

# BHĀRATĪYA VIDYĀ

A quarterly research organ of the Bhavan  
on all subjects connected with Indian Culture

VOLUME XVI : No. 1

16

1956

EDITORS :

Prof. JAYANTKRISHNA H. DAVE, M.A., LL.B.

Dr. A. D. PUSALKER, M.A., LL.B., Ph.D.



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

BOMBAY

*Issued in September 1956*

# THE HISTORY OF TOBACCO IN INDIA AND EUROPE — BETWEEN A. D. 1500 AND 1900

BY P. K. GODE, M. A., D. LITT.

*Curator, Bhandarkar O. R. Institute, Poona 4.*

No complete history of Tobacco in India has been published so far. I have collected some references about this history during the last fifteen years. Though my search for these references is not yet complete, I have thought it advisable to publish the references so far collected with a view to clarifying my investigation to some extent.

In the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (14th Edition, 1929) Vol. 22 we find only the following note on the history of Tobacco:—  
Page 260

“*Historical*:—The tobacco plant was brought to Europe in 1558 by Francisco Fernandes, who had been sent by Philip II of Spain to investigate the products of Mexico. Jean Nicot, the French Ambassador to Portugal, sent seeds of the plant to the Queen, Catherine de’ Medici. The services rendered by Nicot in spreading a knowledge of the herb have been commemorated in the scientific name of the genus *Nicotiana*. At first almost miraculous healing powers were attributed to the plant, and it was designated “*herba panacea*” “*herba santa*”, *Sana Sancta Indorum*. “Divine tobacco” it is called by Spencer, and “our holy herb nicotian” by William Lilly.

While the plant came to Europe through Spain, its use for smoking purposes spread to the continent from England. Ralph Lane, the first Governor of Virginia, and Sir Francis Drake, brought to the notice of Sir Walter Raleigh the habit of smoking tobacco. Lane is credited with having been the first English smoker and through the influence and example of the illustrious Raleigh “Who took a pipe of tobacco a little before he went to the scaffold” the habit became rooted among Elizabethan courtiers. During the 17th century the indulgence in tobacco spread with marvellous rapidity through all nations”. In the article on *Tobacco* in the *Hobson-Jobson* (by Yule and Burnell, London, 1903) we get the following information about *Tobacco* in general and about its introduction into India and the East:—

Pages 924-926—

c. A.D. 1550—

*Tobacco* is mentioned in Burton's *Arabian Nights*, vii, 210 along with meat and vegetables but this is the insertion of some scribe according to the editors of the Hobson-Jobson.

1542-1556—

Girolamo Benzoni in his *Travels* (translated by W. H. Smyth, Hak Soc., 1857) p. 81 states:—

“going through the provinces of Guatemala and Nicaragua I have entered the house of an Indian, who had taken this herb (*tobacco*), which in the Mexican language is called *tabacco* and immediately perceived the sharp fetid smell of this truly diabolical and stinking smoke, I was obliged to go away in haste and seek some other place”

J. T. Platt in his *Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English*, London, 1884 states:—“The word *tobacco* is from the language of Hayty and meant first the pipe, secondly the plant, thirdly the sleep which followed its use”

1585—

*Tabaccam* and *Tabaccane* mentioned (*Gul. Camdeni, Annal. Rerum, Anglicanum, regn. Elizabetha*, ed. 1717, ii, 449)

1592—

“divine *Tobacco*”

—*The Faerie Queene*, III, v. 32

1597—

Earl of Essex at Villa Franca uses *tobacco* — *Commentaries of Sir Francis Vere*, p. 62

1598—

“this roguish *tobacco*. . . . . four died. . . . . with taking of it. . . . its little better than rats-bane or rosaker”

—*Every man in his humour*, iii, 2.

1604—

“new Impost of 6s. 8d., and the old custom of 2d. per pound on *tobacco*”

—*Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, James I, p. 159.

1604-1605—

Visit of Asad Beg (Akbar's Ambassador) to the Bijapur Court. Asad Beg states:—“In Bijapur I had found some *tobacco*. Never having seen the like in India, I brought some with me and prepared a handsome pipe

of jewel work. His Majesty (Akbar) was enjoying himself after receiving my presents, and asking me how I had collected so many strange things in so short a time. When his eye fell upon the tray with the pipe and its appurtenances he expressed great surprise and examined the *tobacco*, which was made up in pipefuls; he inquired what it was and where I got it. The Nawab Khān-i-'Azam replied: 'This is *tobacco*, which is *well-known in Mecca and Medina*, and this doctor has brought it as a medicine for your Majesty'. His Majesty looked at it and ordered me to prepare and take him a pipe-ful. He began to smoke it, when his physician approached and forbade his doing so".....(omitting much that is curious). "As I had brought a large supply of *tobacco* and pipes I sent some to several of the nobles, while others sent to ask for some; indeed all, without exception, wanted some, and the practice was introduced. After that the merchants began to sell it, so *the custom of smoking spread rapidly*"

—Asad Beg in Elliot, vi, 165-167.

1610—

"The *Turks*.....also delight in *tobacco*; they take it through reeds that have joyned unto them great heads of wood to containe it. I doubt not but lately taught them, as brought them by the English:..... *no question but it would prove a principall commodity*. Nevertheless they will take it in corners, and are so ignorant therein, that that which in England is not saleable, doth passe here amongst them for most excellent."

—Sandys, *Journey*, 66.

1615—

"*tabacco*"

—P. della Valle, i. 76.

1616—

"miraculous omnipotence of our strong tasted *Tobacco*"  
(virtues of *tobacco* described)

—K. James I., *Counterblast to Tobacco in Works*, pp. 219-220.

1617—

"As the smoking of *tobacco* (*tambākū*) had taken very bad effect upon the health and mind of many persons, I ordered that no one should practice the habit. My brother Shāh Abbās, also being aware of its evil effects had issued a command against the use of it in Irān.

But Khān-i-'Alam was so much addicted to smoking, that he could not abstain from it, and often smoked."

—*Memoirs of Jahāngir in Elliot*  
V. 851 (*Blochmann* renders this  
passage *Indian Anti.* i, 164).

1623—

"Tobacco"

—*Bacon H. Vitae et Mortis* in *B.*  
*Montague's* ed. X, 189.

17th Century—

long extract from a Persian author. Some points in this extract are worthy of noting:—

- (1) *Tobacco*, "an European plant".
- (2) Its cultivation became speedily universal.
- (3) It "rewarded the cultivator far beyond every other article of husbandry".
- (4) Smoking of *tobacco* pervaded all ranks and classes during the reign of Shah Jahan (A.D. 1628-1658). *Tobacco* was often preferred over other necessaries of life.
- (5) References to "*Chillum*" and "*Hookah*".

c. 1760—

"*Tāmbāku*. It is known from the *Maāsir-i-Rahīmī* that the *tobacco* came from Europe to the Dakhin, and from the Dakhin to Upper India during the reign of Akbar Shāh (1556-1605), since which time it has been in general use".

—*Bahār-i-'Ajam* quoted by *Bloch-*  
*mann* in *Ind. Anti* i, 164.

1788—

It appears from Miss Bird's *Japan* that *tobacco* was not cultivated in that country till 1605. In 1612 and 1615 the Shogun prohibited both culture and use of *tabako*"—See the work, i, 276-77 [According to Mr. Chamberlain (*Things Japanese* 3rd ed. p. 402) by 1651 the law was so far relaxed that smoking was permitted, but only out-of-doors]."

John Fryer in his *Travels* (A.D. 1672-1681) in East India and Persia (Hak. Society, London, 1909, Vol. I) refers to *tobacco* in the following extracts:—

Vol. I, p. 43—

Speaking of the Island of St. Iago, one of the Cape Verde Islands Fryer states:—

"They invite us with an Hubble-bubble (hookah) (so called from the noise it makes) a long reed as brown as

a Nut with use, inserted the body of a Cocoe-shell filled with water, and a nasty Bole just pressing the water, they ram *Tobacco* into it uncut, out of which we may suck as long as we please etc”.

Vol. I, p. 110—Speaking of the town of “Maderas” Fryer observes:—

The natives chew it (betel leaf with *Chinam* (Chunam) and *Arach* (areca-nut) . . . . . If swallowed it inebriates as much as *tobacco*”

Vol. I, p. 88—Speaking of the *Moors* in India Fryer remarks:—

“Their Chiefest Delight and Pride is to be seen *smoking tobacco* cross-legg’d in a great chair at their doors, out of a long *Brass Pipe* adapted to a large *Crystal Hubble-bubble* fixed in a Brass Frame, their Menial Servants surrounding them”

*Hookka* appears to have been used as a general presentation article in the 17th century. In a list of things to be presented to the Faujdar of Hugli, dated 3rd April 1682 we find “one *Hoocka*, one *pigdan* (spittoon)” [See *Factory Records, Hugli*, No. 3 quoted in foot-note 2 on p. 96 of Thomas Bowrey’s account of *Countries round the Bay of Bengal* (1666-1679) Kak. Soc., Cambridge, 1905].

Bernier in his *Travels in the Moghul Empire* (A.D. 1656-1668) ed. by Archibald Constable, London, 1891, refers to dealers in tobacco in Bengal as follows:—

Page 441—

“The masters of vessels take care that their crews drink less punch; nor do they permit them so frequently to visit the Indian women or the *dealers* in *arac* and *tobacco*”.

It is clear from this reference *tobacco* was an article of trade in the Bengal market between 1656 and 1668, the period of Bernier’s *Travels* in India. We cannot say if this *tobacco* was imported from outside or was a product of Indian Cultivation.<sup>1</sup> A. K. Nairne in his *The Flowering plants of Western India, Bombay*, 1894, p. 210, refers to the cultivation of “Several species of *Nicotiana*, *tobacco* which Lamb calls “plant divine of rarest virtue”. Such species are cultivated also “in England as garden and conservatory plants”.

1. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Films Division) prepared in 1950 a documentary film “*My lady Nicotine*” (See p. 21 of their *Catalogue—1949 to 1955*). We are informed in this *Catalogue* that *India* is the *third largest grower of tobacco in the world*. The tobacco industry employs over half a million workers and brings a large revenue into Indian exchequer through internal consumption and export.

John Borthwick Gilchrist published his "*Dictionary, English and Hindoostanee*" in 1810. In the 2nd edition of this *Dictionary* published in London, 1825, we find the following information about tobacco:

Vol. I, p. 658—

"tobacco, tumbakoo, bhelsa, gal, Sendhee, Şortee from Soorat (*Surat*) whence it was first introduced into *Hindoostan*, and Bhelsa is the name of a village where the best tobacco is produced, (bad) phuskoo, (cut) soolfa, (house) bhinde khanu—*tobacconist*, tumbakoo-gur"

The *Gazetteer* of the *Poona District* [*Bombay Gazetteer*, Vol. XX (revised edition, Bombay, 1954)] p. 202, states that tobacco is grown mostly in the villages of Junnar Taluka and also in Indapur, Purandar, Dhond, Sirur, Ambegaun, Poona City and Baramati. We are further informed that "*Tobacco cultivation was introduced before 1841 by the Government who imported Syrian tobacco seeds into this district.*" In the late days of the 19th century Poona was the largest *Snuff* and tobacco market in the Deccan (p. 361). Part I of the *Poona Gazetteer* deals with *Medicinal Plants*. On p. 153 there is a note on tobacco plant (*Nicotiana Tabacum* Linn.) which gives its names, habitat, properties, uses, etc. Tobacco is extensively cultivated in upper Gujarat (Kaira Dist.) and in the area West of the Deccan and the S. M. Country (Satara and Belgaum Districts).

Francis Buchanan in his *Patna-Gaya Report*, Vol. II (1811-1812) published by the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Patna, records the following information about tobacco<sup>2</sup>:—

Page 629—

"Those who prepare the tubes used for smoking tobacco are reckoned better workmen than those in Bengal but not equal to those of Lucknow. Very few of the tubes made here are ornamented with gold and silver. Most of the tobacco is here prepared for smoking by *Modis* who retail provisions. Some tobacco is prepared as in Bhagalpur by the *Halwais* (confectioners) and by those who sell *paper-kites* and a good deal by those who make this business their sole profession. Charcoal balls used in smoking are prepared by old women and inn-keepers".

2. Tobacco, an American plant, came to be cultivated in India rapidly after its introduction long before 1812. About potatoes Buchanan observes as follows on p. 680 of his *Report* Vol. II. "The vegetables for eating consist of potatoes sent to Banaras and Bengal and of various sorts imported to Patna from the country beyond the Ganges."

In the *Baroda Gazetteer* (Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. VII, Bombay, 1883) there is a note on the cultivation of *tobacco* in Baroda division (p. 89). *Tobacco* is differently prepared for *smoking*, *chewing* and for being taken as *snuff*. If *gadāku tobacco* is to be prepared the plants are cut off at the root but if *jarda* is to be made only the leaves are clipped.

In the *Hibbert Journal* for July 1955 there is an article on "*Tobacco as a Sacred Plant*" by Lewis Spence (pp. 394-399). Some points in this article are noted below:—

- (1) Not a single instance of native testimony about the evil results of tobacco has been noticed by Spence.
- (2) The Red Man had employed tobacco for centuries as incense to be burnt before the images of his gods. He also employed it against bodily inflammations.
- (3) The Mexican priesthood regarded tobacco as a sacred substance.
- (4) In 1907 Walter Fewkes excavated some ceremonial rooms at Casa Grande in Arizona with hundreds of tubes used for smoking tobacco.
- (5) In Mexican manuscript paintings many of the gods are represented with the tobacco pouch worn by the priests.
- (6) The Mexican priests were in the *habit of chewing tobacco* for inducing prophetic visions.
- (7) Thomas Heriot, servant to Sir Walter Raleigh, in his *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* composed in A.D. 1587 refers to the superstitious use of tobacco by the natives of that province.
- (8) The North American Tribes attributed magical protective efficacy to tobacco.
- (9) It is possible to suppose that a large and important body of belief associated with a definite cult of the tobacco must have existed among the American tribes.

The Annual Report of the Patna Museum (1942-1952) published in 1954 gives a Catalogue of objects added to the museum's Art Section (Appendix E—pages 120-216). Among these objects we find the following of special interest for our present paper:—

Page 120—No. 824—

"Painting depicting a man smoking "Gargara"  
(hukka) and a male attendant standing before him."

Page 131—No. 891—

“Painting on paper depicting a man making “Hukkas” (hubble bubbles) from coconut shells. A customer bargaining for a “Hukka”. Patna School. 19th Century A.D.”

Page 133—No. 901—

“Painting on paper depicting a tobacco dealer weighing tobacco (for smoking) on a scale. Two ‘gharas’ (Jars) probably containing tobacco covered by a red cloth, and a bamboo basket containing ‘Tikya’ (charcoal cake for igniting tobacco) and three ‘Hukkas’ (hubble-bubbles) on the platform. Patna School. 19th Century A.D.

Page 151—No. 1023—

“Painting on paper of a nobleman smoking *Hukka* and enjoying dance and music performed by a party of five women. Seven other persons are also in the group. Jaipur Qalam. 19th Century A.D.

Page 152—No. 1024—

“Painting on paper of a lady seated on ‘Takht’ and smoking *Hukka*.....Kangra School. 19th Century A.D.

Page 141—No. 958(12)—

“Painting on paper depicting a soldier with a gun on his shoulder and smoking *Hukka*. Southern India School. 19th Century A.D.”

Page 152—No. 1026—

“Painting....nobleman in company of a lady smoking *Hukka*. Pahari School. Late 18th Century A.D.”

Page 153—No. 1034—

Painting.....lady resting on a cushion. *Hukka* and *Spittoon* near her. Delhi School. 19th Century A.D.”

Page 163—No. 1111—

“Painting Nur Jahan Begum.....*Hukka* in the left hand”....Delhi School. 19th Century A.D.”

Page 163—No. 1099—

“Painting....Nur Jahan with *Hukka*....Delhi School. 19th Century A.D.”

Page 169—No. 1129(3)

Painting on ivory—Muhammad Mirza Fakhru holding *Hukka* in his right hand. (4) *Ivory Painting*—Mohammad Bahadur Shah II holding *Hukka* in his right hand.

Page 169—No. 1130(3)

*Ivory painting*—Akbar Shah II with *Hukka* in his right hand.

Page 170—No. 1134—

“*Ivory painting*—Nurjahan with *Hukka* in her left hand. Delhi School. 19th Century A.D.”

Page 173—No. 1164—

*Ivory painting*—Akbar II, son of Emperor Shah Alam holding *Hukka* in his left hand. Delhi School. 19th Century A.D.

Page 174—No. 1165—

*Ivory painting*—Bahadur Shah II with *Hukka* in his left hand. Delhi School. 19th Century A.D.

Page 177—No. 1196—

*Ivory painting*—a king holding *Hukka* by his right hand . . . . Delhi School . . . . 19th Century A.D.

No. 1201—

*Ivory painting*—Nobleman holding *Hukka* in his left-hand. Delhi School . . . . 19th Century A.D.

Page 178—No. 1203—

*Ivory painting*—Nobleman with *Hukka* in company of a lady . . . . Delhi School . . . . 19th Century A.D.

—No. 1206—

*Ivory painting*—Nobleman with *Hukka*—two inscriptions mentioning Raja Balawand Singh Bahadur of Banaras . . . Painter’s name Lala Mihār Chand is recorded . . . Delhi School . . . 19th Century A.D.

Page 179—No. 1207—

*Ivory painting*—Nobleman with *Hukka*—Date “1227 Fasli” (=A.D. 1820) recorded. Delhi School.

Page 180—No. 1214—

Painting on paper—lady with *Hukka*. Delhi School.

Pages 181-182—Nos. 1233-1245—

Cut glass *Hukkas* (No. 12—Blue glass, No. 1244—Red glass).

Page 182—Nos. 1250 and 1251—

*Marble Hukkas*.

—No. 1252 and 1253—

*Black Stone Hukkas*.

Page 188—No. 1309—

Silver enamelled *Hukka* with copper base

—No. 1310—

Silver enamelled base of the above *Hukka*. 17th Century A.D.

Page 189—*Bidri Hukkas* (Nos. 1386-1388); 1393-1398; 1400-1402).

Page 207—No. 1597—

*Painting on mica* of a bearded man holding *Hukka* (Patna Style of painting).

In the *Account of Countries round the Bay of Bengal* (A.D. 1669 to 1679) Thomas Bowrey has given us pictures of two different types of *Hookas* with pipes for smoking *tobacco* (see plate VIII facing p. 104 of this Account published by the Hakluyt Society, Cambridge, 1905). These are the only datable pictures of *hookas* in use in India about A.D. 1670.

My friend Prof. Dr. E. Sluszkiewicz of Warsaw (Poland) informs me in his letter of 30th March 1956 that *tobacco* was introduced into Poland in A.D. 1590 by Uchanski from Constantinople in Turkey, where he was then Poland's envoy.

Another friend, Dr. Vittore Pisani of Milan (Italy) writes as follows about the introduction of Tobacco in Italy in his letter of 12th February 1956:—

“As to the introduction of Tobacco in Italy I can only say that this event might have taken place about A.D. 1560. Some years before that seeds had been taken to Spain and Portugal and in 1560 the famous Jean Nicot sent them to King Francois II and to Caterina de' Medici, the French Sovereigns. As Caterina came from Florence and in her court Italians were very numerous, it is possible that through them the plant became instantly known in Italy, where *tobacco* was named after the Cardinal Nicolo Tornabuoni that was the nuncio at the French Court and probably first introduced in Italy the plant that received his name.”

The notes recorded above will give a fair idea about the migration of Tobacco from America to Europe and India. The evidence about the spread of Tobacco cultivation and the smoking habit in India is recorded in the following papers of mine to be published hereafter:—

- (1) References to Tobacco in some Sanskrit Works between A.D. 1600 and 1900. (*Sir Jadunath Sarkar Volume*).
- (2) References to Tobacco in Marathi Literature and Records between A.D. 1600 and 1900.

(*Poonā Orientalist, Vol. XX*).