

**Chapter three:  
The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report**

No single document yet produced is of greater value to rational analysis of the range of social, ethical & economic questions surrounding Cannabis Sativa than The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report of 1893-94. The very complexity of the society out of which the report is generated must account for a good deal of the thoroughness of its seven volumes. For the British realized that their basically cooperative governing scheme for India, particularly in light of projected schemes for industrial development, depended for its success on receipt & application of intelligent policy recommendations which would forestall their embroilment in unworkable plans. From their extensive experience at bringing other cultures under colonial rule they were aware that there are always areas of another country's life best left alone unless, of course, they run directly contrary to the colonial plans for exploitation or are likely to effectively thwart such plans. In such cases the colonial power is obligated, they knew, to prevail absolutely or to fail.

The question to be resolved, then, in 1893 was whether or not hemp drug use by large numbers of Indians of a fantastic variety of backgrounds & persuasions was inimical to British interests in her colony. A logical extension of this question would be, of course, could Britain pragmatically expect to eliminate hemp drug use in India if it were found to be necessary. Proceeding from this question, it became readily apparent that what was required was a full-scale analysis of the entire phenomenon — know your potential adversary as well as or better than he knows himself, whenever possible.

With this background in mind, it should be clear that the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission was not, as some would have it, a committee of heads & sycophants who gathered together to advocate legalization, to minimize the inherent risks, or to pass down to the ages a paean on the subject of Cannabis Sativa. It was,

instead, a committee of hard-nosed pragmatists who were seeking to analyze an issue of immediate bearing on the future of a vast social-economic enterprise in which they each had substantial personal stakes.

So much more the pity that in America of the mid-twentieth century — eighty years after the appearance of this report — even the title is unfamiliar and the report itself has been for all practical purposes unavailable to all. In 1969, however, a much delayed but welcome event occurred — a rational & observant publisher in Silver Springs, Maryland — the Thomas Jefferson Publishing Company — put out an edited version of the Report which includes the full text of the Commission's findings & several valuable appendices.

The two major policy recommendations of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission were:

- I. Total prohibition of the cultivation of the hemp plant for narcotics, & of the manufacture, sale or use of the drugs derived from it, is neither necessary nor expedient in *consideration of their ascertained effects, of the prevalence of the habit using them, of the social & religious feeling on the subject, and of the possibility of its driving the consumers to have recourse to other stimulants or narcotics which may be more deleterious.*
- II. *The policy advocated is one of control and restriction, aimed at suppressing the excessive use and restraining the moderate use within due limits.*



The complete & exhaustive body of evidence supporting these positions will not be dealt with in great detail here; rather, we shall concentrate on a summary of the conclusions which the Commission used in arriving at its recommendations:

Submitted by Mitch Midel  
#24  
at Board Hearing of 12/20/11

to Consideration of Their Ascertain  
The Commission have now examir  
them regarding the effects attribute  
will be well to summarize briefly th  
they come. It has been clearly estat  
use of hemp in moderate doses may  
they may be regarded as medicinal i  
to the popular & common use of th  
tion will now confine their attentio  
consider the effects separately as a  
mental, or moral nature.

In regard to the physical effec  
come to the conclusion that the mc  
practically attended by no evil re  
exceptional cases in which, owing  
tation, the drugs in even moderate  
there is probably nothing the use  
be injurious in cases of exceptiona  
also many cases where in tracts wi  
climate, or in circumstances of har  
people attribute beneficial effects t  
use of these drugs; and there is son  
the popular impression may have  
ing generally, the Commission is c  
moderate use of hemp drugs appe  
physical injury of any kind. The e  
injury. As in the case with other in  
tends to weaken the constitution &  
more susceptible to disease.

In respect to the particular di  
a considerable number of witness  
directly with hemp drugs, it appea  
lished that the excessive use of the  
asthma; that it may indirectly cau  
the constitution as above indicate  
bronchitis mainly through the act  
on the bronchial tubes.

In respect to the alleged men  
the Commission has come to the c  
use of hemp drugs produces no in  
It may indeed be accepted that in  
neurotic diathesis, even the mode  
injury, for the slightest mental sti  
have that effect in such cases. But  
exceptional cases, the moderate  
no mental injury. It is otherwise  
ive use indicates & intensifies me

Social, ethical  
& economic  
analysis,  
1893-94