



BANG II. IN MODERN IRAN

ii. In Modern Iran

Hemp cultivation and hashish production flourish in dry and sunny regions that are 1,500-2,000 m above sea level; thus hashish produced in Afghanistan is the most prized variety, and places most hospitable to hemp growing in the Tehran province and adjacent area are Sāva, Qāsemābād-e Qandīšāh in Šahrīār. The plant requires a great deal of water and is usually grown along streams; where this is not possible, fields must be watered daily during the first two months of growth, every other day in the third and fourth months, and every third day thereafter.

The height achieved by the mature plant depends on the soil and the type of fertilizer used; plants generally grow to a height of 0.5 m-2 m; however, in areas such as Shiraz, the use of chemical fertilizers has increased vertical growth to more than 3 m. The planting season depends on the local climate; it generally runs from March to April; the harvest goes from the end of August to the end of November, the best time being two or three days after the first autumnal chill when the plant stalks begin to redden. After the plant reaches full maturity, but before it flowers, the male flowers must be weeded from the fields to prevent them from pollinating the females (otherwise the delicate female buds will be turned to hemp). After the male flowers are eliminated, females are weeded in such a way as to space them 0.5 m-1 m apart (depending on climatic conditions and the suitability of the ground to plant growth). Harvest time comes with the first cold spell when the old leaves at the base of the plant stalk start to yellow. Methods of producing *bang* and hashish



vary from place to place; some of the most common can be summarized as follows.

Production of superior-quality hashish. When the plants have budded and a thick, sticky, dust-like paste appears under the delicate leaves of the bud, the delicate leaves at the top of the stalks and the buds are gathered together and kept in the dark until they dry. They are then spread out on a heavy cloth of thick weave (such as the woolen floor coverings known as *gelims* and *jājīms*). They are roiled up in the rug and the rug is pressed and rubbed the way a fuller would press felt. As a result of the rubbing, the paste from the leaves and buds adheres to the rug; the rug is then beaten over a smooth type of fabric (such as calico or nylon or leather) so that the female flowers that adhere to it fall to the fabric. The brownish flowers, which are greasy and sticky, are rolled into pellets and consumed as hashish or *čars*. In place of a thick woolen rug, to knead the dry leaves one can also use muslin (*karbās*), placing the leaves 0.5 cm apart on it. The cloth is then folded five or six times and then rolled up so that the leaves can be kneaded.

Production of ordinary-quality hashish. In the fall plants are gathered, branches are separated from the stalks and bound together to look like old-fashioned whisk brooms. They are then kept in a dark room so that the leaves dry. The branches are shaken so that the dry leaves fall to the ground; the leaves are then kneaded in the manner described above. If the volume of leaves is great, they are placed on a hard surface such as asphalt or brick and a horse wearing blinkers tramples them to soften them up. The pliable greenish substance obtained is then placed on a thick woven rug and kneaded as described above. The slightly oily brownish paste that sticks to the rug is extracted and shaped into pellets or cubes to be consumed as second-grade hashish. The crushed leaves that do not adhere to the rug are moistened and shaped into pellets that tend to be green in color, and not very potent. These pellets are called “horse-hoof hashish” (*hašīš-e somm-e asbī*) and evidently form the kind of hashish that was called *bang* in days gone by; however, contemporary Iranian parlance does not distinguish among *bang*, hashish, and *čars*. Other names for this narcotic are *asrār*, *sabza*, *sabzak*, and *waraq al-ķāl*.

Another form of hashish that has become popular recently, being favored by Iranians who have returned from the United States, is produced by separating the branches from the stalk without extracting the buds and the delicate leaves. These then are bound together into a “broom” and allowed to dry: then the buds within the bundle, which are still soft, moist, and yellowish, are



separated as “marijuana” and rubbed together. The rest of the plant material, which is lower in quality, is kneaded in the manner described above and turned into *bang*.

To produce hashish oil (*rowḡan-e bang*), the most delicate leaves and buds are separated from the plant, dried, and rubbed and pressed. The resulting dust-like substance is placed in a pot of tepid water; the pot is then heated over a medium flame and the solution is brought to a near-boil. The globules of hashish oil that appear on the surface of the water are skimmed off and placed in a bottle.

Hashish is typically consumed in a water pipe, a long-stemmed pipe known as a *čopoq*, or a cigarette. To increase the oily hashish’s combustibility, it is mixed with tobacco; in the *čopoq*, for example, a layer of hashish is covered with a layer of tobacco and packed on top of them is another, thin layer of hashish—this is called a “two-story *čopoq*” (*čopoq-e do-ṭabaqa*). Hashish is sometimes mixed with opium and smoked in an opium pipe; the mixture is called the “fairies’ spirit” (*rūḥ al-ajenna*). Hashish oil is generally consumed by thoroughly mixing a drop of it with a liter of *dūḡ* (a drink made from yogurt), and drinking the resulting mixture. This mixture, which is extremely potent and dangerous, is called *dūḡ-e waḥdat* (the *dūḡ* of annihilation): overconsumption of this drink can cause severe palpitations which, if not immediately counteracted by the consumption of a great deal of animal fat, can be fatal.

Though it has been written that the use of hashish and *bang* does not cause physical dependency, when intoxicated, those who have used the narcotic for years are subject to tremors. The psychological dependency, as shown by the impatience and depression that the user displays when unable to obtain hashish, however, is undeniable. One of the general signs of hashish intoxication is a false appetite, which if not checked by others can cause the intoxicated to indulge in painful overeating. Other general aspects of hashish intoxication are a kind of forgetfulness and unawareness of reality and of life’s aggravations, induced by a strengthening of the power of imagination and the realization of repressed desires in the world of make-believe. Hashish also distorts the vision; the ability to judge depth and distance is so changed that the intoxicated occasionally imagines a puddle of water a boundless ocean, a sparrow in a tree the mythical bird *Simorḡ* or a giant airplane, or a ray of light shining through a crack heaven itself. This condition is occasionally accompanied by uncontrollable fear and terror of imaginary visions and of



reified chimera along with a dream-filled sleep in which the user traverses the earth, flies to the farthest reaches of the heavens, jaunts about the Milky Way, and sees all of his unfulfilled dreams and impossible desires realized. Some hashish users become silent and introspective, while others are subject to pointless fits of uncontrollable laughter and an unnatural euphoria.

Continued use of hashish generally causes lapses of memory, pronounced mental dysfunction, engenders in the user a condition similar to retardation and idiocy and may eventually lead to manic-depressive psychosis.

The sale, purchase, and use of the narcotic products of the hemp plant are illegal in Iran, and they are not that popular among its present-day inhabitants. Their use was evidently greater during the Safavid and Qajar periods; however, the euphoria-seekers of today's Iran turn more to opiates and alcohol. Hashish is more widely consumed on the Indian subcontinent, in Afghanistan, Turkey, and the Arab countries, especially Egypt and Syria; those familiar with the smell can readily identify the hashish smoke coming from the many water pipes in most of the coffee houses of Cairo. In Iran the traditional methods of consuming *bang* and *čars* in a water pipe or a *čopoq* or in the *dūg-e waḥdat* are carried on mostly by itinerant dervishes and by those affecting the ways of Sufis; consumption of hashish and marijuana in cigarettes is generally favored by the limited number of elite euphoria-seekers who have returned from the West.

(The information in this article is based on local investigations and interviews.)