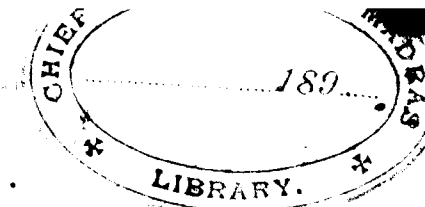

REPORT
OF THE
ROYAL COMMISSION ON OPIUM,
1895.



Supplement to the Report of the Royal Commission on Opium.

NOTE BY THE HON. THE MAHARAJA BAHADUR OF DURBHANGA,
K.C.I.E.

I have carefully considered the different sections of the draft Report which have been submitted to me. I note that the Report is, on the whole, drawn up in accordance with the spirit of the resolutions that were passed at the last sitting of the Commission in Bombay, and as such, I am prepared to accord a general support to it.

2. But there are certain points to which I desire more particularly to invite the attention of the British public: and I have therefore, determined to embody them in the form of a separate Note, in which I shall at the same time suggest such alterations and additions in the Report as may, in my opinion, be advisable.

3. It will be my endeavour, in the remarks which I have to offer, to express, as faithfully as it lies in my power to do, the views entertained on the opium question by the majority of the Indian thinking public. I do not, however, conceal from myself that a certain section of the community hold widely different opinions. In the view of some, opium, when used non-medicinally, is little better than a poison, whose only effect is to degrade humanity. On the other hand, there are those who hold that the properties of opium as a drug are highly beneficial, and that its action as a "brightener of the intellect" is not one of the least of its claims to favourable consideration. The opinions of the former class are not without their value, and are entitled to every respect; but I regret to be unable to admit that they are borne out by the testimony which has been produced on their behalf in the course of the sittings of the Commission.

4. With regard to the export of Indian opium to China, one of the questions we were called upon to discuss, the policy of Her Majesty's Government has been very clearly defined by Sir James Fergusson, when Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in a speech delivered by him in the House of Commons on the 10th April 1891:—"If the Chinese Government," he said, "thought proper to raise the duty to a prohibitive extent, they ought to shut out the article altogether, for this country would not spend one pound on powder and shot or lose the life of a single soldier in an attempt to force opium upon the Chinese." I desire to record my entire sympathy with these sentiments, and I am confident that the Government have no intention of resiling from the attitude then taken up. It cannot be too clearly enunciated that, if the trade in opium between India and China is to be discouraged and suppressed, the initiative must be taken by the Chinese. No one can be better aware than the Chinese Government of the uses and abuses to which opium is put by their subjects. I am at a loss to understand how it can possibly be contended that foreign Governments, such as those of England and India, are more favourably situated for the discussion of such matters, or in what way they are more competent judges than the people and the Government which are most directly interested in the question.

The export
of Indian
opium to
China.

5. It would, in my opinion, be a highly impolitic act on the part of the Government of India to put an end of its own accord to the traffic in opium with China. We possess no guarantee whatever that any such suppression of the trade on our part would in any way diminish the use of the drug in China. Nor have we at present any data to show that such an act of well-meant, but, as it appears to me, wholly mistaken, philanthropy would bring with it the abolition of poppy cultivation in China, or the discouragement of the opium trade between China and countries such as Turkey and Persia.

6. I would also call attention to the financial aspect of the question. Any such suppression of the opium trade in India with China must entail the sacrifice of a large source of revenue without any corresponding benefit to humanity at large or compensation to the Indian taxpayer. The present financial position of the country is not such as to justify any such philanthropic experiments, and I consider it my duty to point out that any action of the nature I have indicated is likely to create grave and serious discontent in this country, where the people have no voice in regulating



R

Y 413 M95 L

M95

the expenditure and where the annual expenditure has enormously increased during the past ten years. The utmost taxable limit has been reached and the fresh and heavy taxation, which would be rendered necessary by the withdrawal of the opium revenue, would be very seriously felt in an impoverished country such as India.

The use of
opium in
India.

7. A great many medical witnesses were examined. Their evidence as regards the uses and the abuses of opium was conflicting. But I do not wish to enter into the subject. I consider it presumptuous on my part to do so, as the question has been so ably dealt with by Sir William Roberts in his Minute. I would only state here that it has not, in my opinion, been proved that opium is an unfixed evil. I have, however, a suggestion to offer in this connexion. In Burma, certain restrictions have been put on the sale of opium by the Local Government. And I think that in other parts of India also the Local Governments, as well as local bodies like the District Boards, should be empowered to frame rules for the sale of opium according to the circumstances of the different localities. It is impossible to make any suggestions that can apply to the whole of India, and I hesitate therefore to lay down any hard-and-fast rule upon the point. I would, however, urge that opium should be sold in bottles or phials labelled "poison", and the minimum dose which is likely to be fatal should also be legibly printed in the vernacular on these labels. In some parts of the country it is a common practice for mothers to give small doses of opium to young children. I do not wish to express any opinion as to whether this practice of giving opium to young infants is at all necessary for the benefit of the children. I will content myself with pointing out the fact that opium is, unlike alcohol, a deadly poison if taken in excess, and is a dangerous weapon in the hands of ignorant persons. A witness at Lucknow gave evidence to the effect that an infant brother of his was killed by an accidental over-dose of opium administered by his own mother. My suggestion to label phials or bottles in which opium is sold, would be of assistance in reducing the chances of such accidents to a minimum.

8. The habit of opium-smoking is generally looked upon as a degrading habit. Mr. Haridas Voharidas has entered into the subject very fully; and as I find myself in agreement with his views on the subject, I do not propose to discuss the point at any length. Opium, however, is chiefly used as a mild and harmless stimulant. The habit of opium-eating, unlike that of opium-smoking, is not necessarily looked down upon as a degrading habit. It is largely practised in Rajputana on festive occasions as a token of welcome to guests and friends. When two enemies wish to end a long-standing feud, they generally go through the following ceremony:—They each drink a small quantity of the preparation of opium called "Amulpani" from the hands of the other; and this is recognised as making the ties of friendship inviolable. In certain localities, opium is consumed at funerals, marriages, betrothals, and other ceremonies. Among the Kathis of Kathiawar it would be considered an offence if the guest refused to take opium on occasions like these. In the Punjab, a large proportion of the adult male population take opium in small doses as a stimulant without much or any apparent harm. It is looked upon as a digestive and a very beneficial tonic for a man who has reached middle age.

9. To stop the use of opium in cases like these would be not only an unnecessary restriction on the freedom of the subject, but it might, and, I think, would, lead also to the increased consumption of alcohol. This fear was expressed by a great number of witnesses. The use of a stimulant should only be interfered with if it is proved that it leads to a general depravity in the moral character or to any marked physical deterioration of a community. Speaking generally of the whole of India, it does not appear to me that these essential conditions have been proved.

Poppy cultivation in
Native States.

10. The evidence given on behalf of those Native States in which opium is grown, shows that there is a very strong feeling against any interference with the cultivation of the poppy; and I consider that it would be highly injudicious to adopt any restrictive measures in face of such strong and influential opposition. I here take the opportunity to make a few quotations from a "Kharita" addressed to the members of the Royal Opium Commission by H. H. the Maharaja Holkar, dated the 6th February 1894:—

"(1.) In view of the relations existing between the Paramount Power and my State the former would not be justified in requiring me to prohibit the cultivation of opium in my State, except for medical purposes, even though it may itself enforce such prohibition in British India.

"(2.) No money compensation can properly or adequately compensate the State or the various classes affected by it for the losses which they will sustain.
"(3.) The prohibition will be oppressive to my subjects.
"(4.) As a rule, the consumption of opium in my State is moderate, and a moderate use of opium is not prejudicial in any way.
"(5.) I have always found my subjects peaceful and law-abiding, and I apprehend that interference with the present state of things will make (them) discontented."

11. These are the views of one of the most enlightened native princes of India, who has besides the reputation of being one of the ablest revenue administrators that Malwa has ever produced. His views, moreover, were endorsed by nearly all the representatives of the States of Central India. This feeling against any interference with the opium trade is a very natural one. The suppression of the opium trade would seriously interfere with the financial equilibrium of many of the Native States; and it is impossible to foresee the consequences of such a step. The discontent and the dissatisfaction will be none the less a source of political danger, although they may not find open expression.

12. In this connexion, I wish to quote the answer given by Rao Bahadur K. C. Bedarkar the Prime Minister of the Indore State, to a question whether he considered it would be expedient (if it were rightful to do so) to bring the powers of the Paramount State into action in relation to this question of the poppy:—

22,202. A.—"My answer to this question is in the negative, and for the following reasons:—

"(1.) The State would suffer a loss of about Rs. 21,000,000 annually, and would gain no benefit for a sum of Rs. 33,000,000 sunk in wells and tanks.
"(2.) The agriculturists would suffer a loss of Rs. 18,56,190 annually, and would get no proportionate return for a sum of 3 lakhs of rupees sunk by them in wells within the last few years, and of other large sums spent by them in previous years.
"(3.) The jagirdars would suffer to the extent of Rs. 1,63,500 annually.
"(4.) The traders would suffer a loss estimated at Rs. 8,50,000 annually, and would find no good investment for nearly a crore and a half of rupees now invested in the opium trade.
"(5.) No money compensation can adequately make up the loss, and it is impracticable to apportion such compensation.
"(6.) The impracticability of carrying out preventive measures.
"(7.) There would be a resort to liquor, leading to physical deterioration, moral and social degradation, breach of religious commandment, and increase of crime.
"(8.) There would be grave discontent amongst the people, amounting to political danger.
"(9.) No object shall be gained by making so much sacrifice and incurring so much risk, as China will continue to grow and consume its own inferior opium, in spite of all and everything."

13. I now come to the consideration of the Bengal Monopoly System. I am a staunch advocate of free trade principles, but as far as India is concerned, I am convinced that a Government monopoly like that of opium is one of the most unpopular and least oppressive systems of raising revenue. The unpopular indirect taxes such as the Income tax and the License tax, and the difficulty in making proper assessments are well known. I should be sorry to see this source of revenue replaced by any system of direct taxation which is likely to place the people at the mercy of a notoriously corrupt and ill-paid class of rural assessors.

14. There are two systems of opium cultivation practised in Bengal. Firstly, the Benares system of dealing directly with the ryots; secondly, the Patna or Beliar system of dealing through middlemen. One thing is common to both of these systems, advances are given to the ryots, and they are bound down by a contract to cultivate a certain area of land. This, in most cases, is a distinct advantage to the ryots, inasmuch as they get these advances without having to pay any interest.

15. I consider it, however, my duty to point out that the prices paid for opium up till last year had not varied for more than 20 years. During this period the country

P,
Y 413 M956
M95

has been opened up by a number of railways, and the cost of labour and food has increased enormously. In the course of the sittings of the Commission at Bankipur, it was brought to our notice that ryots, who had entered into agreements to cultivate the poppy, had in some cases failed to carry out the contract on account of the lowness of the price, and it was alleged that they had been compelled by the Opium Department to uproot the crops they had sown in the place of the poppy. On this question of price the evidence of Mr. A. Forbes, the Commissioner of the Patna Division, was as follows:—

Q. 10,797.—“I presume, you think the people would view with regret the enforcement of a policy of prohibition of the further cultivation of the poppy?”
A.—Very much so. I consider that it would ruin thousands of them. I think, myself, that the proper policy of Government would be to raise the Government price of the poppy. I have very little doubt, if the Government price of opium were raised from Rs. 6 a seer to Rs. 5·8 or certainly to Rs. 6, that it would compete much more equally with the other crops which have risen with the fall in the value of the rupee, which the Government price of poppy has not done.”

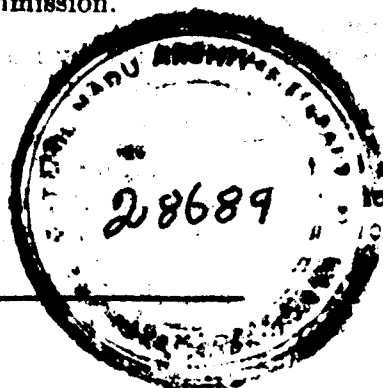
16. It will be seen that Mr. Forbes is strongly in favour of raising the price of the poppy, and his opinion derives great weight from the fact of his having served on a Commission appointed by the Government of India about 13 years ago to inquire into the working of the Opium Department in Bengal and the North-West Provinces. Similar evidence is given by other witnesses like Babu Guru Prasad Sen, the Secretary of the Behar Landowner's Association, and Babu Saligram Singh, who is an influential landowner in that province, gave evidence to the effect that on account of the opening of new markets the opium cultivation is less profitable to the farmers than that of various other crops. In connexion with this subject, it should be pointed out that the Benares system of direct dealing with the ryots is very much more popular with landlords and tenants alike than the Behar system of dealing through middlemen or *chahdars*. This latter system is considered by many to lead to much unnecessary oppression; and I would therefore propose the gradual introduction of the Benares system to Behar also.

17. In conclusion, I desire to record my appreciation of the courtesy and consideration shown to me during the sittings of the Commission in India, by Lord Brassey and my colleagues. I was unfortunately prevented by ill-health from being present throughout the inquiry, and the delay in submitting this Note, which I much regret, must, I fear, be attributed to the same unavoidable cause.

LAKSHMESHVAR SINGH OF DARBHANGA.

Received on the 6th May 1895.

J. A. BAINES,
Secretary to the Commission.



R
Y 1413 M95
M95