

# Drugs and Delusion Fuel Extremism

By MANOJ DAS

TODAY'S terrorists are no more modern than their 11th century compatriots of Lebanon at the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. The father of that cult was one Hasan ibn-al-Sabbah, driven out of his country by the Persian monarch Malik Shah Jelal-eddin. A sinister enthusiasm drove Hasan into an almost inaccessible but wonderful valley in the mountains where, with the help of fellow-outlaws, he built a fortress which proved impenetrable for his enemies.

He went on increasing the number of his followers through a bizarre method. Hasan would capture able-bodied youth, entertain them to lavish dishes enriched with a drug called *Hashis* in Arabic. As the captives would pass into a state of near-swoon, Hasan's assistants would transport them into a charming hidden dale. What would they see when they wake up?

They found themselves in "the largest and the most charming garden adorned with gold and all that is beautiful on earth, and also four conduits, each flowing with wine, milk, honey and water. There were beautiful women who played every sort of instrument while singing and dancing. And he gave his captives to understand that this was Paradise".

Hasan alone — notorious as the old man of the mountain — had the key to this citadel of eternal joy. "This lifestyle will be yours after your death — no matter how you die, if you place yourselves under my command", would be the old man's assurance. Who could be that foolish to let go of the chance? The captives would pledge their total allegiance to the old man. Before long, the old man raised a formidable gang infamous as the 'Hassassins' or 'Assassins' — so named after *Hashis*.

Of the several myths the old man was able to float, one was that the Assassins could command the whirlwind and carry it with them. Needless to say their strategy was to follow the course of the whirlwind that broke out frequently in the region. They plundered, massacred and did practically everything the terrorists do today and used religion to justify their acts.

The Assassins unleashed a reign of terror along the frontiers of Persia and Iraq for decades. It was Hulagu Khan, a nephew of the legendary Mongol Chenghiz Khan, who put an end to the menace, invading the interiors of the valley

and smashing the old man's fortifications, one after another. Their remains can still be seen.

The Assassins were killed to the last man, but one of the sons of the old man managed to escape. Years later, when peace settled down, he returned to the nearest town and some people recognised him. "Did you by any chance inherit the key to Paradise?" The young man was clever enough to say, "Naturally".

"What about a berth for me there?" the curious would ask him. Well, the heir condescended to consider the supplicant's case for a reasonable fee. It is believed that the tradition continued for a long time.

But that is beside the point. What is important to note is, the relationship between drugs and terrorism is almost a thousand years old. What is even more noteworthy is that the terrorists who volunteered to die for a cause then (and those who do so now) were not just some brain-washed and misguided idealists. Terrorists are no doubt brain-washed, but they are also silly and self-centred. In their perverted excitement and irresistible attraction for violence, they become oblivious of the fact that they would cease to

exist and would not know the result of their deeds.

Several of them are allowed to wallow in extravagance before they die; they take it for granted, in fact they are rendered incapable of serious thought — they imagine their opportunities for luxurious living would multiply, that fantastic rewards awaited them after their death.

Therein lies the difference between the would-be martyr and the terrorist. The martyr is committed to his ideal, not for any worldly or other-worldly consideration but out of choice. He would never willingly harm the innocent whereas a terrorist finds a vicious gratification in destruction, murder and massacre, either because he is made to believe that such barbarism is sanctioned by his faith or because he is a pervert who simply uses the faith as a pretext. There is of course another category of terrorists, recruited often forcibly, brain-washed and used by vested interests.

Today's terrorists are the direct spirit-descendants of the mediaeval Assassins — brainwashed by a cultist zeal, but promised of paradise in one form or another. Those who took to terrorism under compulsion may deserve some sympathy, but not these new Assassins or their masters.



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