

# History of opium growth

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History is replete with many stories concerning the use of opium. Some are facts and some are fables. However, it is interesting to know that references to its use predate the birth of Christ. We know, for example, that the ancient civilisations used opium in various preparations, both for pleasure and medical purposes. The presence of opium poppy in the ancient Near East is a matter of some contention and so is the dating of opium back to 4000 years B.C. Opium poppy was also known to the ancient Egyptians and figured prominently in their art. Similarly, the Persians also knew opium and cultivated five to six varieties of the plant on their farmlands. The Greeks also sanctified opium poppy.

There is preponderant evidence to suggest that the phenomenon of opium poppy production was introduced in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent by the invading armies of Alexander the Great because huge stocks of opium poppy were consumed as herbal medicine in the camps. However, after the seventh century opium spread throughout the Arab empire. Therefore, opium production on farmlands in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent began sometime in the ninth century with the arrival of Arab traders in India. During the reign of Mughal Emperor, Akbar the Great, cultivation of opium poppy crop was practiced as a cash crop for international trade. Emperor Babar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, himself used opium, a habit that was also shared by his son, Hamayun, and others in the lineage. The royal indulgence in opium promoted its use as an intoxicant as well as an easily available domestic medicine for many common diseases. The opium poppy production was further

increased as a means of domestic and international sources of trade and revenue with the advent of British rule in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. It was mainly to enrich the state treasury and avail the flow of gains through favourable terms of international trade to Europe and China that popularised opium production in India.

In fact, it was Java and Formosa in the East and East India Company in the Indian sub-continent that carried opium to China. In an attempt to prohibit the use of opium and its derivatives, the Chinese government forbade the import of opium leading to the first OPIUM WAR (1839-42), which brought China and Great British into conflict. It was only in the year 1906, when an imperial edict forbade the use of opium and as a consequence, the fight against opium was successful. In Europe of the nineteenth century, the use of opiates was so rampant that no stigma whatever was attached to the regular use of opium and its

derivatives. Thomas de Quincey was addicted by the age of twenty. Similarly, Elizabeth Barrett Broning had an opium addiction, as did Samuel Coleridge who is said to have written his famous poem Kublai Khan under the influence of drug.

In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, the policy of the British government ignored the long-term repercussions of the use of opium and its derivatives on the health, productivity and economic consequences of addiction among the people of the sub-continent. There was a time when the total revenue of British India was as high as twenty per cent from the opium poppy crop. The increasingly growing use of opium and its derivatives was considered no threat to the Indo-Pakistan societies and only economic considerations, as a source of state revenue prevailed.

One of the most significant developments in modern history took place in the

addiction was not a problem of the down-trodden and destitute people but it was the middle-class white American woman who ranked highest in the addiction. It was also at this time that one American in four hundred was involved in some opium habit. Until the 17th century opium was regarded as possessing certain supernatural or God given qualities to relieve pain and elevate the individual. Also with the beginnings of modern medicine opium was used as a palliative for intolerable suffering. The inventor of hypodermic needle, around 1853 was considered to be a scientific breakthrough. This allowed direct administration of the drugs into body tissues, causing a faster onset of action and a greater rate of absorption. With regard to drugs, some people actually believed that the injection route of administration eliminated some of the dangers of addiction, which they claimed were developed through oral administration.

In 1875, two English chemists first developed the chemical compound diacetylmorphine. This was achieved by subjecting the morphine alkaloid to chemical alteration. Studies were thus begun in Europe as to the physiological properties of this new compound. In 1898, the German chemical firm of Friedrich Bayer and Company named the drug, Heroin. The Bayer Company began marketing heroin as a cure for opium and morphine addiction and said that it was absolutely non-addictive. Between 1923 and the late 1940s several other derivatives of opium and synthetic drugs were produced which are still being used today by physicians. Probably, the most important of these synthetic drugs was methadone, which again was developed in Germany. Mathadone would later be used as a cure for heroin

addiction. Most countries of the world recognise the abuse potential of these drugs and as early as 1912, they attempted to enact laws and restrictions, which could control these drugs. All of these efforts, however, met with little success and as an end result, the United States became the major abuse centre of the world.

It is important to recognise, however, that during recent times, due to certain international and political considerations and a lack of worldwide control, several other countries have also developed extensive heroin-related problems. In the Scandinavian countries, Italy, France, Spain, Thailand and Great British heroin addiction is recognised as a significant problem. Fairly recently, West Germany has published statistics which claim heroin to be the danger of increasing drug abuse. The ultimate control, of course, would be the worldwide abolition of opium production.

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early nineteenth century (1803-1805) when a German scientist isolated morphine from opium. Morphine was later introduced as a cure-all for opium addiction. This discovery also marked the beginnings of drug use and abuse, as we know it today. Codeine was isolated in 1832, and shortly thereafter, many other alkaloids of opium were also identified and isolated. Initially opium and its derivatives were considered to be a cure-all for many ailments but very little was known of their pharmacological effects or toxicity. Certain individuals began to glamorise the stupefying effects of the drugs, and shortly thereafter, large numbers of people began to abuse the drugs. Through continuous promiscuous use, the numbers of addicts began to swell in countries throughout Europe.

It was at the turn of the century in America that a survey was conducted in San Francisco which revealed that opium