

From:

The
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Complete Guide
to
gentlemen intended for the
CIVIL, MILITARY OR NAVAL SERVICE
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Pages 220 to 228 (The Hookah-burdar, the Hookah, the Kaleaun...)

[...]

The next upon our list is the *Hookah-burdar*, or preparer of the pipe; a domestic of wondrous consequence with many gentlemen, who give themselves up, almost wholly, to the enjoyment of smoking. Some begin before they have half breakfasted; whiffing away, with little intermission, till they retire to rest: I know not of any custom which becomes so habitual! It is inconceivable how distressed some are, in consequence of their *hookahs* not arriving in time particularly when on a march: at such moments, nothing goes right: *Hookah! Hookah! Hookah!* seem to be the three indispensables towards happiness. Some few may plead in apology, that, without its aid, they would be subject to an irregularity, such as rarely fails to induce severe illness: when this is the case, we cannot censure the practice provided it be confined to that duration which may produce the salutary stimulus; and which, it is obvious, must be rather weakened than aided, by the subsequent use of smoke during the rest of the day. To so great an extreme is this carried, that I have known more than one instance of two *hokkah-burdars* being retained; one for the day, the other for the night. Where such prevails, it may be rationally concluded the wages are in proportion: in most services, these may be from ten, to fifteen, rupees per month; occasionally somewhat less, but rarely exceeding; except where excessive partiality for his pipe induces a gentleman to give more, under the common error of expecting satisfaction in proportion to the disbursement. To such an egregious excess has this opinion led some persons, that I have heard of no less than one hundred rupees per month having been given to a *hookah-burdar*. Yet, many

gentlemen, supposed to be judges, were unanimous in declaring, that such high-priced preparations inferior to the generality of those obtained at that moderate expence usually incurred by persons contenting themselves with mediocrity.

In some instances, the whole expence lies with the *hookah-burdar*, who receives such a sum as may, besides his wages, include tobacco, *gools*, (or fire-balls,) and *chillums*, (or sockets for receiving the *towah*, or tile,) on which the prepared tobacco is applied. Some even provide the *snakes*, or pliable conductors!

With respect to the tobacco used for smoking, "*tot homines, tot sententiae;*" in that particular few are to be found of the same opinion: and among those that are, probably more than half are under the grossest deception. The little village of Bilsah, in the Maharrattah country, has been long celebrated, and it should seem not without reason, for the fragrance of the tobacco raised around it. But the quantity of tobacco sold annually throughout Bengal, where it produces from thirty to sixty, and even eighty rupees per maund, (if ascertained to be genuine,) is known to exceed, full a hundred fold the amount of any crop ever raised at Bilsah. The substitutes are various, but one kind, raised in the *Bundelcund* district, supplies the greater portion; many, indeed are of opinion that it is not inferior. May not its excellence be owing to the practice, common in that quarter, of sprinkling the plants at harvest time with a solution of molasses? We know that many fruits yield but little of their flavor, until excited by the saccharine acid: the raspberry may serve to corroborate my position. I have known that very cheap kind of tobacco, the *Cuggareah*, which ordinarily sells for about four rupees per maund, (of 82 Ib.) rendered so mellow, and so fragrant, by being worked up with molasses, and kept in close vessels for some months, as absolutely to be admired even by persons who prided themselves on never smoking any but the true Bilsah!

The usual mode of preparing tobacco for the *hookah*, is by first chopping it very small; then, adding ripe plantains, molasses, or raw sugar, together with some cinnamon, and other aromatics; keeping the mass, which resembles an electuary, in close vessels. When about to be used, it is again worked up well; some, at that time, add a little tincture of musk, or a few grains of that perfume, others prefer pouring a solution of it, or a little rose water, down the *snake*, at the moment the *hookah* is introduced: in either case, the fragrance of the tobacco is effectually superceded; giving ample scope for the *hookah-burdar* to serve up rank *mundungus*, (as bad tobacco is termed,) in lieu of the supposed, or perhaps the real, *Bilsah*.

The *hookah-burdar* rarely fails to smoke of the best his master may at any time possess; which, however highly perfumed, will rarely be strong enough for his gratification: the deficiency is supplied by the admixture of *bang*; a preparation from the leaves of the *ganjah*, or hemp, (the *cannabis sativus*,) and is extremely intoxicating. The leaves of that plant, when triturated with water, compose a drink of the same tendency, known by the name of *subzy*, (*i. e.* green,) which is a constant beverage among the more established sinners, who rarely fail, towards night-fall, to take an ample dose, of either *bang*, *subzy*, or *majoom*: the latter being sweetmeats impregnated with a decoction of the *ganjah*, or hemp plant, much used by all debauchees, and too often admitted within the sacred area of the *zenanah*, (or haram). The use of any preparation of the *ganjah*, or hemp plant, is attended with much opprobrium: like most intoxicating drugs and spirits, they, in the first; instance, excite to gaiety, but; ultimately leave, their victim in the most deplorable state of stupefaction; the recovery from which is attended with dreadful head-ache, ill temper, and hypochondria. Some *hookah-burdars* indulge freely in the use of musk, which never fails, after a while, to produce considerable

derangement of the nerves; and, not unfrequently, that complete debility which is ever attended with the greatest depressure of spirits.

A very common species of debauchery, in which I have known only one or two gentlemen to indulge, is the incorporation of opium with the prepared tobacco, previous to its being spread upon *towah*; a custom so repugnant to discretion, as to leave little room for animadversion, the folly being usually of very short duration, and intermediately, attended with the most abject degradation. Many native princes, and others, who have been hurled from their thrones, or from offices of trust, are said to have been treacherously overcome by means of opium thus Administered: it appears to me very practicable, by such a device, to lull a whole guard to sleep; for few can resist the offer of a whiff when the *goorgoory* (a small kind of *hookah* used by the lower classes) is passing round. Among such trash as is generally sold to the poor, who care not much about the flavor, so long as they can draw abundance of smoke, the opium would probably, if at all tasted, rather give a zest, than prove an objection, to the indulgence. It is asserted, that if a capsicum be put among the *gools*, or be mixed with the tobacco, fatal consequences will ensue; an instant attack of apoplexy taking place. This I have never known to be done; therefore am incapable of producing any testimony, one way or the other: but it appears rather doubtful whether any reasoning, or analogy, could be adduced in support of the assertion; the acrid stimulus would, in all probability, be dissipated, rendering the residue as inert as any other raw culinary vegetable. Admitting it to be true, that a capsicum can produce such an effect, a very strong argument against smoking may be adduced: no man would, altogether, relish the idea of being so perpetually in the power of a debauchee, who might, either through resentment, or by a small bribe, be induced to bestow a *quietus*, without the possibility of a discovery. In such case, the *hookah-burdar* would have all the advantages of an inimical cook, without the danger of his narcotic being detected.

However complicated the *hookah* may appear, it is, nevertheless, extremely easy of construction. I have been told, that one has been made in England; and I have seen a few in use, that were brought from Bengal. The preparation of the tobacco with apples, in lieu of plantains, is equally simple and approved. The *Kaleaun*, or small kind of *hookah*, used on the west coast of India, is certainly commodious: it has a larger bottom, in general, than the Bengal *hookah*; though I have seen some very small, with beautiful imitations of flowers, and of coral, shells, &c. within them.

Some of the real Persian *kaleauns* exhibit considerable ingenuity, and taste, on the part of their manufacturers. In the centre of the interior, bunches of flowers, beautifully colored, far too large, and too delicate, to have been introduced at the embouchures of the vessels, may be seen. Over these the glass, which is rarely of the best quality, though far superior to any I have seen of Hindostanee formation, has evidently been cast, or blown. Many of these artificial bouquets are, however, made piecemeal, as I discovered by examining their construction, after their exterior cases had been accidentally broken: such were found to consist of a cone of rosin firmly cemented to the bottom of the *kaleaun*, by heat; it appeared that the several leaves, branches, flowers, birds, &c. were introduced one after the other, in a heated state, and applied to the rosin, in which they buried themselves sufficiently to retain a firm hold. I likewise ascertained that some models of Persian architecture were combined in the same manner; while, on the other hand, others, especially small figures of great personages, seated on thrones, elephants, &c, were never subjected to that device: in the latter instance, some grapes were, however, joined in the manner above described.

The *goorgoory* is a very small kind of *hookah*, intended to be conveyed in a palanquin, or to be carried about a house; the person who smokes holding a vase-shaped bottom by its neck, and drawing through a stiff, instead of a pliant, pipe, formed of a reed, arched into such a shape as should conduct its end conveniently to the mouth. In this, the pipe is rarely more than a yard in length: it is an implement very generally used by the middling classes of natives; and especially among the women in *harams*.

The *neriaul* is nothing more than a cocoa-nut, with the pipe-stem thrust through a hole at its top, and a piece of reed, about a cubit long, applied to another hole rather lower down. The nut-shell, being half filled with water, the air, or rather the smoke we might suppose would be cooled; but, from observation, I much doubt whether any change takes place in the temperament of either. These little *hookahs*, (for, however paltry, their owners do not omit to give them that designation,) are often used without any reed to conduct the smoke; the lips being, in that case, applied to the small lateral aperture into which the reed should be fitted. One of these usually serves half a dozen men, who pass it round with great glee: it often forms an appendage about the feet of a palanquin, if the opportunity offers for securing it there, without master's knowledge.

The dress of a *hookah-burdar*, in the service of a gentleman of rank, approaches nearly to that of a *chobe-dar*; a *jamma* being generally worn by such, but, in more humble situations, the *courtah* of a *khedmutgar* is common. In the former situation, his office is confined entirely to the *hookah*; while, in the latter, he is generally expected to wait at table, at least, on occasion; but wherever the master, of whatever rank, may go, thither the *hookah-burdar* is expected to proceed, so as to furnish the pipe in due season after dinner, or at any other time it may be required. The ordinary periods for smoking, are, after breakfast, after dinner, after tea, and after supper: such may be deemed regular; and, if no more than two or three charges are used, at each time, are by no means considered extraordinary. I have already stated, that some gentlemen smoke day and night.