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By Frenchy

# CHARAS

## The First Concentrate

**CHARAS CAN BE DEFINED AS A PSYCHOACTIVE DRUG MADE BY GENTLY HAND-RUBBING LIVE MATURE FEMALE CANNABIS FLOWERS TO COLLECT THE RESIN.**

The act of collecting resin was born when our ancestor came into contact for the first time with the Cannabis plant. The definite birthplace of Cannabis is unknown to us, due to early prehistoric dispersal of the plant and its ability to adapt to most geographical and climatic conditions; nonetheless we have three potential birthplaces, China<sup>1</sup>, the feet of the Himalayas<sup>2</sup> and Central Asia<sup>3</sup>.

"There is good evidence that most of our human evolution took place in Africa<sup>4</sup> and that Europe and Asia were populated by humanity around 1.8 million years ago<sup>5</sup> after hundred of thousands of years of migration from South Africa to the Euro-Asian continent. Therefore the chance of an encounter between our distant ancestors and Cannabis is likely to have happened sometimes over a million years ago, well before the earliest known use of fire. The time frame of Cannabis discovery is not as important for this article as the actual first physical contact with the plant.

It is literally impossible to collect seeds or fiber from a Cannabis plant without having a layer of resin build-up on your fingers.

The first Concentrate was "born" during that first contact, and will be called Charas in the distant future.

Master foragers, with millions of years of experience, discovering the medicinal and nutritious properties of every plant they encountered during their long migrations from Africa to the Asian continent would, in all probability, ingest some of that aromatic resin to determine its potential.

The psychoactive aspect of cannabis may well have been experienced before the discovery of its seeds nutritious bounty or the quality of its fiber, the most significantly valuable fiber in the history of mankind until prohibition.

Charas is the oldest form of cannabis concentrate; it is the simplest and most effective method to collect fresh resin from the wild Cannabis plants at the peak of its flowering.

This method of production is hardly practiced anymore in Hashish producing countries but remains the unique collecting process in those countries at the feet of the Himalayas: Bhutan, Nepal and Northern India - tropical regions with a high humidity climate cycle.

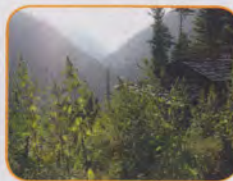
The medicinal and psychoactive properties of the Cannabis plant and its resin have been known for thousands of years in India<sup>6</sup>. It also plays a role in the Hindu religion, especially among the followers of Lord Shiva, "The Auspicious One", ultimate yogi, destroyer and giver of life, source of wisdom and his consort Parvati, "She Who dwells in the mountains", Goddess of Love and Devotion, the celebration of womanhood and the complementary opposite to the ascetic tradition of Shiva and his followers.

The plant is sacred to Shiva devotees, ascetic-wandering monks called Sadhus, whose practice includes having no material attachments in life. They migrate to the many holy places in India and Nepal, mostly living in caves, forests and temples, practicing yoga, meditation and contemplation. They are respected

everywhere for their holiness and austerity. Sadhus use Charas as a form of communion with Shiva who is believed to have sown the first cannabis seed in the Himalayas. They drink a concoction of spices, cannabis flowers and water called Bhang, and blend the Charas with a little tobacco to smoke in straight clay pipes called chillums, using a damp cotton cloth to filter the smoke. Before lighting the chillum they intone the many names of Shiva as a form of communion with a higher plane of consciousness and being.

For most modern connoisseurs, the "Mecca" of Charas today is in Northern India, in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Three valleys are the center of production: the Kulu, the Parvati and Malana.

The Kulu valley has been a summer retreat from the heat and rain of the monsoon months for thousands of years. The Parvati is a smaller, more secluded valley and an old pilgrimage route to the village of Manikaram and its hot springs. Malana, another village found in a remote side valley of the Parvati and Kulu, is totally isolated from the rest of the world: it is situated on a remote plateau by the side of the river Malana, at a height of 10,000 feet. The village is now legendary for its Charas, the "Malana Cream", known the world over for its quality.



Cannabis has been mostly growing wild throughout these territories since the dawn of time; these plants are known to be superior in all their medicinal properties, as with most plants grown at high altitude, between 8,000 to 12,000 feet. Potency can be related to the natural selection of wild strains in harsh mountainous conditions, to stronger ultraviolet radiation at higher altitudes (ultraviolet radiation transforms terpenes into cannabinoids). As

the altitude increases, atmospheric pressure decreases, which affects humans and plants by reducing the partial pressure of oxygen. The human body can adapt to high altitude by breathing faster, having a higher heart rate, and adjusting its blood chemistry, plant's metabolism compensate as well<sup>7</sup>.

Charas was traditionally made from wild Cannabis, known as "jungle"; it was predominant until the late sixties and the discovery of these valleys by the first hippies. Since then cultivated fields, called "baguija", have appeared at an increased pace, so much so that today most of the Charas produced in this area is now "baguija". The potency, flavors and distinctiveness of Himalayan wild Cannabis are unequalled and "jungle" will always be a favorite of local and western connoisseurs. Two villages, Tosh and Nactang at the very end of the Parvati valley, were sanctuaries that will resonate forever in our memories, the beauty and love of the Goddess Parvati is felt strongly in her valley and in the wild Cannabis growing under her protection.



Cannabis plants ripen from early September to late November in the Himalayas, wild cannabis finishing earlier

than the cultivated, so that there are actually two "seasons". Only locals from villages higher up the mountain and a handful of foreigners, that have been going season after season to those mountains, have the knowledge of the choice wild growths remaining and the experience necessary to collect the resin at the peak of the flowering cycle of the plants.

"Returning connoisseurs" would rent a "baguija" years ahead and have the fields left undisturbed to let the plants go back to their wild potential. Cultivated plants 6 to 8 feet tall with branching will become three feet stalks topped with a single flower in a few years time, looking very much like its wild cannabis parents again. The coloration, terpenes profile and uniformity of the plants change as well; the cultivated cannabis being mostly in the darker green shade changes to a full palette of colors, with an array of phenotypes and aromas.

The highest quality Charas, be it from wild or cultivated Cannabis is called "cream" by all "aficionados". Cream is rare and impossible to obtain if you do not go to the fields to make it yourself

and/or hire local "Charas professional" to work under supervision. A hand-rubber will collect between 5 to 15 grams of cream a day, depending mostly on the size of hands, the experience and the location (wild or cultivated) of the plant.

The principle is quite simple: take off the fan leaves, caress the flowers with gentle back-and-forth movements between your hands, clean your hands of all leaf matter and start again until a layer of resin builds up on the palms.

Press and turn your thumb on the most resinous part of your other hand, snap the resin off and repeat the process until your hand is clean and your thumb holds all the resin mass, change thumb and repeat the process on the other hand.

It is a very basic technique adapted to the climate conditions, wasteful in the eyes of a westerner but Shiva's gift is bountiful in the birthplace of Cannabis.

The high of Himalayan Charas is clean, cerebral, vibrant and energizing; it is somewhat comparable to smoking a Sativa strain, with no plateau but different levels of consciousness. An amazing experience.

I recently had the chance to make some Charas for the first time in Mendocino, rubbing only the small loose flowers left over after harvest.

It is actually more efficient than working on totally formed flowers like in the Himalayas and a wonderful-if-unconventional solution to maximizing a harvest.

The plant was Aficionado Cherry Limeade; it took approximately 45 minutes to make two grams of Charas. It is important to prepare your 'tools' so that you will work under the best conditions possible. Hands have to be smooth and pristinely clean; oily or sweaty hands are a major handicap to the process of resin collection.

The plants have to be totally dry from morning dew as well; water and humidity is your worst enemy.



It is also essential to take off leaves with no resin from the small loose buds before rubbing, the concept of working solely with resinous material apply to all type of resin collection.



Roll the small flower very gently between your hands, if you apply too much pressure you will crush the leaves and collect chlorophyll with the resin which could create mold later and will hamper the resin collection. It is important to use the whole surface of your hands, which is a little tricky with small flowers.



The feel of the resin collecting on hand is a unique tactile communion with the Cannabis plant.



The sense of smell goes on total overload, accumulating terpenes on one hand is an unbelievable olfactory experience.



Clean all leaf and flower matter gently after every rubbed flower.



The resin collects faster after a thin layer of resin has been gathered from the first flowers.



The resin always accumulates rather unevenly over the hands, which is mostly due to slight variation of pressure while rubbing the flowers. Every groove and indentation in your hand will also collect resin at a faster rate.



The sensation of collecting resin is a smooth and soft sensory experience until you have to pull the resin of your hands.



Choose the part of your hand with the most resin, press and twist your thumb on the layer of resin before snapping your hand away.



The more the resin collects on your thumb the easier it gets to snap it off your hand. It is a little tricky to transfer the resin to the opposite thumb.



The second hand is much easier to 'clean' because you are working with a bigger mass of resin.

A perfect hand cleaning is not mandatory or if you plan to make more. The second hand will go faster because of the layer of resin left on your hands.



Use coconut oil at the end of the day to deep clean your skin of the resin and give back some much-needed moisture to your hands.

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