



Dear Prof. Shreekumar Varma

Firstly we would like to apologise for the delay in submission of this interview. We realize that it would be futile to try justifying it in any way. All we can do is sincerely request you to not misinterpret this delay as a manifestation of indifference or apathy.

We present to you the outcome of our work. We hope you find it interesting. Please do tell us what you make of it.

Bharat Ram
Debangshu Mukherjee
Pavithran Iyer

Diving into Infinity

“Purple Haze was in my brain,
lately things don't seem the same,
actin' funny but I don't know why
'scuse me while I kiss the sky.”

-Jimi Hendrix-

Evidence of the inhalation of cannabis smoke can be found as far back as the 3rd millennium BC

The most famous users of cannabis were the ancient Hindus of India and Nepal. The herb was called *ganjika* in Sanskrit. The ancient drug soma, mentioned in the Vedas as a sacred intoxicating hallucinogen, was sometimes associated with cannabis. It is also considered as a 'prasad' of Lord Shiva, by itinerant sadhus. Cannabis was also known to the ancient Assyrians, who discovered its psychoactive properties through the Aryans.

Cannabis has an ancient history of ritual usage as an aid to trance and has been traditionally used in a religious context throughout the old world.

Throughout history, artists have been using marijuana as a source of inspiration. Some of the best works of art and music have been born in minds intoxicated by marijuana.

This raises some rather interesting questions:

What is it about that leaf that makes it so inspiring?

What exactly does it do to the mind?

How does it engender artistic and spiritual insights?

We decided to investigate these issues through this experiment.

This interview is a compilation of our interaction with a regular marijuana user, a student of a reputed institution of higher learning.

To make things more interesting, the interview happened while he was "high".

Due to obvious security reasons, the identity of the person shall not be revealed.

Our objective was to probe into the effects of marijuana on the mind of a user.

In this regard, the interview is divided into two sections.

In section one, we explored the factors that motivate a person to get into 'weed'. The subject was sober during this stage.

In section two, we probed into the workings of his mind while he was intoxicated.

This was to gain insights into the way the drug interferes with thought processes.

We strongly believe that it would be a hasty misjudgment to dismiss this as a pointless endeavor trying to find meaning in incoherent babble. This is because unlike other intoxicants like alcohol, which just makes a person dazed and nauseatic, marijuana has much more subtle effects on the mind and thought processes, and studying its cognitive effects could give us deep insights into the working of the mind.

We hope you find it as interesting as we did.

(A dimly lit room. 'Echoes' by Pink Floyd. Starts 'rolling')

Okay, lets start with some basics. What made you try this out in the first place?

Well lets say I was curious about it. And I like to try out new things, so I decided to do this just to see what it was all about.

Is that all?

Well, also, I broke up with my girlfriend, and that made me feel really miserable. And I felt lost, lonely and directionless. All this and a few other unsavoury events made me despondent enough to try giving this a shot, just to see if it could make me feel any better.

Why did you believe this could be a solution to your problems? You would not have known what experiences it might induce in you.

Well I did not view this as a solution to my problems, but simply as a distraction from them. I just wanted to ease the pain a little, at least temporarily if possible. And people around me suggested that it *was* possible. I was told that it makes you feel lighter, your worries appear like distant illusions, and you start seeing things in a new light when you are in that state.

So do you think it served its purpose?

Initially it did make me feel better. It clouded my thinking sufficient enough to at least make me apathetic towards unfavorable things which I had no control over. But nowadays I just do it to kill time and enjoy being in that state. Of course it has its negative effects- like if I dont use it for a while, I tend to become restless and agitated.

How do you think this habit of yours has influenced your thinking style and the way you perceive the world?

Well it makes you doubt the veracity of your perceptions and your mental construct of what reality is all about. It makes you less bound to dogmatic beliefs. Essentially it makes you less rigid in your thinking, because when you are high, you realize that your mind is not as perfect and objective as you think it is, and the abstract mental structures you create, are not as infallible as they seem to be. So you start becoming a little apathetic in your day-to-day life towards all cherished constructs, and you may become a bit cynical too. But it may be good in a way because it makes you less attached to things around you, as you remember that you felt they were all fake while you were "high".

Will I be wrong if I interpret this as an unsustainable, cowardly, and misguided escape route taken when you are not able to cope with the real problems facing you?

It might start out that way. That could be one of the motivations behind trying it out in the first place, and in most cases it is. If you are already fine and dandy, you would not bother getting into all this in the first place. But what I am saying is, its not just about that. When you do it, you realize that the problems which really stressed you out, arent things to be taken too seriously in the first place. There are many more disturbing questions which are much more fundamental. The trivial problems, which you tried to run away from, are pushed to the side, and these more disturbing questions take centrestage.

So do you intend quitting anytime? Or do you want to keep using this as long as possible?

Well I should quit sometime. Ideally I would like to quit once I get out of this place and settle down in a job, say. But I would most definitely quit if I start finding this too repetitive to evoke any significant insights in me. Or if I find some better purpose to devote myself to.

Describe the immediate physical effects that you are able to perceive.

Firstly I am able to hear my heart beat faster. Lips dry up. I constantly feel the need to drink large quantities of water. And I can feel a force trying to compress me. A force which pushes my head downwards, and my legs upwards, effectively pulling me in. And I feel like coiling myself into a ball (*fetal position*). I feel as if every organ in my body is contracting. Some parts of my body feel warmer than others, eg my palms and the soles of my feet. Certain parts of my body ache badly. And yeah, its hard to think. And harder to put thoughts into words.

Isn't this painful?

Yes. It is painful. But it is also pleasurable in a weird way.

Aren't you just being masochistic?

Probably. Putting yourself through this pain gives you a spark of satisfaction. That you are being hardened. And it gives you a hope that you might, at some point, become immune to the effects of pain of any form. And that hope that you are getting somewhere with this, supplies the pleasure. And your mind tends to feel detached. Even though you know it is painful, you feel like taking more of the pain. Everyone is basically a masochist, and marijuana just helps you realize that. Pain is pleasure.

Why didn't the same masochism show itself when you were naturally facing problems in your life? You could have stoically faced them and become harder, right? All without marijuana.

(*Blinks for a while. And laughs*) I guess I never realized that I was a masochist then.

And what happens to your thinking?

You lose conscious control over your train of thought. The train tends to travel in its own direction, and at its own pace. You try to come in the way and it runs over you (*hysterical laugh*). You just tend to flow along with your thoughts, unable to put reins on it. And it tends to explore a lot of alien territory at times.

Since you have less control over its direction, what if the train naturally goes towards hell? As in, what if you meander into the space of uncomfortable thoughts, which would only make you more miserable?

There's always a possibility of that. Sometimes the same depressing thoughts which I wanted to avoid, used to stare at me in the face and depress me even more. And those thoughts are amplified to such an extent that you get terrified. And your mind and body start paining. You feel a surge of negativity flow all across you. So I start with a positive mindset. Telling myself "No. I will exercise conscious effort into not digressing into rough territory."

But I thought you 'enjoyed' the pain. Arent you contradicting yourself at every level, at least regarding the masochism bit?

(*Laughs hysterically*) I guess thats what masochism is all about. It is, in a sense, a self-contradicting concept. But these thoughts are like devils. You may enjoy the process of subduing and hunting them, in general. But you would not enjoy being eaten by them. And if you know that they are too powerful to be hunted down by you, its better to flee. At least until you are confident of facing them. And once you are strong enough to face them and hunt them down, you can proceed towards the castle with the beautiful princess waiting for you. Its like playing a video game. All inside your head. (*Laughs*)

Assuming its a game, what is the goal? And how do you know if you are actually progressing towards it?

(*Silence*) You never know. The goal of the game is to discover it. Its a loop. The way I see it, everything around you, our perception of "reality" as we know it, is just a fog. A colorful fog, which hides the loop from us. This fog must be cleared, for the loop to be perceived. Only the loop exists. Everything else is a mirage.

What exactly is this "loop"?

The "loop" is perceived when you your thoughts start self-referring. Your thoughts tend to recurse on themselves, entering an infinite loop. Which is very hard to escape from. Its like getting sucked into a black hole. Its like **diving into infinity**. There is no escaping the loop. You realize that you are caged. You always were. Everyone's in a cage, but they just dont realize that. Probably because the walls of the cage are plastered with attractive wallpaper which distracts you and makes you believe you are actually free. Thats what the reality we perceive really is. Only the loop is truth. Till you realize that you are in a cage with an attractive wallpaper, you just tend to believe that the illusion that the wallpaper provides is all that there is. But once you find some cracks in the wallpaper through which you see the "real" world outside, thats when you realize your freedom is actually just a mirage. And you start yearning to escape. So subdue your sensory distractions, start perceiving the loop, realize that you are trapped in it, feel the pain of claustrophobia, and try escaping from it. Squeeze through the cage, break out of it, do something. I want to break free. (*Starts singing the Queen song of the same name*)

So why cant I just plaster the walls of my cage with beautiful images, and sit cosy inside, without worrying about what could be outside? What is that "outside world", assuming it exists, is fraught with more peril?

(*Silence for a while*) You cannot do that. Because thats not the way we work. We thirst for freedom. Everything wants freedom. The energy of a sub-atomic particle is high when it is constrained in a box. It is restless. It "wants" to be free. You give it more degrees of freedom, and it gets more and more stable. Fighting for freedom is a basic order of nature.

If you dont know that you are in a cage, then its fine. But if you realize it even slightly, that possibility disturbs you so much that you cannot continue to be cosy in your confinement. Only your fear of danger can possibly diminish your urge to break free. Overcome your fear. Dont let it stop you. Dont let anything stop you. Everything you perceive with your senses is just part of that illusion. Dont take any information gathered through your senses, too seriously. Some of them could be hints suggesting that you have been imprisoned, but most of them end up as distractions trying to make you comfortable in the cage. That is just not sustainable anyway. Truth is in your head. Its always been there and always will. Its just that we tend to fill up our heads with so much manure that the treasure gets buried deep beneath. But its never to late to dig it out. Yes its an effort, and you get your hands dirty. But the anticipation of the treasure, and the knowledge that you are getting closer to it, will keep you going.

If any external sensory information anyway ends up becoming manure which buries the treasure deeper, than why bother trying to gather knowledge? Why cant we just make everyone sit and smoke marijuana?

(*Laughs*) You could do that. Probably it works like this, The more external knowledge you accumulate, the more you realize that you are being loaded with b*llshit, till you reach a point where you just cant take it anymore. And then you start introspecting what you really got to do.

Apart from that, I mentioned that some external information could be used to your advantage. As hints which subtly suggest that you are imprisoned. Art and mathematics do that to you. Music does that to you. Even though they too are part of the mirage, they tease your mind and offer glimpses of the cage and the "real world" you are missing out on. Thats where mathematics and art come from. The realization that something is not right. Mathematics investigates the structure of that cage, while art offers subtle glimpses of what you are missing. My life is all about the 3 M's.

Mathematics, music and marijuana.

(*Uncontrollable laughter followed by awkward silence*)