

# Hinduism, Lord Shiva and Substance abuse

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*“We have drunk Soma and become immortal; we have attained the light, the Gods discovered. Now what may foeman’s malice do to harm us? What, O Immortal, mortal man’s deception?” -The Rigveda Sambita (8.48.3)*

“Hinduism” has many religious and cultural traditions which gets its origin from the Vedas and Vedanta, the ancient Sanskrit scriptures of India. The tradition, as accepted, has no clear cut beginning, but innumerable beliefs and practices are widely accepted.

“Moksha” or the way to escape the cycle of birth and death remains, for most of the Hindus, the aim of life, through union with the supreme “Brahman”, who is omnipotent. Every Hindu has “Purusharthas” or life goal, and believe that leading a pure life through purity of mind, body and soul is of extreme importance. To attain that goal, one must pursue good “karma” through control over immediate need and pleasure of the senses: sensual, sexual and mental enjoyment, as also cited by Lord Manu in his verses about a perfect man as

*“He who has perfect 3 fold control : that is over speech, thought and actions”.*

Being a “Sanatan Dharma” of non-violence and non-harming, Hinduism, therefore doesn’t entertain use of substance or drugs and alcohol and believes these can harm the body leading to the breach of “Ahimsa”. Karmic energy is a must for the Hindus to get to the ultimate goal or “Moksha”, and

hence any sort of drugs and substances are viewed as a solid hindrance on its path. Meditation and control of mind, from time eternal, has been practiced in Hinduism for total well-being for this purpose. Substances, especially hallucinogens, do the opposite of the meditation and break the chain of mind control. Hence drugs and alcohol abuse is not usually allowed stating that it will lead to bad “Karma” and bad “rebirth”.

As per Hindu law the Brahmin priests are not allowed to drink alcohol as it affects the nervous system, leading to do things which a person normally wouldn't, leading to slurred speech and goes against usual norms. Similarly, hallucinogens can also lead to do things out of the ordinary and at time disastrous.

*“For liquor is the defiling dirt excreted from rice, therefore a priest, a ruler or commoner should not drink liquor” (Verse 11:94)*

Contrary to that, many Hindus like Hindus in Britain and Krishna consciousness believe in occasional substance use depending on another guideline given by Lord Manu stating that

*“Meat eating is not wrong, nor alcohol, nor sex. These are natural actions of living being; but abstinence from such actions is highly rewarded” (M 5:56).*

Hinduism is perhaps is the only religion to have some experience of drugs, dating back to the history. Certain unclear lines within the Hindu tradition are there which depicts use of non-medicinal plant like Cannabis including Bhang, Ganja, Charas or Hashish. Many Sadhus use those to bring on trances and visions. Smoking Ganja or Marijuana can help Sadhus deal with the cold and bodily discomforts perusing life at higher altitudes. Ayurveda also uses traces of cannabis in its formulas for its pain relieving properties. However, many Hindu sects do not accept the use of any type of drug, including marijuana.

Drugs also had importance in rituals in the past. In the Vedas a drug called “Soma” was used as an offering and then drunk by the priests. The Vedic god Soma was the ‘master of plants’ and the ‘healer of disease’, finally bringing prosperity. In later Hinduism, Soma was identified with the moon which waxes and wanes when the drug is drunk by the Gods.

Again views about alcohol vary from time to time, caste to caste, region to region as well. Specially “Tantriks” who aim to get freedom from all materialistic things of the world, use cannabis and alcohol as regular part of their rituals. Overall, it is better to avoid alcohol or drug as laid down by Lord Manu against willful addiction, as

*“He (man) must not get willfully addicted to any object or substance of self gratification; he must try to overcome such dependence through will”*

From the perspective of Lord Shiva who is also known as the “God of the Gods”, substance and drugs also have a different light to throw upon. He is regarded as “cool dude” by the modern youth considering his appearance and lifestyle, way of living alone and smoking his “Chillum” (Ganja, from flowers of female cannabis plant), or drinking Bhang (a milder drink from leaves of cannabis plant). In Shiva temples, he accepts the venomous and hallucinogenic flowers and fruit of dhatura. He receives alcohol as offering in the name of Kala-Vairaba. Is that why the Puranas tell us why king Daksha does not allow Shiva to enter his yagna-shala?

Argument that drugs may be part of Shaiva culture and not that of Vaishnava culture also doesn't stand upon rightly, as Bhang is also an important part of ritual in Vishnu temples, viz, in Jagannath temple of Puri, Odisha and Nathdvara, Rajasthan. Bhang is offered to Lord Balarama, who is also identified as Lord Shiva often in his worship. So ultimately what message do the Gods try to give us?

Exploring this mystery, Hinduism can be looked upon into two distinct pathways, the world outside and inside, or, the home and the wilderness, the spectrum of the householder and hermit. Both Shiva and Balaram are reluctant householders. Hence, the drugs are meant to withdraw from the world and all sensory pleasure. So they are tools for “Yoga” and strictly not “Bhoga”.

Majority of the people looks upon substances for bhoga and pleasure. Being unable to handle social responsibilities and pressures, overburdened by the demands of modern family and society, feeling misunderstood, desolated and unloved, many young people indulge into drugs to escape from harsh reality and thereby helping them construct a more compliant reality. This drug-taking is more a balm to ease the tensions of life and sorrowness of failure. The drug takers no way want to be yogis.

Shiva is yogi who withdraws. However he also participates with the Goddess relating with the world as Shankara and protecting the world from all bads. This dual aspect of withdrawal and engagement makes Shiva, Shiva. Until one can become this Shiva, who helps the world, and does not fear it, it is best to stay away from drugs.

Thus, concluding the brief discussion, the Hindus realize the problem and burden of drug abuse and needs to be dealt with. Seen as a “trendy” for up-

per class and a way to escape the harsh reality of needs for the lower ones, ultimately lead to all sort of unpleasant bane to both of them. Thus, Hindus believe that people who suffers for their bad karmic action and own stupidity should be helped and not to judge them for their substance abuse, which is also modern way taught in the drug de-addiction clinic, for leading them to pursue their responsibilities for family, social and mankind. The modern world prohibits drug for maintain purity of the body which is also against Hindu religion which aims to bring mind under control and then control of the body through mind. Ultimately, drugs may not always appear to be considered inappropriate, but the question of limit comes in, and this, as is often the case in Hinduism.