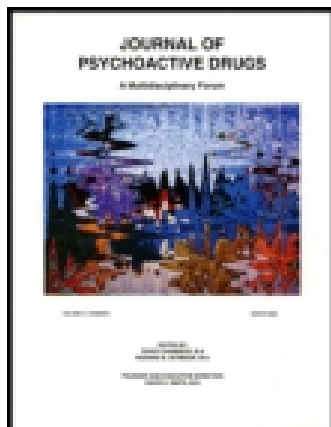


This article was downloaded by: [Australian National University]

On: 15 March 2015, At: 19:22

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Psychoactive Drugs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ujpd20>

Tantric Cannabis Use in India

Michael R. Aldrich ^a

^a The Fitz Hugh Ludlow Memorial Library , P.O. Box 99346, San Francisco , California , 94109

Published online: 18 Jan 2012.

To cite this article: Michael R. Aldrich (1977) Tantric Cannabis Use in India, Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 9:3, 227-233, DOI: [10.1080/02791072.1977.10472053](https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.1977.10472053)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02791072.1977.10472053>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Tantric Cannabis Use In India

MICHAEL R. ALDRICH, PH.D.*

SHIVA TO SHAKTI: "For Thy pleasure, O Beloved! I shall speak of that which is dearer to me than even life itself. To all sufferings it brings relief. It wards off all dangers. It gives Thee pleasure, and is the way by which Thou art most swiftly obtained. For men rendered wretched by the taint of the Kāli Age, short-lived and unfit for strenuous effort, this is the greatest wealth."

—*Mahānirvāna Tantra* 5:5-7

The oldest religion on earth for which we have the complete texts was based on ritual ingestion of a psychotropic drug. The religion is that of the Vedas, texts composed in north India in the second millennium B.C. and passed down essentially unchanged by a remarkable system of oral transmission. The drug was a plant hallucinogen made into a sacred beverage called Soma, the "nectar of immortality" (*amrita*) which gave Vedic worshippers at least a temporary taste of the divine. "We have drunk Soma, we have become immortal, we have attained the light, we have known the gods," sang the Vedic priests in ecstasy. (Keith 1925:168). The Vedas do not specifically identify Soma, but the landmark study by Wasson and O'Flaherty (1971) has argued that it was probably *Amanita muscaria*, the fly agaric mushroom. The mounting evidence that Soma was hallucinogenic is of great importance, for it means that the fountainhead from which sprang the Indo-European religions may have had as an essential element the ritual use of drugs. This surely must alter our concept of the origins of the human religious spirit, particularly in India.

Tantric Cannabis use in India arose in about the 7th century A.D. in an explosive mingling of the doctrines

and practices of Shaivite Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. Tantrism reached its height in medieval Bengal and the Himalayan kingdoms, and may be secretly practiced today. (Several poets and writers in Calcutta told me in 1965-1966 that they were involved in Tantric rituals, but they may have been deceiving me. Professor Agehananda Bharati informs me [personal communication] that at the present time, no one performs the traditional Tantric ceremonies — "they only write and talk about it.") The most important Hindu Tantric text available in English, the *Mahānirvāna Tantra*, was composed about the 11th century A.D. and is still consulted along with more modern manuals (Avalon 1913; Bharati 1970:66). Significantly, the goal named in its title is Buddhist — *mahānirvāna*, meaning the "greatest nirvāna" or liberation attainable — but the text itself is couched in the form of a dialogue between the Hindu god Shiva and his *shakti* (female power), Kāli. The word *tantra* means "that which is woven together." There are three strands of Indian tradition, derived from the Vedic Soma cult, interwoven in the Tantras.

The first is the magical or ceremonial use of marijuana, which can be traced back to the Atharva and is almost as old as the use of Soma. While Soma was the official sacrament, *bhang* (Cannabis) was a special plant of the Atharvan magicians and shamans. The

*Curator, The Fitz Hugh Ludlow Memorial Library P.O. Box 99346, San Francisco, California 94109.

Atharva Veda (11.6.15) mentions bhang, along with Soma, as among five sacred plants employed "for freedom from distress," and also (8.8.3) ordains the practice of throwing hemp boughs into a fire during a magical rite "to overcome enemies" and evil forces (Whitney & Lanman 1905). As in so many other shamanistic traditions of ancient Asia, the earliest use of Cannabis in India was both medical and religious.

As time wore on, bhang became a mainstay of folk medicine, first prescribed by Hindu physicians as an antiphlegmatic agent (Grierson 1894:246ff) and used by Buddhist monks as a remedy for rheumatism (Davids & Oldenberg 1882:57). Thereafter, it appears regularly in medical and religious texts, where it is especially associated with Shiva. In Shaivite ritual practice, bhang is poured over Shiva's stone phallus, the *lingam*, to placate and cool him (Campbell 1894) and is consecrated to Kālī to bring her terrifying energy under control. Thus Tantric worshippers can point to a very long tradition of magical marijuana use, and can conceive of their use of bhang in ceremonies for liberation from suffering as directly related to the Atharva-Vedic use of bhang "for freedom from distress." In fact, the Tantrics refer to their texts as the "Fifth Veda" after the Atharva Veda, and consider them to be the perfect scriptures for this harsh modern age (Avalon 1913:xlx).

A second strand of Hindu tradition is the concept of poison-drinking as a divine act. In the late Vedic period, as the Aryans plunged deeper into the Indo-Gangetic plains, they were cut off from their supply of Soma, which grew only in the mountains. Substitutes had to be sought. Many plants were tested, some so powerful that they were called *viṣa*, poison. A late hymn of the Rīg Veda (10.136) depicts a long-haired, unorthodox sage sharing a cup of such "poison" with Rudra, the Vedic forerunner of Shiva (Staal 1975:197-198). The replacement of Soma by substitutes is also reflected in the quintessential drug myth of ancient India, the story of the Churning of the Milk Ocean. It tells that the gods had somehow lost *amṛita* which gave them their immortal strength, and had to enlist the aid of the demons to get it back, by churning, including the goddess of fortune (Śrī, or Lakṣmī) and the goddess of wine (Sūrya). But as the turmoil continued, a terrible poison came out of the deep. Blazing with fumes, it threatened to paralyze the universe. Shiva caught the poison in his throat and since then has been known as Nīlakantha, "Blue-throated." The churning continued until at last Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods, came forth holding a bowl of *amṛita*. The demons tried to seize the divine nectar and a fierce battle ensued. The

gods finally won and carried *amṛita* back to heaven, their immortality secure. (O'Flaherty 1975:273-280).

This is, perhaps, the only story in world mythology in which gods and demons work together for the specific purpose of producing a sacred intoxicant. Shaivites tell this legend of dialectical opposition to account for Shiva's blue neck, emblem of the divine act of poison-drinking which saved the universe. Tantric worshippers also see here opposites united for a divine purpose, as well as the origin of the goddess of wine, sacred to them but forbidden to orthodox Hindus and Buddhists. Moreover, the Tantric tradition holds that the *amṛita* produced by the churning was the marijuana milkshake used in their ceremonies. Since it gave the gods victory, it is called *vijayā*, the victory drink. These new sacred intoxicants replacing Vedic Soma are thus neatly tied, in the Tantric rituals, with the use of "poisonous," dangerous, or forbidden elements in the pursuit of salvation or enlightenment.

The third strand of Indian tradition is much more familiar, the practice of yoga. Yoga may indeed have been pre-Vedic, but it was not until the time of the Upanishads (about 700 B.C.) that there arose a class of ascetics called *munis* (sages) who forsook the rigid Vedic sacrificial ritual and wandered into the forest to experiment with physical and mental exercises to produce altered states of consciousness. What distinguished Tantric practice is just this profound emphasis on the experimental, or as Bharati says, "experimenting with one's own mind" (Bharati 1970:20). The purpose of asceticism was the acquisition of magical power, called *siddhi* (Basham 1959:244). The classical Hindu treatise on yoga by Patañjali says that *siddhis* may be obtained by birth (that is, by merit accumulated in previous lives), by herbal drugs (*osadbhi*), by incantation of mantras, by austerities, and by concentration (Taimini 1975:377). Similarly, an ancient Buddhist text enumerates five kinds of powers (*iddhi*): those attained by being inborn, by use of herbs (*osadbikṛita*), by spells, by activities, and by meditation (Staal 1975:162). Regardless of the preachings of contemporary orthodox swamis who urge their followers not to use drugs, the tradition of drug yoga is an ancient and honorable one in India, developed to its fullest extent in Tantric practice.

In Bengal, where Tantric yoga reached its height, marijuana itself is called *siddhi*, a pun on "occult powers." Shiva the great bhang-drinker is also the Lord of Asceticism, so in the Hindu Tantric tradition he is the master of drug yoga. Moreover, there is a Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition that the Gautama Buddha subsisted on one hempseed daily during six years of asceticism preceding his enlightenment (Beal 1883:143). Even

hemp fiber is regarded as sacred in Tibet. Because it is so durable, Tibetan monastic histories are often written on hemp paper. These Sino-Tibetan traditions were absorbed into Vajrayāna iconography, where the Buddha is sometimes depicted with sharply serrated "Soma leaves" in his begging bowl. Thus Buddha's asceticism as well as Shiva's is associated with Cannabis in Tantric belief.

Sex yoga developed concurrently with drug yoga in the late Vedic period. The Chandogya Upanishad compares the sexual act to a Vedic fire-sacrifice: "The woman is the fire, her womb the fuel, the invitation of man the smoke. The door is the flame, entering the ember, pleasure the spark. In this fire gods form the offering" (Archer 1963:21). The Kāma Sūtra and Ananga Ranga eloquently detail Hindu sexual techniques, and the Tantras transform such sexual practices into a means of meditational yoga. Marijuana fits into sex yoga as well, for in Hindu folk medicine it is the aphrodisiac *par excellence*. Shiva is Lord of both asceticism and eroticism, a seeming paradox about which volumes have been written (O'Flaherty 1973). It is resolved in Tantric tradition by the unity in practice (*sādhana*) of yoga with *bhoga* (sensual pleasures). The Kūlārṇava Tantra says succinctly: "In the Kaula (Shaivite Tantric) doctrine, *bhoga* turns into yoga directly. What is sin (in conventional religion) becomes meritorious. *Samsāra* (worldly involvement) becomes Release" (Ibid:258). Thus *bhoksha* (sexual enjoyment), sublimated by rigidly prescribed Tantric practice, produces *moksha* (release or liberation). The key word here is practice, for it is emphasis on ritual methodology (*sādhana*) in the laboratory conditions of Tantric worship, rather than doctrine, which distinguishes it from other yogic traditions.

Tantric practice brings together these elements – the ceremonial use of marijuana, the conscious employment of "poisonous" or dangerous substances, and the practices of drug and sex yoga – into a fully developed system for achieving *māhānirvāna*. Tantric practice is difficult and dangerous because it involves breaking through the deepest taboos of orthodoxy, such as taboos on eating meat, drinking wine, and incest. It turns conventional yoga, which requires complete sexual abstinence, inside out and uses five essential elements (*pañcamakāra*) as a means to liberation. The five M's, so called because each begins with the letter M, are liquor or wine (*madya*), fish (*matsya*), meat (*māmsa*), parched grain (*mudrā*), and sexual intercourse (*maithuna*). If these elements are materially or literally used, it is called "left-handed" practice. If they are taken metaphorically and substitutes (such as milk instead of

wine) are used, it is called "right-handed" practice.

Because the use of pleasure-producing agents for the purpose of transcending desire for pleasure is risky, every Tantric text warns that its rituals are not to be undertaken without formal initiation into a Tantric order, and are not to be practiced except under the guidance of an experienced guru. The choice of paths, right-handed or left-handed, is determined by the worshipper and the guru together, who take into account the worshipper's attitude. He may be inexperienced or ill-prepared for advanced practice and is thus considered *pasbu*, "animal-like." Or he may be a *vīra*, "hero," fit for literal left-handed practice, or *divya*, "god-like," an experienced adept whose entire life is his *sādhana*, a concept very close to that of the *bodhisattva* of Māhāyāna Buddhism.

Both Hindus and Buddhists, and for that matter persons raised in other religions, may become students of Tantric practice once they are initiated by a Tantric guru. Though the texts conventionally speak of male students (*sākhakas*), women students (*sādhakīs*) are welcome and indeed may be required in advanced practice. Some texts, including the Mahānirvāna Tantra, say that sexual intercourse should be performed only with one's married spouse; others say the partners need not be married, and even that persons related to each other may be partners, which breaks the incest taboo. As in Buddhism, but unlike conventional Hinduism, caste rules are ignored in Tantric *sādhana*. There are, however, differences of emphasis in Hindu and Buddhist Tantric doctrine. In Hindu Tantrism, the female energy (*śakti*) is dynamic and paramount: the male is passive and takes all his vitality from the *śakti*. In Shaivite Tantric iconography, Shiva is often depicted as *śava*, a corpse which can be brought to life only by unity with the Goddess. In Buddhist Tantra it is just the opposite: the male is active and assumes the dynamic role of compassion, while the female is the passive embodiment of wisdom (Blofeld 1970:81; Avalon 1913; Bharati 1970). In both traditions, however, the purpose of the ritual is to unite worldly involvement (*samsāra*) with the extinction of worldly desires (*nirvāna*). In the unity of the phenomenal and the absolute lies liberation. To sum up, "All tantrics flout traditional, exoteric orthodoxy, all put experiment above conventional morality . . . all agree that their specific method is dangerous, and radical, and all claim that it is a shortcut to liberation" (Ibid.:21).

Now let us take a look at advanced Tantric *sādhana* in the "heroic" (*vīra*) mode. The most dangerous left-handed ceremonies usually begin at midnight. However, the Mahānirvāna Tantra ceremony (which

contains a full description of the marijuana consecration ritual), begins just before dawn (Avalon 1913; Bharati 1970). In the second half of the last quarter of the night, the *sādhaka* awakes, shakes off drowsiness, sits straight up in bed, and immediately meditates on his guru in the thousand-petalled lotus in his head. The teacher is imagined in company with his Shakti embracing him, and to this couple the *sādhaka* mentally offers flowers and the appropriate mantra. The student then chants the seed-syllable AING from ten to 100 times, and proceeds to worship his own *Ishta-devatā* (the particular deity the particular disciple worships) in a similar fashion, offering flowers, incense, candles, libations, and mantras. In this case the deity is Kali: "I bow to thee again and again, Original Kali, both Creatrix and Destructress."

Only then does the worshipper arise. Placing his left foot on the floor first (left being the auspicious side in Tantrism), he goes to the bathroom, cleanses his teeth, and proceeds to the ritual bath, which may be in a river, a tank, or beneath a simple faucet. The ritual ablution is complex and involves much chanting, meditating, drawing diagrams on the water, and so forth. Its purpose is to center his thoughts as much as to cleanse his body. Leaving the water, the worshipper ties up his hair, dries his body, and puts on two pieces of clean cloth; marks his forehead with the Tilaka (sectarian mark) — which in the case of this Shaivite is three horizontal lines — and proceeds to perform early morning prayers in a particularly Tantric way, invoking the powers of the sacred rivers into the jar of water in front of him. The Tantric *sādhaka* meditates on these rivers as channels within his own body. He draws water into the left nostril, expels it from the right nostril into his palm, and dashes it against an imaginary *vajra* (diamond thunderbolt). To an outside observer, this might seem simply an extraordinary way of blowing his nose. To the *sādhaka*, this gesture washes away all inward impurity. His every action from the moment he wakes is invested with sacredness as the *sādhaka* purifies himself in preparation for the rite. Pronouncing the weapon-mantra PHAT!, he drives sin out of his body, and pours water over his hand.

After offering a libation to the Sun, he meditates on the goddess Gāyatrī (sarasvatī, speech) with the Gāyatrī mantra, one of the oldest Vedic mantras, along with mantras to the gods, sages, ancestors, and his own chosen deity. The early morning prayers close with pouring of water back into its source, the pond or tank or river, with appropriate mantras. This is a sacrificial ritual which returns the lesser or particular element (drops of water) into the greater or general element from which it sprang.

Then the *sādhaka* bows to the great goddess (Devī), takes such water as is needed for the worship, bowing to the water from which he has drawn it, and proceeds to the place of worship, "earnestly meditating on and reciting hymns of praise to the Devī meanwhile." The place of worship may be a temple, a private house, or even a graveyard: some appropriate place designated by the leader of the ceremony. Upon arrival, the worshipper draws a prescribed diagram in front of the door, places his jug of water in the diagram, again invoking the sacred rivers into it and chanting mantras to Sun, Moon, and Fire in the water. The gods of the entrance are worshipped, starting with Ganesha (Shiva's elephant-headed son) as the Remover of Obstacles. The *sādhaka* then lightly touches the left part of the door-frame and enters the place of worship left foot forward, meditating the while on the lotus-feet of the Goddess.

Once inside, the devotee worships the presiding deities of the place and picks the spot where he will sit, cleansing the site with water, gazing unblinkingly in front of himself (the "celestial gaze" with eyes half-open, a hallmark of elementary yoga), and reciting the weapon-mantra PHAT! to drive away evil. Striking the ground three times with his heel and lighting specially-selected incense, the *sādhaka* marks off a triangular space inside a rectangle, and worships this seat by the *Kāmarūpa nama* mantra.

Kāmarūpa is a shrine in Assam where according to mythology the Goddess's sexual organ (*yoni*) landed when she was sacrificially dismembered. This mantra allows the *sādhaka* to draw the Goddess's sexual energy into the spot where he will sit. Spreading a mat of sacred grass over this spot, he worships the shakti of the seat and of the lowest center of his body, connecting himself to this spot, and sits down either in lotus position or in the "hero posture" (*vīrāsana*: oversimplified, it is one foot on the ground, the other on the opposite thigh), facing East if it is daytime, North if at night.

These procedures have been described in detail (though not as much as in the Mahānirvāna Tantra) to provide a sense of the intricacy of these preparations in which total attention is concentrated on the slightest action or thought. The *sādhaka* is carefully focussing and gathering his energies for the ritual to come. His next step is to consecrate the marijuana milkshake, *vijayā*, to the Goddess.

VIJAYA — GRAHANA

The *vijayā* he will use is already prepared. The Tantric texts do not give recipes for this potion but assume that the adepts know how to make it. Sometimes it is only a little round green ball of moistened bhang in

milk or water; more often, at least in contemporary India, it is a delicious marijuana milkshake flavored with almonds, pepper, cardamon, poppy seeds, and other spices. The sādḥaka takes a bowl of vijayā and places it on the "foundation," i.e. the equilateral triangle drawn on the ground or floor as a protective mandala in front of him. To purify the drug and consecrate it to his chosen deity (in this case Kālī), he recites the following mantra for the consecration of vijayā: OM, HRIM, AMRITE, AMRITODBHAVE AMRITA-VARSHINI AMRITAM ĀKARSHAYĀ-KARSHAYĀ: SIDDHIM DEHI: KĀLIKĀM ME VASHAM-ĀNAYA: SVĀHĀ. In this mantra, OM is the seed-syllable for the crown chakra at the top of the head; HRIM is the māyā-vīja, a seed-syllable of the illusory phenomenal universe, the goddess and temptress *śakti*. AMRITA is the nectar of the gods, here meaning the vijayā itself; SIDDHI is "occult power," also meaning the marijuana milkshake; and SVĀHĀ is the closing phrase of this type of mantra, i.e. "so be it." The mantra means: "OM, HRIM, Immortal Nectar, who rises from nectar, who showers nectar, attract nectar again and again; bestow magic power upon me; bring Kālī into my power; so be it."

Silently repeating his own personal mantra seven times, the sādḥaka then makes the following specified gestures (*mudrās*) over the bowl of vijayā; the cow-mudrā, yoni-mudrā, calling-in mudrā for invoking and welcoming, the fixing-mudrā which fixes something in place, the hypostasizing-mudrā which places holiness in a seat, the obstructing-mudrā which repels evil forces, and the confronting-mudrā which brings the worshipper and the vijayā face to face with the deity. These magical gestures bring the power of the Goddess into the marijuana.

The sādḥaka then meditates on the guru in the thousand-petalled lotus at the top of his head with the mantra, "AING, O Lord of Bliss, I offer this libation to the foot-stool of the guru, obeisance to him." While mentally reciting this mantra, the worshipper raises the vijayā-bowl to his forehead three times with a specific gesture the bowl three times to offer the bhang to the Devī in his heart; and again, raises the bowl while chanting the mantra to the goddess of speech, Sarasvatī: "AING, speak, speak, O Speaker of Speech, Thou who brings all truth under control, remain ever on the tip of my tongue." He then drinks the vijayā from the bowl.

With that last mantra, the worshipper is drawing the energy of Kundalinī, the goddess in the form of a coiled serpent in the lowest center of his body, up into the realm of Sarasvatī, the tip of his tongue, to receive the offering of vijayā. By drinking the milkshake, he is sacrificing it to the Goddess and, as he had done before

with purifying water, is symbolically pouring the particular offering back into the cosmically pervasive receptacle from which it came (Bharati 1970:261).

After drinking the vijayā, he bows to the guru, placing his folded palms over his left ear; then to Ganesha, placing his folded palms over his right ear; and lastly to the Eternal Original Goddess, placing his folded palms in the middle of his forehead, meditating meanwhile on the Goddess. This concludes the consecration and offering of the marijuana to the Goddess, and the sādḥaka busies himself with arranging the conventional articles of worship (milk, flowers, etc.) on his right, and the Tantric articles (wine, etc.) on his left, and purifying them with sprinkles of water and appropriate mantras. He then "fences the quarters," protecting this area with gestures and chants so that no obstructions can intrude.

He then performs a ritual called *Bhūta-shuddhī*, the cleansing (*śuddhi*) of the elements of which the body is composed (*bhūta*). This is an imaginary, mental, rapid arousing of the Kundalinī force in himself, guiding it (or her) progressively up the energy centers of the body, dissolving the elements of each chakra into the next higher energy center. He thinks of "an angry black man in the left side of the cavity of his abdomen the size of his thumb, with red beard and eyes, holding a sword and shield, with his head held low, the very image of all sins." This image of evil is burned up with breathing exercises, inhaling through the left nostril for 16 counts and holding the breath for 64 counts. Then the burnt body of evil is purified or "bathed in nectar" while the worshipper exhales for 32 counts. "Having thus bathed the whole body from feet to head, let him consider that a Deva body has come into being," i.e. his body has been purified and he is on his way to becoming a mangod, a divine human.

When marijuana is taken orally in high doses, it takes about an hour for the full effects to be felt. But in this mental *Bhūta-shuddhī* ritual are the beginnings, the first *frissons*, of the high. This quick run-through of Kundalinī yoga certainly helps bring on the high, and vice-versa: drinking bhang facilitates the meditation. The sādḥaka has not eaten for 24 hours before the ceremony, and the "image of sin" in the abdomen may have something to do with the interior rumblings and queasiness which often occur when one has drunk a large amount of bhang on an empty stomach. If one imagines the sādḥaka starting to get high, the rest of the purificatory rites are more comprehensible. These consist of several types of *Nyāsa*, that is, placing the tips of the fingers and the palm of the right hand on various parts of the body to infuse it with divine life. Beginning

with the *So'bang* mantra "I am He," which announces that the worshipper is beginning to feel the godhood within himself, the *sādhaka* places the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, sacred to the Goddess, on his own body with seed-syllables and gestures appropriate to each letter. In so doing he places the qualities of the Goddess – auspiciousness, victory (*vijayā*), grace, etc. – in himself and transforms himself into a divine human worthy of taking part in the second half of the ceremony.

The description of the second or "superior" portion of the rite will be less detailed. It consists of the formation of the *chakra* or circle of male and female worshippers, the Shivas and Shaktis, each woman on the left of her male partner. The site is worshipped, and the circle itself is worshipped, after which the five M's, the articles of worship, are consecrated. The vessels containing each element are purified and the wine, fish, meat, and parched grain are placed in the center of the circle within reach of the participants. The leader of the ceremony and his shakti also usually sit in the center, representing the paradigm divine couple in the center of the crown *chakra* in every participant's head. (Each participant's personal guru is not able to be present on all occasions, so the senior *sādhaka* and *sādhakī* must take their place.) The ingredients of worship are meditated upon and consumed one by one, with divine power invoked into them with ceremonies similar to that for consecration of *bhāṅg*. The meditation on the wine goddess in the *Kaulāvālī Nirṇaya* is particularly beautiful:

O Thou (Goddess) who was churned from the milk ocean, the best (product of) that ocean; there the Goddess 'liquor' (*Sūrya*) was born, assuming the form of a virgin; her countenance white as cow-milk, (she) emerged from the nectar. Having eighteen arms, lotus-eyed, born on the summit of bliss (whence also originated) bliss as Mahesvara. From their union comes forth Brahmā, Vishnu, and Shiva. Therefore I drink Thee with my total personality, Goddess of Wine.

(Bharati 1970:259)

As the *sādhaka* raises the wine to his lips, he repeats the transcendentalizing ritual we have already seen with drinking *vijayā*: he mentally draws up the Kundalinī energy to the tip of his tongue, and offers the libation to the Goddess there. In the state of exaltation brought on by the marijuana and the concentration rituals, the Tantric "hero" does not regard himself as separate from the object of worship or the divinity mediated upon; rather, he becomes it.

Ultimately, the *sādhaka* is merely the vehicle by which the goddess in the wine, for example, unites with the goddess Kundalinī in himself. This is the very special Tantric sense in which to sacrifice wine, fish, meat, or grain to the Goddess is to eat it oneself. This ritual is repeated for the consumption of the Tantric sacraments.

So too with *maithūna*, ritual copulation. If the woman partner is herself a *sādhakī*, she has been going through the same preparatory purifications as the man. If not, she must be specially prepared with certain procedures: the *sādhaka* bathes her, scents and combs her hair, adorns her with cosmetics, and seats her on a purified bed or couch. He performs *Nyāsa* on her body, touching her forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, arms, and thighs while pronouncing the Sanskrit letters. If she has never partaken of the five M's, he feeds her betel-nut, touches her pudenda for an instant, and utters the most intimate seed-syllable of the Goddess, AING, one hundred times. Then the text says: "Viewing the Shakti as Gaurī (the spouse of Shiva), and himself as Shiva, he should pronounce the root-mantra of his chosen deity and should offer the father-face into the mother-face" (Ibid.:264). Bharati offers the comment – as if we hadn't guessed – that kissing is not what is meant.

During the sex act, the worshipper recites this verse: "OM, Thou Goddess resplendent by the oblation of dharma and non-dharma, into the fire of the self, using the mind as a sacrificial ladle, along the path of *sushūmnā* (the central duct of the yoga-body), I who am engaging in harnessing the sense-organs, constantly offer (this oblation)." Continually meditating on the oneness of Shiva and Shakti, and (mentally) repeating the letters of the alphabet, the *sādhaka* continues. In the end, the male "abandons his sperm" with the mantra, "OM, with light and ether as my two hands, I, exulting one, relying on the ladle, I, who take dharma and non-dharma as sacrificial ingredients, offer (this oblation) lovingly into the fire, Svāha" (Ibid.:264-265). In fact, texts differ on whether the man should "abandon his sperm" at all: Buddhists instruct the worshipper to retain it, while some Hindu texts call for ejaculation. It depends partly on the path the *sādhaka* follows, and on his yogic ability. The point, in either case, is to prolong intercourse for as long as possible – hence all the reciting of the Sanskrit characters and so forth – to build up the tremendous sexual energy thereby generated until the couple is surrounded with a golden fiery aura, a much-prolonged and not-genitally-specific *coming*, a sense of divine unity. Sparks shower for hours in this cosmic dance, the brain melts away, and liberation – *mahānirvāna* – is experienced.

Most books about Tantrism are coy about the role of marijuana in this ceremony, and some don't even mention the central role of vijayā in Tantric ritual. Bharati alone among dozens of writers has noticed the time that elapses between the drinking of vijayā in the first half of the rite, and the climax of the ceremony in the second half. It is about an hour and a half, "just long enough to get really 'high' on the drug . . . This is very important in the Indian scene, where the spiritual postulant has to overcome enormous cultural inhibitions" (Ibid.:251). So that is one aspect of bhang use: it is a disinhibitor. But there are deeper reasons for its use.

The way it is used indicates something about its role. The Tantric practice is not a matter of "Hey let's go get stoned and screw." Rather, from the moment of first awakening, the sādḥaka's every action is intentionally made sacred and intensified. After the vijayā is drunk, attention is paid to each bodily sensation as it occurs, particularly in the *Bhūta-shuddhi* cleansing of the bodily elements which I think is the ceremonial manifestation of the sādḥaka's awareness of the first shivers of being high. Then he wondrously touches the parts of his body with Nyāsa, fusing his being with divinity. As he starts to feel higher and higher, going through carefully selected rituals for consecrating the five M's, the vijayā functions as a sense-heightener, a euphoric booster of awareness. In this heightening of feelings and awareness, rather than as a mere disinhibiting agent, vijayā is essential to the ceremony. The entire *sāḥkṛā* could be performed without it, of course — but then it would not be this ritual at all: it would be some other, perhaps "right-handed" or symbolic way, like performing a peyote ceremony without the cactus.

Large oral doses of marijuana are truly hallucinogenic. Vast and celestial visual hallucinations occur which, in this ceremony, are directed: different gods and goddesses are imagined during specific portions of the ritual. Suggestibility is increased, and this can be very valuable when following the strictly delineated series of exercises which comprise this ceremony. Moreover, a common hallucination induced by large doses of cannabis is time and space distortion: minutes seem like hours, small rooms yawn into deep caverns, and every activity is imbued with a sense of timeless grandeur. On the stage set for the performance of these rites, the worshipper's "set and setting" is made optimal for its purpose. The place reeks with incense, beautiful flowers abound, the light from temple lamps flickers softly, and

the participants are beautiful and clean, intent upon mystical experience. In such conditions the marijuana high augments the practice of Kundalinī yoga and vice versa. It seems an ideal way to attain a sense of one's own divinity through euphoric experimentation with the powers of one's mind. Indeed, the use of high-dose marijuana coupled with Kundalinī yoga may even help the male worshipper retain his sperm, and make him aware of the presence of the Goddess within himself. More importantly, in the ecstatic union of the human and the divine represented by this ritual, the sense of self is transcended by both partners. The role of cannabis in Tantric ceremony is thus to enable the worshippers to feel the divinity within and without themselves.

REFERENCES

- Archer, W.G. 1963. *The Kāma Sūtra of Vatsyayana*. Burton Translation. New York: Capricorn Books.
- Avalon, A. (Sir John Woodroffe). 1913. *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahāirvāna Tantra)*. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications (1972).
- Basham, A.L. 1959. *The Wonder that was India*. New York: Grove Press.
- Beal, S. 1883 (reprinted 1966). *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan King*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Bharati, A. 1970. *The Tantric Tradition*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Blofield, J. 1970. *The Tantric Mysticism of Tibet*. New York: Dutton.
- Campbell, J.M. 1894. Note on the Religion of Hemp. *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report*. Reprinted in 1969 *Maribuan: Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission 1893-1894*. Thos. Jefferson Publishing Co.: Silver Spring, Md.
- Davids, T.W.R. & Oldenberg, H. 1882. (Reprint 1965) *Vinaya Texts*, (Mahavagga 6.14.3.) Part 2. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Grierson, G.A. 1894. Note on References to the Hemp Plant Occurring in Sanskrit and Hindi Literature. *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report*, Vol. 3, Appendices.
- Keith, A.B. 1925. *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. Pt. I, Harvard Oriental Series 31: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. (Rig Veda 8.48.3.)
- O'Flaherty, W.D. 1973. *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Shiva*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- O'Flaherty, W.D. 1975. *Hindu Myths*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Staal, J.F. 1975. *Exploring Mysticism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Rig Veda 10.136.)
- Taimini, I.K. 1975. *The Science of Yoga* (Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras). Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publication House. (Sūtra 4.1.)
- Wasson, R.G. & O'Flaherty, W.D. 1971. *SOMA: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Whitney, W.D. & Lanman, C.R. 1905. *Atarva-Veda Samhitā*. Harvard Oriental Series 7 & 8. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.