

POPPY PLANTING AND OPIUM PRODUCTION
IN AFGHANISTAN

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POPPY PLANTING AND OPIUM PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is an Islamic country where more than 99% of the people are Muslim. Islam is basically opposed to the production of poppies, opium, heroin or hashish. Poppy planting was against the law before the war started in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan also is an agricultural country where more than 80% of the people before the war were involved in the agriculture and animal husbandry sector.

Poppy History in Afghanistan

Poppy is produced once a year. It has showy red, yellow or white flowers and its height ranges from one to five meters. Opium is made from a certain type of poppy.

Poppy planting in Afghanistan was started after the invasions of Arab armies, Chengez Khan and Nader Shah. Since then, Afghan farmers planted poppies for opium or taryak to be used as a cure for the common cold. Opium is also used by some people as a sleeping potion. Opium addiction began in this way.

Opium planting further increased after the attack of British armies on Afghanistan.

During the time of King Abdul Rahman Khan (1880-1901) the poppy trade in Afghanistan was declared illegal, although exports to foreign markets were permitted. Poppy cultivation increased during 1901-1910. Official opium exports to Russia started in 1907.

During the rule of Amanullah Khan, the plantation of poppies and the production of any drug which caused drowsiness, sleep, dullness or insensible condition was prohibited by law. Bhang (for hashish) was allowed to be planted and exported, but the sale or purchase of bhang was prohibited inside the country. Laws and regulations on the export of poppy products were published.

During the rule of Mohammad Zahir Shah, poppies were not planted on public land. If a poppy field was noticed by a government official, he had to report it and the proper authorities ploughed the field under. This strict enforcement limited poppy planting at that time. At the end of Zahir Shah's rule, the planting, selling, buying and import of poppy products became illegal. This policy was adopted and enforced by President Mohammad Daud, through March 1978.

After the communist regime took power, many of the agricultural lands were abandoned. The area of wheat, maize, rice, cotton,

and other major crops decreased due to the presence of mines and the fear of communist attacks during the daytime. Farmers worked their fields early in the morning and late in the evening. Many of the farmers left rural areas and became refugees in cities inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan and Iran. Yields of agriculture products decreased and the prices of agricultural products increased. The government had no controls on poppy or bhang planting. Therefore, some farmers, especially those in Helmand, Nangarhar, Bamyan, Herat and Paktia provinces, increasingly planted poppy and bhang.

The area of poppy in some countries in 1983 was as follows:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Areas in Hectares</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Areas in Hectares</u>
Burma	60,000	East Germany	4,500
India	32,000	France	4,200
Iran	30,000	Mexico	4,100
Turkey	22,950	Thailand	3,500
Afghanistan	20,000	Laos	3,500
Russia	15,000	Romania	3,380
Poland	15,000	Spain	3,380
Czechoslovakia	12,000	Yugoslavia	3,000
Austria	6,050	Holland	2,400
Hungary	5,000	Bulgaria	2,300
Pakistan	4,500	Egypt	300
		Total	259,760

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Source: Mirwes/bouj, "Impact of War on Poppies Plantation", Afghan Writer's Union (WUFA), No. 3, June-July, 1992, p. 13-55.

Afghanistan, Mexico, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Thailand, Burma and Laos were planting poppies illegally (i.e. without government permission). India legally produced 997 MT of opium in 1983, and over one million people made their living on poppies.

Opium Production in Afghanistan

Poppies are generally planted in November in Afghanistan.. The farmers apply animal manure, urea and DAP at roughly the same time as they do for wheat and its irrigation takes place at the same time as wheat. Most of the farmers in Afghanistan know the importance of animal manure in poppy production.

At the end of the growing season while the coat of the pod is still green, farmers cut the pod diagonally with razor blades fixed in a special wooden frame. The process of cutting usually takes place in the afternoon. The sap is collected early the next morning. Some people make one cut on each pod every afternoon and collect the sap the next morning. They continue this action for many days until they get all the sap. Some people who are short of labor make many cuts on each pod and collect the sap in a short time.

The sap is then separated from the pod very carefully. Some people mix burned bread and milk with the collected sap, and then put it in cotton bags. Some people soak cotton bags in oil and then rub the bagged sap in dirt. This action stops aeration, and prevents the color of the opium changing to a darker hue and the quality becoming poorer.

The material produced is known as taryak or opium. The weight of opium in each wholesale bag is close to 7 Kg. Most of the opium traders live in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan or Iran. Most of these traders require the name and address of the person from whom they get the opium, and demand some sort of guarantee in case the opium is rejected by the second trader or the owner of the special factories in the border regions of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The process of making heroin and morphine largely takes place outside of Afghanistan.

Heroin Production

Heroin is made from opium by an extraction process of distillation from morphine. Heroin is a white crystal material. Heroin is sold as a powder or a liquid. The powder is smoked, often in a bank note, and the liquid is injected.

The original material of opium is morphine. Afghan poppies contain 27.11% opium, and on average the percent of morphine in opium is 10. Morphine is sold in powder, tablet and capsule forms.

Poppies in Helmand and Kandahar

On my trip to Helmand and Kandahar in July 1992, I saw fields in both provinces where poppies were planted and harvested. After the poppy harvest, farmers were planting maize in Helmand Province. A major poppy area is Musa Qala, north of Helmand Province. We talked to the new governor of Helmand Province in this regard and he stated that poppy planting in Helmand needs to be stopped, but he did not make any guarantee.

It was reported that many people planted poppies last year, but they were unable to collect the sap of the poppies properly due to the lack of laborers. Also animal manure, the basic fertilizer for poppies, is in short supply. The yield of poppies in Kandahar Province was very low and the quality of their opium was also very poor. Most of the farmers stated that they will not plant poppies this year. The farmers of Kandahar Province are also apparently not well experienced in the planting of poppies and the processing of its products.

Afghan farmers are planting poppies to make more money. A farmer in Helmand Province stated that he recently rented a jerib of land (about half an acre) at a rate of Afs.12,000. He planted poppies on this land and made Afs.832,000 per jerib, earning 69 times more income than the land rental rate.

Animal manure is the best fertilizer for poppies. A yield of 18

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Kg. of opium can be obtained from one jerib of land. The price of 7 Kg. of good quality opium is Afs.450,000.

Some fields of bhang were also noticed in Sayed Karam of Paktia Province. The governor of Paktia, Malavi Mohammad Mansur, stated that he will try his best to stop bhang planting in Paktia. He also promised to make contact with Mohammad Rasul Akhand Zada of Helmand Province to assist the control of poppies in Helmand.

Conclusions

Poppy and bhang cultivation is commonly practiced in Helmand, Nangarhar and Paktia Provinces. Afghans use opium only, not processed heroin or morphine. Talks need to be continued with the governors of Helmand, Nangarhar and Paktia Provinces, but poppy and bhang control needs a strong central government in Afghanistan to enforce laws against production.

Wheat cannot compete with poppies as far as their yields and prices are concerned. NGO's need to stop their activities in places where poppies and bhang are common. For example, I have seen some fields where sugarcane provided by an NGO and poppies were planted together. This simple step can help discourage poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

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