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Indian Hemp Drugs Commission.

VOL. III.

APPENDICES.

MISCELLANEOUS.



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VOLUME III.—APPENDICES.

No. 2792-Ex., dated 3rd July 1893.

Resolution by the Government of India, Finance and Commerce Department.

Despatch—

Despatch from Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, No. 36 (Revenue), dated 16th March 1893, forwarding a copy of a question asked in the House of Commons, and of the answer given thereto by the Under-Secretary of State, regarding the appointment of a Commission to enquire into the production and consumption of hemp drugs in India.

Read also—

Correspondence ending with Despatch from the Secretary of State, No. 99 (Revenue), dated 20th October 1892, regarding the consumption of ganja in India.

RESOLUTION.—In the despatch recited in the preamble, Her Majesty's Secretary of State informed the Government of India that, in answer to a question put in the House of Commons, he had expressed his willingness to request the Government of India to appoint a Commission to enquire into the cultivation of the hemp plant in Bengal, the preparation of drugs from the trade in those drugs, the effect of their consumption upon the social and moral condition of the people, and the desirability of prohibiting the growth of the plant and the sale of ganja and allied drugs. In accordance with the announcement thus made, Lord Kimberley requested the Government of India to appoint a Commission for the purposes stated, and to issue such instructions as would ensure that the enquiry should be thorough and complete. His Lordship is of opinion that the investigation can hardly be confined to Bengal, but should extend to the whole of India, and that the Commission should be instructed to ascertain to what extent the existence of the hemp plant all over India affects the practical difficulty of checking or stopping the consumption of ganja, as distinguished from other narcotic drugs prepared from the hemp plant, and whether there is ground for the statement that bhang is less injurious than ganja to consumers.

2. In accordance with these instructions, His Excellency the Governor-General in Council has been pleased to appoint a Commission to conduct the enquiry desired by the Secretary of State. The following gentlemen are appointed to form the Commission:—

President:

The Honourable W. Mackworth Young, M.A., C.S.I., First Financial Commissioner, Punjab.

Members:

1. Mr. H. T. Ommaney, Collector, Panch Mahals, Bombay.
2. Mr. A. H. L. Fraser, M.A., Commissioner, Chattisgarh Division, Central Provinces.
3. Surgeon-Major C. J. H. Warden, Professor of Chemistry, Medical College, and Chemical Examiner to Government, Calcutta, Officiating Medical Storekeeper to Government, Calcutta.
4. Raja Soshi Sikhareswar Roy, of Tahirpore, Bengal.
5. Kanwar Harnam Singh, Ahluwalia, C.I.E., Punjab.
6. Lala Nihal Chund, of Mozaffarnagar, North-Western Provinces.

3. His Excellency the Governor-General in Council desires that the enquiry should be thorough and searching, but he leaves to the Commission full discretion to determine the best means of securing that result. Certain instructions are given in the following paragraphs; but these are not intended to be exhaustive, and the Commission have full authority to take up any branch of enquiry which in their opinion is likely to elucidate the subject and to aid the Government of India and the Secretary of State in deciding on the policy to be adopted in regard to hemp drugs.

4. It is desirable that the Commission should visit and take evidence in all or most of the Provinces of India: there are political objections to their holding sittings in Native States, but any information similar to that required regarding British India, which can be obtained regarding Native States, should be included in the Report.

5. The Commission should ascertain with as much precision as possible the extent to which the hemp plant is cultivated in each of the provinces of India in which it is grown. They should collect full information as to the manner in which the plant is cultivated for the production of drugs, and the methods of preparing the manufactured drug from the raw product, whether of the wild or the domesticated plant. Little is known at present as to the extent to which the wild plant can be used for the preparation of drugs, whether in the milder or the more noxious forms. This point has an important bearing on the possibility of introducing restrictive measures, and will require careful investigation. Full particulars should be obtained regarding all the different forms of the drug which are commonly used, especially ganja, charas, and bhang; and regarding the classes of the people by whom, and the extent to which, each is used. The physical and other effects of the use of hemp-drugs should be

thoroughly investigated, each variety of the drug being separately treated so far as that can be conveniently done. In conducting this branch of the enquiry, the Commissioners should avail themselves freely of the evidence of medical experts. They should endeavour to ascertain what proportion of the population habitually consumes hemp-drugs, and should thoroughly examine the testimony in support of the commonly received opinion that the use of hemp-drugs is a frequent cause of lunacy. They should ascertain whether, and in what form, the consumption of the drugs is either harmless or even beneficial, as has occasionally been maintained.

6. Full information should be compiled regarding the administrative arrangements in force in each province for controlling the growth of the plant, the manufacture and sale of the drugs, and their importation from other provinces or from Native States, and for imposing duties on cultivation and sale. It is understood that charas is imported into the Punjab on a considerable scale from foreign territory, and the question of the importation of hemp-drugs generally from foreign territory should receive the special attention of the Commission. The various systems employed for taxing the drug or the cultivation of the plant should be reviewed, with especial reference to the comparative incidence of this taxation in different parts of India, and to the comparative efficacy of the taxation imposed in restricting consumption, whether by the mere weight of the tax, or by the method and stage of imposition. It is known that the rates vary considerably in different provinces, but the precise effect of the variations is not fully understood. In this connection the Commissioners should notice any case in which the proximity of a Native State affects the production or consumption of the drug in British territory.

7. There are two points connected with the subject-matter of the enquiry which call for special investigation. The first of these is the danger lest prohibition, or restrictive measures of a stringent character, may give rise to serious discontent, and be resented by the people as an unjustifiable interference with long-established social customs. In some parts of India the use of hemp-drugs is, it is believed, common among fakirs and ascetics held in veneration by large classes of the population. In Bengal it has been stated that an infusion of the leaves of the plant is commonly offered to every guest and member of the family on the last day of the Durga Pujah: it has no ill effects, and its use is not considered reprehensible in any way. The Governor-General in Council desires that the Commissioners will endeavour to ascertain to what extent these and similar customs prevail in Bengal and other parts of India, and how far the use of hemp drugs forms a part of social, or possibly religious, ceremonial or observance, and they should, if possible, take the evidence of witnesses drawn from the classes among whom the use of hemp-drugs is chiefly prevalent. The Commissioners should state their opinion whether the prohibition of the use of hemp-drugs or any restrictive measures which they may deem practicable would be likely to give rise to political discontent in any parts of India or among any classes of the population. It is believed that in some parts of the country bhang is, in a special degree, the poor man's narcotic, and the possible unpopularity of a measure which would deprive the very poorest of the population of the use of a narcotic to which they have always been accustomed should not be overlooked.

8. Another point to which the attention of the Commissioners should be directed is the probability or possibility, that if the use of hemp-drugs is prohibited, those who would otherwise continue to use them may be driven to have recourse to alcohol, or to other stimulants or narcotics which may be more deleterious.

9. Finally, the Governor-General in Council requests that the Commissioners, if they should be of opinion that the prohibition of the consumption of any hemp-drug should not, or could not, be enforced, will indicate, for the consideration of the Government of India, any reforms and improvements which their investigations may lead them to recommend in the existing arrangements of each province for controlling the cultivation of the hemp plant, and the manufacture, sale, and taxation of hemp-drugs. In framing their recommendations regard should, of course, be had to the considerations which have been stated in paragraphs 7 and 8 of this Resolution. Absolute prohibition, or repressive measures of a stringent nature, may involve inquisitorial proceedings of an unpopular character, and afford opportunities for the levy of blackmail; and in framing regulations for the prohibition or for the restriction of the use of hemp-drugs these considerations should be borne in mind.

If the Commission should be of opinion that the cultivation of the hemp plant for the production of drugs, or the consumption of any hemp drug, should be absolutely prohibited, it will be their duty to state the regulations which should be adopted for this purpose.

10. All Local Governments and Administrations have been requested to render every assistance to the Commission, to collect and place at its disposal whatever information may be available, and to make to the Commission any suggestions regarding the enquiry which local knowledge and experience may suggest.

11. The Governor-General in Council directs that the Commission shall assemble in Calcutta on the 1st August 1893.

J. F. FINLAY,

Secretary to the Government of India.

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