

Poppy: The Elegant Flower or a Lethal Weapon of Addiction

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Poppy and its plantation had been there in Europe and it frequently appears in the 18th century English poetry emphasizing the point that its extracts were in fact consumed centuries back in Europe. Opium had its impact on romanticism and it did cause an addiction in poets like De Quincey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who represented the era of romanticism. It is said that Lord Byron, Keats and Shelley also consumed laudanum for recreational purposes. The Victorian and the pre-Victorian era were witness to the rampant use of opium and many other addictive drugs.

Gathering green weeds to mix with poppy flower,

They might thy minions crown, and chant thy power.

The word poppy again appears in one of William Wordsworth's works, "Fair prime of life, were it enough to gild." Wordsworth in his poems mostly talks about the daffodils and other flowers in the woodlands, but mentioning poppy in his couplets, reflects that the poppy flower was also grown in the highlands of the then England.

During the 1st World War in the spring of 1915, poppy plant began to grow in the battlefields in Belgium. A Canadian soldier describes in a poem his observation of the poppy flowers that grew in the fields wrecked by the 1st WW as under:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow,
Between the crosses, row in row,
That mark our place, and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing fly,
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

Monia Michael who worked in the Overseas War Secretaries' headquarters in New York during the last days of WW I wore a red poppy flower of Flanders Fields as a sign of resemblance of those soldiers who had died in the fields where the red poppy flowers were to be seen growing sporadically. She later became known as the 'Poppy Lady' as she always used to wear a poppy on her coat collar. Her idea later spread to Australia, Canada and New Zealand who marked and remembered the legend of poppy and the legendary figure Monia.

Poppy is being grown and processed into fine heroin

in the indigenous and unhygienic local laboratories located at the tribal belt of Afghanistan. Perhaps they are paying back the Americans through this lethal weapon. Many are at the back of drug trafficking. This ill breed lot thus controls the entire scenario and have found short cut to easy money making and through this detestable path have siphoned off funds into their private accounts. They seem to have let the lure of money override the conviction of principle.

Afghanistan ranks first as an opium producing country followed by Burma. The poverty stricken people grow poppy in the rugged terrains and plants as it earns them instant cash. Laos, Thailand and Mexico are other countries where the poppy is grown. Lack of security and peace perhaps could be factors why farmers are lured to grow poppy. Illicit production of heroin and metamphetamine earns them millions of dollars and that is why poppy is commonly labeled as a cash crop. These farmers produce the largest heroin in the world. The value of opium is much higher than any other crop and perhaps that is the compelling reason why they grow it.

Heroin/ opium use is prevalent among 0.5% of the world population (1). Heroin continues to be the illicit drug with the greatest associated risk of user mortality and criminal activity (2). In Iran, like other societies, some people use opium for medication and recreational purposes (3). Despite the fact that the eventual outcome is death, still people go for it and it is a big tragedy to say the least.

In a study in Laos, it was found that heroin addicts had more frequent doses of the drug, spent more money for it and needed large methadone doses for detoxification compared to opium addicts (4).

Opium is an addictive narcotic drug acquired from poppy. Heroin is derived from the morphine alkaloid found in opium and is 2-3 times more potent. Because addicts are not aware of the actual dose of heroin, it is but logical that over dosage and death can occur easily. Over dosage can cause bradycardia, hypotension, frank convulsions, coma and eventually death. Many a times these addicts are found dead lying in streets, gutters and awkward places appearing as if they had been looking

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for hide outs to consume the drug and to remain hidden from the law enforcing agencies. Again because of using contaminated needles and impurities in the injectable form of heroin, addicts almost always develop abscesses at the site of injections and as they are left untreated, they finally get septicemia and endocarditis leading to miserable death in the most detestable places.

The ominous signs of addiction can be seen in the society in the form of addicts in all ages of their life. The career of this lot is marred with pitfalls, shattered hopes and unfulfilled expectations. These addicts are frequently seen in the streets in tattered clothes, disheveled hair and dresses, charcoal and dust laden hands, feet and faces, pendulous walk, and look emaciated with signs of malnutrition. These unfortunate youth who have been lured by the temptation to get the thrill and kick of euphoria from heroin eventually find their way lying on the dusty pavements with stubs of cigarettes, loaves of rotten bread, coins that pedestrians have put out of pity and perhaps help, dirty crockery all around them, and having covered themselves with stinky and filthy blankets and garments gathered from dustbins in the streets. That is the final fate of a six footer young adult lying dead in a gutter or in an unforsaken place. Whom should we blame for such an unfortunate tragedy that is being repeated time and again in the cosmopolitan cities all around the world specially those cities where there is an easy access to heroin and other derivatives of opium? The youth is enticed to get a puff of heroin out of sheer curiosity or for recreational purposes and thus get entangled in a whirlpool where he is literally pushed in into the depth of the whirlpool and finally strangulated and suffocated because of over dosage and want of a tiny flow of air. If engulfed and entangled by the euphoric effects of the drug, an escape is perhaps beyond human comprehension and beyond the scope of our present day medical knowledge. It is a perilous situation to say the least and needs the ever watchful gaze of our researchers, sociologists, physicians and parliamentarians.

My central contention backed by evidence is that this appalling situation if not nibbed in the bud would have colossal repercussions affecting our youth and the oncoming generations. Addicts have been springing like mushrooms. When we see them in the streets, it looks as heroin has sapped the life out of them. We should leave our ivory towers and rub shoulders with this dejected and unfortunate lot who are on the rise and who need our all attention.

The poppy flower which looks so elegant and

marvelous in the fields has in fact venom in it and its venom, the heroin has a strong addictive potential because of its strong euphoric effects and if succumbed to it, or fall a prey to it would end in a truly crippling state for which hitherto medicine has no remedy or cure. Its euphoric effect is so intense that there is an unexplainable craving for it and the addict would go to any extent to attain it even if his life is at stake.

We should take a hard line stance against the cultivation of poppy no matter where it is cultivated and who is behind it, and should give the most stringent punishments and impose the highest possible fines for those who cultivate it and those who do drug trafficking. There should be no illusion that poppy's growth is a wrecking problem and to save our youth, all the fields of poppy should be set ablaze. It is only then that we can overcome this ghastly problem otherwise the present growth of poppy would in fact be a mass grave production for our youth.

Researchers should focus on this burning issue and come out with their innovative thoughts as narcotic addiction has been explored less although it is playing havoc to our youth. The issue of addiction is already known but has never been taken up seriously. It would be an epoch of progress in medicine if we can ward off this malady.

All the avenues got to be blocked and stringent measures adopted that the lethal weapon is neither produced nor made available to the youth. Punishments should be reinforced specially for those with the rabid appetite of earning billions of dollars through this inhumane trade.

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