fernandes who had been sent to Mexico by King Philip II of Spain. The French Ambassador to Portugal, Jean Nicot, sent the seeds of the plant to Queen Catherine de' Medici. Nicot's name has been perpetuated in the scientific name of the genus *Nicotiana*. If the tobacco plant came to Europe through Spain, its use spread to the continent through England. Sir Walter Raleigh took a pipe of tobacco a little before he went to the scaffold and he came to know of its use from Ralph Lane, the first Governor of Virginia, and Sir Francis Drake. From then onwards the habit of smoking tobacco got rooted in England, from where it spread miraculously to the whole of Europe and became a general practice in the 17th century.⁸⁷

By the end of the first decade of the century (1610 A.D.) the habit of smoking tobacco became quite common with the Turks who also had become 'incredible takers of Opium.' They took it through reeds 'that have ioyned unto them great heads of wood to containe it.....they will take it

in corners, and are so ignorant therein, that which in England is not saleable, doth passe here amongst them for most excellent⁸⁸.

By 1616 tobacco came to be known for its 'miraculous omnipotence'. It became a general belief that it could cure all sorts of diseases.....in all persons and at all times..... It cures the gout in the feet..... It helps all sorts of agues. It refreshes a weary man, and yet makes a man hungry'. If one took it before going to bed, he could enjoy sound sleep. It awakened the brain and quickened the understanding of sleepy or drowsy persons. Such was the 'omnipotent power of Tobacco!' at that time⁸⁹.

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- 85 *Ibid.*, 1618-21, p. 64.
- 86 Hobson-Jobson, p. 926.
- 87 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed, 1929, Vol. 22 p. 260
- 88 Hobson-Jobson, p. 925.
- 89 *Ibid.*, pp. 925-926.