

Marijuana

History Of Marijuana, Intoxicant Use

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Intoxicant Use

The preceding history of the medical use of marijuana has provided an outline of how marijuana has been alleged to cure diseases and relieve pain.

This section discusses the non-medical use of cannabis. The survey includes a discussion of marijuana use in India, the rest of Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States; and a concluding analysis of the intoxicant use in contemporary times.

Assessing marijuana's use as an intoxicant is difficult because for many people around the world, its importance as an intoxicant has been secondary to its use as a folk medicine or a ceremonial adjunct (Grinspoon, 1971: 173-174). Caffeine and nicotine apart, cannabis is second in worldwide popularity only to alcohol.

India

marijuana was probably first used as an intoxicant in India around 1000 B.C., and soon became an integral part of Hindu culture (Snyder, 1970: 125).

In China, where the marijuana plant had been used to make cloth and certain medicines for centuries, it was not recorded as an intoxicant. Explanations are unclear as to why marijuana was used

as an intoxicant in India but not in China.

Marijuana was also used as an intoxicant in other parts of the world prior to 500 A.D. but was not as well documented as the use of opium.

The drug "nepenthe" in Homer's Odyssey is believed by a number of scholars to have been a brew in which the most active ingredient was hemp (Brotteaux, 1967: 10).

Galen wrote in the second century that it was customary to promote hilarity and happiness at banquets by giving the guests hemp (Reininger, 1967: 14-15).

Cannabis is used in three different preparations in India (Snyder, 1970: 27). The first is called Bhang, comparable in potency to marijuana in the United States.

It is made from the leaves and stems of uncultivated plants and blended into a pleasant tasting liquid concoction.

The second is Ganja, more potent than Bhang, made from the tops of cultivated plants.

The third and most potent preparation, charas, is similar to hashish or "hash" and is obtained by scraping the resin from the leaves of the cultivated plants. Hard blocks are pressed from this material which are converted for smoking.

High-caste Hindus are not permitted to use alcohol. But they are allowed Bhang at religious ceremonials, and also employ it as an intoxicant at marriage ceremonies and family festivals.

Bhang is used by laborers in India in much the same way as beer is used in the United States (Barber, 1970: 80).

The lower classes of India use either a few pulls at a Ganja pipe or sip a glass of Bhang at the end of the day to relieve fatigue (Grinspoon, 1971: 173), to obtain a sense of well-being, to stimulate appetite, and to enable them to bear more cheerfully the "strain and

monotony of . . . daily routines" (Geller and Boas, 1969: 5).

These types of users and objectives are frequently the reverse of those in the United States where marijuana users consider themselves an exclusive and advanced "in-group" (Andrews and Vinkenoog, 1967: iii). A major intoxicant use in India is for religious purposes.

Asia And The Middle East

Cannabis spread from India to other parts of Asia, to the Middle East and then to Africa and South America, although some believe it may have originated independently in the latter two continents (Fort, 1969: 15).

Cultural values may have played a part in determining its use. Opium and cannabis were equally available in pre-Communist China; but cannabis had no vogue as an intoxicant (Barber, 1970: 80). The Chinese spoke of the plant as the "Liberator of Sin."

In India, it was called. the "Giver of Life" (Fort, 1970: 15). One author proposed that temperament may have also played a role in this determination, suggesting that perhaps the placid, practical Chinese did not appreciate the euphoria produced by cannabis (Snyder, 1070: 125).

Additional evidence of mid-Asian use comes from cuneiform tablet interpretations that ascribe use in Persia circa 700-600 B.C. and of the time of Ashurbanipal's Assyrian reign, 669-626 B.C. (Blum. and Associates, 1969, 1: 62).

The drug's popularity as an intoxicant spread to the Middle East and thoroughly permeated Islamic culture within a few centuries (Geller and Boas, 1969: 5).

Because alcohol was prohibited to the followers of Mohammed, cannabis was accepted as a substitute.

The Myth Of The Assassins

Two Muslim myths, one from the 10th century A.D. and the other from the 13th century A.D., have been the sources of some of the contemporary attitudes about the drug.

The first myth deals with hashish as a magical eastern drug brought by the Arabs into Spain in the 10th century.

These invaders confined its use primarily to themselves, taking it back to Africa when they left Spain. Although it did not become a European habit, some beliefs about the drug were left behind.

The existence of this "magical eastern drug" was probably known to Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler of the 13th century A.D. before he left on his journey to the East.

Marco Polo returned to Europe with his own tale of cannabis which, in the potent form of hashish, was said to be used as an intoxicant by Hasan-I-Sabbah to send his ruthless followers on missions of murder.

The word "assassin" was said to be derived from the word "hashish," or from Hasan (Geller and Boas, 1969: 6). Marco Polo had written about how this "Old Man of the Mountain" sent his men out on their missions with all the color and pageantry that Europeans associated with the East. As Marco Polo described:

... In the territory of the Assassins there were delicious walled gardens in which one can find everything that can satisfy the needs of the body and the caprices of the most exacting sensuality.

Great banks of gorgeous flowers and bushes covered with fruit stand amongst crystal rivers of living water.... Trellises of roses and fragrant vines cover with their foliage pavilions of jade and porcelain furnished with Persian carpets and Grecian embroideries.

Delicious drinks in vessels of gold or crystal are served by young boys or girls, whose dark unfathomable eyes cause them to

resemble the Houris, divinities of that Paradise which the Prophet promised to believers.

The sound of harps mingles with the cooing of doves, the murmur of soft voices blends with the sighing of the reeds. All is joy, pleasure, voluptuousness and enchantment.

The Grand Master of the Assassins, whenever he discovers a young man resolute enough to belong to his murderous legions . . . invites the youth to his table and intoxicates him with the plant "hashish." Having been secretly transported to the pleasure gardens the young man imagines that he has entered the Paradise of Mahomet.

The girls, lovely as Houris, contribute to the illusion. After he has enjoyed to satiety all the joys promised by the-Prophet to his elect, he falls back to the presence of the Grand Master. Here he is informed that he can enjoy perpetually the delights he has just tasted If he will take part in the war of the Infidel as commanded by the Prophet(Geller and Boas, 1969: 6).

Another translation (Kitti, 1967: 24) begins the tale this way:

Now no man was allowed to enter the Garden save those whom he intended to be his ASHISHIN.

In reality, this was a religious situation and scholars have long since exposed Marco Polo's tale as being a myth, at best an imaginative embellishment of tales he had heard.

Africa

Use of cannabis in most parts of Africa developed slowly, most of it during the past 100 years (Blum and Associates, 1969, I: 73).

A report from Africa in 1891 (Reininger, 1966: 141-142), dealt with a tribe that used hemp as an intoxicant in their newly formed religion and in preparation for battle.

A similar use is described in the Congo, when Simba warriors in 1964 were said to use a cannabis-alcohol mixture in preparation for battle, to rouse themselves for the battle and to magically guarantee immunity from harm.

In Morocco, marijuana, called kif, has been used as an intoxicant by adult males for centuries; that custom continues today even though the drug is illegal (Mikuriya, 1970: 122-123).

Although moderate use appears to be tolerated in the areas of India, North Africa and the Middle East, excessive use is generally viewed as indicative of serious personality problems (Geller and Boas, 1969: 7).

Europe

One of the more suggestive parallels between 19th century France and the United States today is the fact that the French interest in cannabis at that time was aroused by the returning French soldiers and scientists of Napoleon's army in Egypt, a source of the drug.

A similar interest occurred in the United States after the Korean conflict, and has intensified since Vietnam (Geller and Boas, 1969: 7).

During the 19th century, European interest in the drug was aided by two scientific reports, the first by W. B. O'Shaughnessy in 1839, and the second report by Queen Victoria's physician, Russell Reynolds.

Both men recommended its medical use for a variety of ailments and as a mild euphoriant (Grinspoon, 1971: 56). Cannabis received highly laudatory testimonials from the medical profession of that day and was readily available without prescription (Snyder, 1970: 121).

Interest in cannabis was further kindled by popular writers who used and spoke of hashish enthusiastically, including Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Pierre Gautier.

Gautier and Baudelaire, in fact, were members of the Club des Hachischins, in which a number of writers and intellectuals gathered and experimented with hashish (Geller and Boas, 1969: 13).

Although the public delighted to read of the French writers' drug experiences, the public did not care to engage in the same kind of activity; to them the experiences were frightening and repugnant.

"As a result, the smoking of hashish remained the sub-rosa province of a few European artists until the recent transatlantic phenomenon of the American drug culture" (Geller and Boas, 1969: 8).

United States

The events surrounding the introduction of cannabis use to the New World are entirely unclear.

Some historians say the Spaniards brought the plant with them in the 16th century, other say marijuana smoking came in with the slave trade or with the Asian Indian migration of the late 18th century.

The hemp plant was cultivated in the United States for centuries, apparently without general knowledge of its intoxicating properties (Grinspoon, 1971: 10).

Cannabis was an often used medicine in the United States in the 19th century. It was easily available without a prescription and was also widely prescribed by physicians (Snyder, 1970: 26).

Hemp was used by the pioneers to cover their wagons. The plant was a major crop in Kentucky, Virginia, Wisconsin and Indiana, and was one of the more important southern agricultural products, after cotton.

It is still used to make rope, twine and textiles, while the seed is used as bird food (Geller and Boas, 1969: 16).

Marijuana use as an intoxicant in the United States began slowly in the early part of this century. Puerto Rican soldiers, and then Americans who were stationed in the Panama Canal Zone, are reported to have been using it by 1916.

American soldiers fighting Pancho Villa circa 1916 also learned to use it. This follows the first reported use in Mexico in the 1880's (Blum and Associates, 1969, 1: 69-70).

Intoxicant use in the United States is also traced to the large influx of Mexican laborers in the 1910's and 1920's (Geller and Boas, 1969: 14).

The 1933 Report of the "Military Surgeon" stated, regarding marijuana use among the soldiers in the Canal Zone, that:

marijuana as grown and used on the Isthmus of Panama is a mild stimulant and intoxicant. It is not a "habit forming" drug in the sense that the derivatives of opium, cocaine, and such drugs, are as there are no symptoms of deprivation following its withdrawal.

Delinquencies due to marijuana smoking which result in trial by military court are negligible in number when compared with delinquencies resulting from the use of alcohol drinks, which is also classed as a stimulant and intoxicant(Geller and Boas, 1969: 147).

The report went on to say that marijuana presented no threat to military discipline, and "that no recommendations to prevent the sale or use of marijuana are deemed advisable."

Cannabis has been rejected in various societies on ascetic grounds. In such puritanical societies such as the Wahabil of Arabia and the Senussis of Libya, no smoking of any kind was tolerated, nor was coffee.

In North Africa, social rank dictated use: the aristocratic Moors scorned both hemp and tobacco smoking, preferring instead, as compatible with high status, opium eating (Blum and Associates, 1969, 1: 73).

One statement highlighting this kind of value conflict comes from a Nigerian journalist (Davies, 1966: 299-300) attempting to explain the 15-year prison sentences of foreign tourists for growing and smoking marijuana:

There is a growing trend in the more economically advanced countries to indulge at leisure in the exploration of the personality.

At a certain stage of development, there is less need to produce and more time to spend consuming. This is healthy. If used properly, marijuana could be helpful at this stage of development.

However, countries which are only beginning to develop a more complex economic structure must channel all their energies into creating a new system. This means that they must sacrifice more of their pleasure.

People who smoke hemp seem on the whole to be less aggressive than people who drink alcohol. Hemp smoking may have a positive value for certain social functions....

One of the first acts of the Military Government was to issue a decree making it punishable by death to grow marijuana, and by up to twenty years of prison for merely being in possession of it . . . meantime, we Nigerian have to stop getting high for a while and develop our country.

In the United States, the decade of the 1960's has seen a spectacular and unprecedented spread of the use of marijuana, chiefly among the youth. An estimated 24 million persons have used marijuana and approximately 3.4 million are current users.

The numbers involved and the fact that use spans all age groups and social classes in American life has produced marked public reaction and a need for more information on the drug.