

Cannabis in Traditional Indian Alchemy

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Introduction

It is a great honor to dedicate this paper to Dominik (Dom) Wujastyk, a scholar whose generosity and knowledge of a wide range of topics make him one of the most unique figures in South Asian studies working today. Over the course of several years, Dom and I have shared coffee and cake while discussing politics, religion, cryptocurrencies, and of course, medicine.

I have long been interested in the legality and usages of medicinal cannabis. Since first investigating the subject for an undergraduate research paper, the usage of both medicinal and recreational cannabis has become more mainstream, with legalization and decriminalization across large swaths of the Americas, parts of Europe, South Africa, Australasia, and Southeast Asia. Around the same time I began my early research, in 2002 Dom wrote an article suggesting that “to discuss cannabis is to step into an arena of fierce and lively contest.”¹ Much has changed over these last twenty years, with legalization efforts moving well past just medicinal use and now widely allowing for recreational use. However, the fierce and lively contest Dom identified remains. Discussion of cannabis remains a taboo subject for many people, even as usage grows.²

In this paper, I would like to respond to and provide updates to Wujastyk’s 2002 paper, “Cannabis in Traditional Indian Herbal Medicine.” I begin with the 12th–13th-century medico-alchemical work, the *Ānandakanda* (ĀK), which offers one of the earliest and most complete descriptions of cannabis in either the medical or alchemical corpora. Among the many topics related to cannabis in the *Ānandakanda* are discussion of its mythology, cultivation, associated mantras, medical uses and preparations, and dangers. I end the chapter with an examination of the uses of various terms for cannabis in early Sanskrit works and compare the ambiguities of etymology and usage to some of the terms for cannabis that are familiar to English speakers today.

1 Wujastyk 2002.

2 A study by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that among people aged twelve and older, 17.5% of people used marijuana in 2019, compared with 11% in 2002, with 35.4% of young adults aged eighteen to twenty-five using in 2019, and 15.2% of those twenty-six and older. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2020.

Medicinal marijuana in pre-modern South Asia

Buried within the *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission, 1893–1894*, is a brief report in which G. A. Grierson explores references to hemp in Sanskrit and Hindi literature, specifically the terms *bhaṅga*, *indrāsana*, and *vijayā* or *jayā*.³ Though he mistakenly identifies *bhaṅga* – in the masculine/neuter rather than the feminine *bhaṅgā* – as the hemp plant in both the *Atharvaveda* and the work of Pāṇini, he correctly notes that in early works *vijayā* likely refers to yellow myrobalan rather than cannabis. *Indrāsana* (“Indra’s food”) as a term for cannabis does not appear in the *Ānandakanda*’s list of plants, nor to my knowledge does it appear in the *Rasaśāstra* corpus. Grierson states, without reference, that this term first appears in the tenth century and it’s in the fourteenth century that its intoxicating properties became widely known.⁴ In Jyotiśvara’s 14th-century play *Dbūrtasamāgamanāṭaka*, an ascetic carries cannabis (*indrāsana*), a fragrant and special substance that entices others and appears to have both medical and non-medical uses.⁵ Grierson further alludes to a 16th-century play, unnamed, that associates cannabis with Śaiva mendicants.⁶ He also comments that the earliest mention of *gañjā* appears around 1300 CE, contemporary to or slightly preceding the *Ānandakanda*.

The cannabis of *Rasaśāstra* does not appear to be highly intoxicating, or at the very least its intoxicating effects are not highlighted. The *Ānandakanda* refers to *gañjā* only once as *mā-dayati*,⁷ a term that can indicate intoxication, exhilaration, delight, passion, or stupor. The same passage also describes *gañjā* as that which inebriates or which is nectar (*madirā*). Again, the ambiguities do not necessarily point to a highly intoxicating substance, nor one used for the purpose of inebriation. Modern medical science and the growing legal trade of cannabis products in the Americas and Europe demonstrate a wide variety of effects from different strains of cannabis. Across Europe non-intoxicating strains of cannabis, high in cannabidiol (CBD) but low in tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, the intoxicating chemical found in cannabis), are available in shops and even vending machines. In Canada and parts of the US, these products sit side-by-side with those high in THC in recreational shops.

This is to say, not all cannabis is the same, and it is likely that the plants grown in South Asia between the tenth and thirteenth centuries were quite different from those imagined by writers versed in the effects of cannabis available today, which has been bred to include high amounts of THC for recreational rather than medical use. For example, a 2019 study of ancient archeological sites in Central Asia found that wild cannabis plants had low levels of psychoactive THC compared to their cultivated counterparts.⁸ Without material evidence, it

3 Grierson 1893–1894: 246–249.

4 *Ibid.*

5 McHugh 2021: 271.

6 Grierson 1893–1894: 246.

7 ĀK 15.341ab.

8 Ren *et al.* 2019.

is impossible to know whether pre-14th-century cannabis medicines contained high levels of THC or if they were, like wild strains, higher in CBD, a non-psychoactive phytocannabinoid that remains understudied due to various legal issues, but which is currently marketed in Europe and North America as a treatment for anxiety, sleep disruption, pain relief, epilepsy, and other medical conditions.⁹

Cannabis in the *Ānandakanda*

Containing approximately 6,900 verses, the *Ānandakanda* is one of the longer works of Rāsaśāstra literature. In its thirty-six total chapters, the work covers a wide range of material: from initiation to gemology to the purification of metals. Its fifteenth chapter focuses on thirty-eight divine herbs (*divyauṣadhi*). Important plants include *jyotirdruma* and *aśvagandhā*, a common ayurvedic plant used for a wide variety of ailments, which receives only brief mentions in three verses. By far the longest entry in the fifteenth chapter is the one dedicated to *vijayā* (cannabis), which consists of 186 verses. Apart from the introductory verses (1–3), this is the only section in the chapter that presents a dialogue between Bhairavī and Bhairava. While other sections mention specific mantras by name, only the section on *vijayā* and false daisy (*bhṛṅgarāja*) contain specific mantras.

Mythology

The cannabis section of the *Ānandakanda* begins with the goddess Bhairavī asking about the plant whose rejuvenative use produces ease, knowledge, enjoyment, and absorption into the divine (313–316ab). Bhairava then replies with the mythological origin of cannabis as a substance that is part of the primordial ocean and a natural medicine (318–330). He explains that users include holy persons (*siddha*), sages (*muni*), women, people of all castes, yogis, children, the elderly, the infirm, those suffering from sexual afflictions, and those with many wives.

The *Ānandakanda* teaches that cannabis has changed during the different *yugas*, beginning as white, then becoming red, then yellow, and now green. In its white form it is associated with the *brāhmaṇa varṇa*, red with the *kṣatriyas*, green with the *vaiśyas*, and black with the *śūdras* (331–333). The plants come with one, three, five, seven, nine, ten, eleven, or thirteen leaves. As Dominik Wujastyk noted, the *Ānandakanda* acknowledges that the female plant has intoxicating properties that can cause fainting or delusion (*mūrchā*) as well as pleasure.¹⁰ The male plant is described simply as tree-like (*drumākṛti*).

9 VanDolah *et al.* 2019: 1840–1851.

10 Dominik Wujastyk 2002: 62.

Mantras

The cultivation, processing, and production of cannabis-based medicines described in the *Ānandakanda* requires a series of seven mantras. These are:

1. The establishing mantra (*sthāpana*): *oṃ kṣāṃ kṣīṃ kṣūṃ* reverence to [Śiva], the protector of the world, make, make me strong and give, give me perfection, *svāhā*.¹¹
2. The honoring mantra (*sevana*): *oṃ śrīṃ hrīṃ klīṃ ya ra la va śa śa sa ha*. O Amṛteśvari, make, make immortality, *āṃ hrām kroṃ svāhā*.¹²
3. The thread binding mantra (*tantubandhana*): *oṃ glaum saum hrīṃ*, O goddess of finely calcinated mercury, protect, protect O tormentor of all enemies, *svāhā*.¹³
4. The cutting mantra (*lāvana*): *oṃ klīṃ vaṃ saṃ krauṃ*, O origin of happiness, bliss, and immortality. Grant victory in the triumph of three worlds, *svāhā*.¹⁴
5. The cooking in fire mantra (*agnipāka*): *hrīṃ śrīṃ* one prays for true perfection to Mahākālāgnibhairava, whose body is embraced by the Mother of all *siddhis*, [the Mother] who is sacred speech (*brahman*) [itself], who resolves disease and dries up all misfortune, *hum phaṭ ṭham*.¹⁵
6. The sun baking mantra (*sūryapāka*): *hrīṃ śrīṃ*, to the Sun in the vast sky (*vyoman*), whose body is embraced by the mother goddess (of) Brightness, make much light, *ṭham*.¹⁶
7. The moon baking mantra (*candrapāka*): *hrīṃ śrīṃ* the great Bhairava, who has the spreading rays of the moon. [Homage] to him whose body is embraced by the mother goddess Queen of the Nectar of Immortality, make, make lightening quiver, *hum phaṭ ṭham*.¹⁷

Each mantra has its own set of instructions. For example,

Having bathed and adorned himself in clean clothes and fragrant flowers, the *sādhaka* should venerate Bhairava and Nandi successively on the fourteenth night of the dark half of Phālgunī (February or March) with offerings of wine and meat, enveloping them with red, yellow, white, and black threads while reciting mantra:

11 *oṃ kṣāṃ kṣīṃ kṣūṃ kṣetrapālāya namaḥ savīryaṃ kuru kuru siddhiṃ dehi dehi svāhā* (355).

12 *oṃ śrīṃ hrīṃ klīṃ yaralavaśaśasaba amṛteśvari amṛtaṃ kuru kuru āṃ hrām kroṃ svāhā* (355).

13 *oṃ glaum saum hrīṃ kbecarabhūcaradiviyogini imāṃ rakṣa rakṣa sarvaśatrupramathini svāhā* (357).

14 *oṃ klīṃ vaṃ saṃ krauṃ śivānandāmṛtodbhve tribhuvanavijaye vijayaṃ prayaccha svāhā* (361).

15 *hrīṃ śrīṃ mahākālāgnibhairavāya sarvasiddhimātrībrahmālīṅgitavīgrahāya sarvāpadām śośakāya hum phaṭ ṭham* (370).

16 *hrīṃ śrīṃ mahāvīyomabhāskarāya dīptimātrīkāliṅgitavīgrahāya tejasām nidhiṃ kuru kuru ṭham* (376).

17 *hrīṃ śrīṃ mahāśaśāṅkīraṇavīspārabbhairavāya amṛteśvari mātrīkāliṅgitavīgrahāya viśphuraṇaṃ kuru kuru hum phaṭ ṭham* (380).

oṃ glauṃ sauṃ hrīm̃. O calcified mercury, protect, protect this, o tormentor of all enemies.¹⁸

Here we find seed mantras combined with honorifics and two of the five transgressive substances (*pañcatattva*) common in Tantric practice.¹⁹

The moon-baking mantra (*candrapāka*) offers a more specific recipe that calls for:

- 3 *palas*²⁰ of cannabis
- 2 *palas* of licorice powder
- 1 *pala* of cardamom powder
- 1 Ashok tree root
- 1/2 *pala* of sandalwood powder
- 1 *pala* of sugar
- 1/2 *karṣa*²¹ of gold powder
- 1/2 *karṣa* of camphor

The ingredients are stirred into melted butter, and put in the moonlight on the fifth day of the bright half of a month for a fortnight so that the macerated powder can dry in the moonlight.

Usage

Despite their outward simplicity, Rasaśāstra recipes present a lot of technical challenges, for both the reader and alchemist, largely due to ambiguities of language that make identifying ingredients difficult. The *Ānandakanda* in particular is uniquely complicated because its recipes are often written as lists of ingredients with little information about how long to cook, grind, etc. their many parts. The section's early recipes are written as catalogs with very few instructions, while the later ones are more comprehensive. Despite the ambiguities, however, the basic uses and administration of cannabis and other materials are apparent.

Beginning with verse 380, the *Ānandakanda* takes ten verses to describe the various ailments for which cannabis preparations are prescribed. It grants protections, destroys epilepsy, removes bile, carries away spleen pain, grows knowledge, removes leprosy, increases weight

18 *snātaḥ śuddhāmbāro gandhapuṣpabhūṣaṇasamyutaḥ || arcayed bhairavaṃ tatra nandiṣaṃ ca krameṇa ca | madyamāṃsopabhāreṇa raktapītasitāsitaḥ || tantubhir veṣṭayed devi tanmantraṃ ca nigadyate | oṃ glauṃ sauṃ hrīm̃ kbecarabhūcaradivayogini imāṃ rakṣa rakṣa sarvaśatrupramathini svāhā |* (ĀK 15.355ij–357ab).

19 White 2003: 83–85.

20 Each *pala* is approximately equal to forty-eight grams. Srinivasan 1979: 93–94. Śrīnityanāthasiddha 1982: 255–257.

21 Each *karṣa* is approximately equal to 151 grams. Srinivasan 1979: 106.

and virility, destroys phlegm diseases and great pain, and helps users avoid old age and death. At verse 391, the text shifts to the preparation of medicines, sometimes but not always connected to particular ailments.

Aphrodisiac recipes are quite common in Rasaśāstra works, with entire chapters dedicated to potions appearing in 15th-century and later works, such as the *Rasaratnākara* (Rasāyanakhaṇḍa)²², *Rasamañjarī*²³, *Rasaparakāśasudhākara*²⁴, *Rasaratnasamuccaya*²⁵, and *Rasendrasārasaṅgraha*²⁶. The *Ānandakanda* gives several recipes for aphrodisiacs that include cannabis, including the following:

siddhayoga aphrodisiac:²⁷

1 part cow's milk
 1/2 part water
 equal parts:
 fire flame bush flower
 jasmine fruit
 dry ginger
 cannabis

One then mixes the ingredients in milk, sieves the concoction through a cloth and dissolves honey, sugar, and ghee into the mix. The text gives no further instructions for production or consumption.

kāma pill:²⁸

equal parts:
 tryūṣana: long pepper, black pepper, ginger
 butter tree
 piper chilli
 cāturjāta: cardamom, cinnamon, Indian bay leaf, Indian rose chestnut
 fruit of the three myrobalans
 red grape
 peepul root
 Cuddapah almond

22 Chapters six and seven.

23 Chapter nine.

24 Chapter twelve.

25 Chapter twenty-seven.

26 Chapter five.

27 ĀK 15.420–421.

28 ĀK 15.438–440ab.

large-leaf pongam creeper
cannabis

The ingredients are mixed, powdered, and made into a pill.

In addition to increasing virility when taken three times daily, the *kāma* pill also mitigates disease, removes the three bad *doṣas*,²⁹ and gives strength. When eaten for three days, a person can be endowed with perfection, thus avoiding old age and death.

The *Ānandakanda* also advocates for the use of cannabis to aid meditation and to produce a perfected body (*debasiddhi*). A *karṣa* pill made of the *trijāta* (cardamom, cinnamon, and Indian bay leaf), *trikaṭu* (long pepper, black pepper, and ginger), cumin, and cannabis, eaten every evening and early morning, perfects meditation.³⁰ A powdered combination of asparagus, *trijāta*, *kaṭutrāya* (ginger, long pepper, and black pepper), and cannabis mixed with honey and licked during the first waxing of the moon perfects the body.³¹

Recipes and techniques for reducing the signs of aging and eliminating death appear across tantric, yogic, and ayurvedic works.³² Vanity and an aversion to death may be some of our most human traits, with no civilization in history immune to either. In many ways, the products of *Rasaśāstra* resemble those of what in 2023 we might call the “wellness industry.” This includes exercise (including yoga), dietary supplements and health-focused diets, cosmetics, skincare, and meditation. Cosmetics and skincare are often marketed with the word alchemy or tout the inclusion of gold within products.³³ The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) even warns that some cosmetic products marketed as anti-aging or skin lightening contain dangerous levels of mercury,³⁴ though small amounts of mercury continue to be used as a preservative in mascaras.³⁵ Cannabis too has found its way into the cosmetics industry with cannabis-infused hair, skin, makeup, and even perfume products. The luxury brand Malin & Goetz romanticizes cannabis to market one of its cannabis-infused perfume oils, saying,

Once defiantly naughty, now inescapably chic and always a rite of passage, cannabis has never been more in vogue. Bringing to mind lazy afternoons spent dwelling on a favorite record and the lingering smokiness that clings somewhat inconveniently to clothes, cannabis balances rich, spicy and herbaceous aromas with soft, floral notes of muguet and magnolia. Free of THC but heavy on black pepper and bright bergamot, this apothecary staple grounds higher flights of

29 Likely referring to craving, aversion, and delusion.

30 ĀK 15.446–447ab.

31 ĀK 15.450cd–451.

32 *Kaulajñānariṇaya* chapter five, *Khecarīvidyā* chapter four, the *Rasaratnākara*’s *Rasāyanakhaṇḍa*, *Ānandakanda* chapter six, to name but a few.

33 Shatzman 2022.

34 U.S. FDA 2022.

35 Bienkowski 2013.

fancy with a base of earthy cedarwood, patchouli and sandalwood. Inhale deeply for an experience rife with nostalgia – minus the side effects.³⁶

Like many *Rasaśāstra* recipes, this perfume contains flowers, black pepper, cedar, and sandalwood. The *Ānandakanda* gives several recipes for the elimination of such aging signs as wrinkles and grey hair. Ingesting a *karṣa* pill of equal parts black pepper, long pepper, dry ginger, cardamom peel, cinnamon, cannabis, wheat, and sesame seeds prevents wrinkles and grey hair.³⁷ Another recipe, called “the five arrows” (*pañcabāṇa*), calls for the use of a powdered mixture of bay rum tree, sandalwood, camphor, Ceylon ironwood blossom, cardamom, cloves, butter tree, long pepper, black pepper, and cannabis in equal parts. Not only does the powder remove all pain, but the continued use of it for twelve years destroys wrinkles and grey hair.³⁸

Despite its position as an encyclopedic text of the *Rasaśāstra* corpus, the *Ānandakanda*’s entry on cannabis contains very few recipes that include mercury, gold, or any of the other metal, gem, or mineral ingredients associated with alchemy.

Dangers and effects

Chaturvedi, Tiwari, and Rai note that cannabis does not appear in the ayurvedic classics, pointing to the approximately 14th-century *Śārṅgadharasamhitā* as the text in which cannabis as medicine is most often found.³⁹ These rare textual occurrences indicate that cannabis was not widely used as medicine prior to around the tenth century. In addition to its descriptions of medical uses, the *Ānandakanda* offers a handful of verses dedicated to the dangers and side effects of cannabis use. Signs that a person has consumed too much include reddish eyes, dryness of the tongue, lips, eyelids, and nose, heavy or closed eyes, warm hands and feet, hunger, thirst, and disturbed sleep; stammering and forgetfulness, a confused mind, an extended appetite, waves of happiness, eye-rolling, tranquility, furrowed brows, excessive crying, a hum in the ears, fainting, forgetting, and confusion, and finally vomiting, moaning, rolling on the ground, and a generally miserable state.⁴⁰ The description of these effects indicates at least some level of intoxication was acknowledged but not sought after.

36 Malin & Goetz n.d.

37 ĀK 15.442cd–444.

38 ĀK 15.448–450ab.

39 Chaturvedi, Tiwari & Rai 1981: 33–34. On the dating of the *Śārṅgadharasamhitā* see Meulenbeld 1999, IIA: 207.

40 ĀK 15.486–491: *āraktalocanaḥ śuṣkajibvauṣṭhapaṭatālukaḥ | prathame śuṣkanāsāgra uṣṇakṛc chvā-sapārśvayoḥ || dvitiye kṣinimīlatvaṃ paṭalīkṛtavīgrahaḥ | tṛtiye pādabastākṣidābhakṛd gadgadadhvaniḥ || caturthe kṣutpīpāsārto nidrāghūrṇitalocanaḥ | pañcame gadgadā vāṇi svaproktaṃ vismarekṣaṇāt || ṣaṣṭhe vikāre saṃjāte cittāpasmṛtikāraṇam | saptame karasādaśca debe ca rucirāyate || mahormaya ivollāsā jāyante ca punaḥ punaḥ | aṣṭame digbbramaḥ śāntirbbrūbhaṅgāś cātirodanam || navame śro-trabuṅkāro mūrccāpasmṛtikātarah ||*. Many of these symptoms were confirmed in a widely mocked

Cannabis in Rasasāstra texts

Cannabis as an alchemical ingredient is rare within Rasasāstra literature. Late premodern and modern texts such as the *Āyurvedaprakāśa* (seventeenth century),⁴¹ *Rasajalanidhi* (nineteenth century),⁴² and *Rasatarāṅgiṇī* (1923 or 1924)⁴³ are more likely to contain references to cannabis than those from the pre-Mughal period. We do find a handful of recipes from the *Rasasamketalikā* (fifteenth century)⁴⁴ and *Rasārṇavakalpa* (possibly eleventh or twelfth century)⁴⁵ that mention *vijayā*, which may refer to myrobalan or cannabis. The *Rasaratnākara* (fifteenth century)⁴⁶ and *Rasasamketalikā*⁴⁷ both include *siddhamūli* in recipes.

Cannabis and Yoga Today:

Postscript, or Bhanging on about jazz cigarettes

According to various sources and traditions, cannabis usage on the Indian subcontinent began either before written history, in the earliest medical works,⁴⁸ or approximately 1,000 years ago.⁴⁹ A plant named *bhaṅgā* appears in the *Amarakoṣa* (2.9.20), an approximately sixth century Sanskrit lexicon.⁵⁰ We cannot be sure the word means “cannabis,” however, as the text itself gives us no taxonomical information on the plant, and its synonyms often refer to other plants.⁵¹ The Zoroastrian *Avesta* alludes to the medical use of a plant called *banga*, which today is commonly considered an early reference to cannabis.⁵² Gnoli notes that *bang* (Middle Persian and etymologically related to Avestan *bangha* or *banga*) commonly refers to one of three plants: cannabis, henbane, and datura.⁵³

Following on the work of Meulenbeld, Dominik Wujastyk argues that *bhaṅga* in the masculine or neuter cannot unambiguously refer to cannabis because the masculine form commonly appears to mean “break” or “rupture,” while the feminine form refers to cannabis

opinion piece by *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd who ingested far too much recreational cannabis on a trip to Colorado (2014).

41 Meulenbeld 1999, IIA: 599.

42 *Ibid*: 625.

43 *Ibid*: 695.

44 RSK 4.24, 4.26, 5.4, 5.13.

45 RAK 1.209, 1.430.

46 RRĀ Vkh 12.56–58, 12.75, 143, 14.7.

47 RSK 3.15.

48 Dash 1978: 142–143.

49 Dominik Wujastyk 2002: 56.

50 Chakrabarti 1979: 26.

51 Meulenbeld 1989: 62.

52 Russo 2005: 2.

53 Gnoli 1988: 689–691.

proper. Wujastyk points to the 11th-century *Cikitsāsārasaṃgraha* by Vaṅgasena as the first irrefutable reference to cannabis as an ingestible medical and intoxicating substance.⁵⁴

The *Ānandakanda* provides an early description of *bhaṅgā* that includes mythological origins, synonyms, taxonomy, and usage. As an encyclopedic work of early Rasaśāstra, the *Ānandakanda* is the natural starting point for a discussion of the alchemical usages of cannabis. The names of cannabis given in the *Ānandakanda* describe its various properties. Many occur only within the *Ānandakanda* itself. But we can see from the names the connection of cannabis to both medicine and yogic philosophy. The names of cannabis in the *Ānandakanda* are:

- śivamūla*: the root of Śiva
- vijayā*: conquerer
- bhaṅginī*: breaker of the three types of humoral diseases
- gañjā*: intoxicator
- vimarśinī*: considerer or examiner
- dīvyakā*: giver of pleasure⁵⁵
- siddhā*: perfected
- siddhidā*: granter of perfection
- siddhamūlikā*: root of perfection
- manonmanā*: achiever of mental objects⁵⁶
- cidāblādā*: giver of happiness
- madhudravā*: distillate of the nectar of the gods
- paśupāśavināśinī*: destroyer of the bondage of living beings
- kālaghñī*: destroyer of death
- (sarva)rogaghñī*: destroyer of (all) disease.⁵⁷

Note that each term is feminine, lending further credence to the idea that the masculine or neuter word *bhaṅga* likely does not refer to cannabis. Further, the *Ānandakanda* recognizes that the plant has male and female forms, the female being that which produces the flower buds that contain psychoactive properties. It is the female plant that the text prescribes for curative uses. In addition to being medicinal, the female plant produces intoxication, delusion, pleasure, purity, and union. It is pungent in both taste and scent. The male plant is tree-like and otherwise unnoteworthy.⁵⁸

54 Wujastyk 2002: 56–57.

55 341.cd: *kṛīḍāmodadyutimadakāntidatvāc ca dīvyakā*. It is [called] *dīvyakā* because it gives sex, pleasure, dignity, rapture, and desire.

56 343ab: *manāscintitakāryāṅām sādhanāc ca manonmanā*. It is [called] *manonmanā* because it achieves the tasks that the mind has imagined.

57 ĀK 15.337–338.

58 ĀK 15.335cd–336ab.

The etymology of terms used in English to describe cannabis suffers from similar ambiguities as that of Sanskrit *bhaṅgā*. The term marijuana, commonly used in English to describe the plant in its intoxicating rather than industrial uses, where hemp is more common, shows similar obscurities. The word “marijuana” is the subject of intense debate in the Americas. Various stories exist, including that Chinese immigrants to western Mexico called cannabis “*ma ran bua*, or *mejoranda (chino)*,” which was Spanishized to marijuana and that it refers to the saint Maria Juana.⁵⁹ In the 1930s, former US commissioner for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Harry J. Anslinger, popularized the claim that the word marijuana had etymological roots in the Nahuatl word *millibuan* (prisoner).⁶⁰ Haugen points to the exoticization and racialization of the word marijuana:

That the English word is derived from the Spanish, and that its use was promoted to “exoticize” it (and its users), is not in doubt. What I would like to question here, however, is any connection to the Nahuatl term *mallibua* “prisoner.” While the phonetic forms of these two words are indeed similar, I see no semantic basis for connecting the two terms. The connection of this plant with illegality and hence “prisoners” is something that only occurred later. Therefore, I regard this as a case of accidental homophony and, until additional positive evidence is brought forth, I reject marijuana as being a possible Nahuatl loan word.⁶¹

A Nahuatl root is also historically unlikely, since cannabis did not appear in the Americas until after the beginning of Spanish colonization.

Post-1900s newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times* associated cannabis with mental illness through headlines like “Delirium or death: terrible effects produced by certain plants and weeds grown in Mexico.”⁶² The story claims that, “people who smoke marihuana finally lose their mind and never recover it.”⁶³ Frequently cannabis in the Americas was called *loco weed*, the crazy weed, which was demonized as “an intoxicant among a large class of Mexican laborers ... [and] ... if placed under the ban on equal terms with opiates it is believed the traffic in the drug can be much diminished.”⁶⁴ The efforts to ban cannabis often confused the marijuana of Mexico with locoweed (*astragalus bornii*), a plant native to North America that causes neurologic symptoms and death in livestock.⁶⁵ The California Board of Pharmacy, in a

59 “marijuana, n.” *OED Online* (accessed 13 October 2022), www.oed.com/view/Entry/114102.

60 Booth 2005: 179–180.

61 Haugen 2009: 94.

62 “Delirium or Death: Terrible Effects Produced by Certain Plants and Weeds Grown in Mexico.” March 12, 1905.

63 *Ibid.*

64 Gieringer 2006–2012: 22.

65 Locoweed (*Astragalus* and *Oxytropis* spp.) 2022.

campaign article published in the *Washington Post*, *American Practitioner*, and *Pacific Medical Journal* between 1911–1913 claimed that “the hasheesh of India (*Cannabis Indica*) is almost like the Mexican drug plant” and claimed “the loco narcotic destroys body, soul and mind. Its immediate effects are said to include highly exhausted mental states that last much longer than morphine, and are followed by sudden collapse.”⁶⁶ The confusion between the two plants did little to stop California’s anti-cannabis legislation that connected the possession of opium pipes with extracts, tinctures, and other narcotic preparations of cannabis. The law went into effect in August of 1913. While not targeting medicinal cannabis, the law effectively outlawed all possession.⁶⁷

The linguistic ambiguities that exist within Sanskrit and English proliferate in pop culture and colloquial language use, and they continue to cause confusion among non-linguists who seek to extract the history of its usage. The continued criminalization of cannabis also confuses the issue, with new terms coming into vogue all the time. The etymology of these terms, too, can cause confusion. The 1920s and 1930s in the United States saw the rise of cannabis use among jazz musicians. Popular culture has retroactively assigned the term “jazz cigarettes” to this era, often claiming the term was used within the community itself. However, it appears the term developed in Scotland only in the 1990s,⁶⁸ remaining in use with ironic meaning up to the present day. In fact, among the many terms, jazz musicians have used to describe cannabis, “muggle”⁶⁹ may be the most familiar today, though it’s likely to be associated with the non-wizards of the Harry Potter world rather than Louis Armstrong.

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66 Gieringer 2006–2012: 23.

67 *Ibid.*

68 Wright 1992.

69 “Crime: Muggles” 1931; Louis Armstrong & his Hot Five (1928) *Muggles* (Side two).

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