



## Social, religious, recreational and medicinal usage of cannabis in India and Thailand

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### Abstract

Cannabis usage is controversial both in India and Thailand. Cannabis has a history of social, religious, recreational and medicinal usage dating back centuries. This article, based on literature review, focuses on the history of cannabis usage in India and Thailand in order to highlight the importance of more research regarding the medicinal use of cannabis in oncology in different countries as India and Thailand. As more countries approve cannabis use for therapeutic uses, physicians need to research more information regarding the risks and benefits of use. Hence the present article reviews the history, the importance of cannabis usage in different societies from the past to the present. There is difference in the form of cannabis usage between India and Thailand in the past as it was used for social, religious and medicinal purpose in traditional India. On the other hand, in Thailand, it was used mostly for recreational culture and industrial purpose. One similarity of the two countries at present is in the medicinal usage. Both countries are trying to legalize the use of cannabis for medical research and medicinal purposes. On the whole, more research should be done with the legalization of cannabis usage for therapeutic purposes and research in medical science.

**Keywords:** cannabis usage, (social, religious, recreational and medicinal), India, Thailand

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### 1. Introduction and Historical Background

In recent decades, people have been affected by various kinds of incurable common diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, insomnia and so on. This made medical scientists, oncologists and doctors to turn their attention on a herb called “*cannabis*”, also known as *marijuana* for therapeutic use. *Cannabis/marijuana* plant is unique in the world as it produces chemical cannabinoids or psychoactive drug called THC. THC stands short for tetra-hydro-cannabinol, which is a chemical compound found in the cannabis plant. It produces chemical effects in the brain via cannabinoid receptors when it is taken through ingestion or inhalation. The cannabinoid compound when used in low dosage helps to reduce pain, aggression, nausea etc. and at the same time stimulates appetite. When consumed in higher dosage, it may cause intoxicating effects also called the “high” commonly associated with marijuana, the effect of it causes change in one’s perception of time and space, and feelings of happiness or fatigue.

However, till date, there is limited investigation on this herb due to its Schedule I classification and therefore, it is hard to make effective use of this herb legally due to the imposition of strict laws. This article aims to fill available knowledge gap through reviewing literatures, highlighting the significance of this herb and the need to make effective use of this herb, by pushing the respective governments to lift ban on cannabis for medical research or further studies. This article aims at:

- reviewing the historical background of cannabis usage in different societies, particularly in India and Thailand from past to present
- reviewing the social, religious, recreational and medicinal usage of cannabis in India and Thailand
- highlighting similarities and differences for cannabis usage in India and Thailand

The findings from this review may help to bring awareness or knowledge about the variation of its usage and the status of legalization of cannabis usage in between India and Thailand. The authors have obtained secondary data through an extensive literature review, such as textbooks, journal articles and from internet sources relating to history of cannabis usage,

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social, recreational, religious and medicinal purposes in India and Thailand. The article is organized as: Introduction and Historical Background, Objectives and Methods, Cannabis Usage in India, Cannabis Usage in Thailand, Summary and Conclusions, and Recommendation.

Cannabis is one of the oldest plant known to mankind, with records of its cultivation dating back thousands of years. The first evidence of the use of cannabis was found in China, where archeological and historical findings indicate that cannabis plant was cultivated there for fibers since 4.000 B.C. [1, 2]. The use of cannabis as a medicine by ancient Chinese was reported since the remote past and it continues until today, which cannabis seeds continue to be used as a laxative by Chinese physicians [3]. In India, cannabis was used both as a medicine and as a recreational drug on socio-religious occasions as the sacred virtue of cannabis plant has an association with ancient religion of India. It has been mentioned in the *Atharva Veda* (a collection of sacred texts of unknown author) that cannabis was a sacred plant, providing mankind a source of happiness and freedom. Hence, cannabis use became part of numerous social and religious rituals in India [3]. The use of cannabis in America is assumed to begin in South America, introduced to Brazil by the African slaves in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While in Europe, during this period, cannabis was cultivated exclusively for fibers [4]. Along with this, in course of time, cannabis was introduced in the western medicine in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the usage of cannabis extracts to treat epilepsy, tetanus, rheumatism, migraine, asthma, trigeminal neuralgia, fatigue and insomnia. The western medicinal usage of cannabis declined significantly in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to difficulties in obtaining consistent results from various batches of plants having different compounds. This causes interests to the medical scientists and practitioners to identify the chemical structure of cannabis components and the possibility of obtaining its pure constituents through renewed research and investigation of cannabinoid receptors and the identification of an endogenous cannabinoid system in the brain in the 1990's. Along with this, a new and more consistent cycle of the use of cannabis derivatives as medication begins, since treatment effectiveness and safety started to be scientifically proven [1]. Cannabis has a long history of medicinal use in the Middle East, Asia and South East Asia, with references as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC [5].

### 1.1. Types of Cannabis Plants

There are two major types of cannabis plants, namely, *Cannabis Indica* and *Cannabis Sativa* as shown in Figure 1 and 2. *Cannabis Indica* plants are short, bushy plants with wide leaves, grow faster and have a higher yield than the sativa variety. Medicine

produced from *Cannabis Indica* have higher CBD and lower THC counts. The major qualities of *Indica* medicinal strains include: increased mental relaxation, muscle relaxation, decreases nausea, decreases acute pain, increases appetite, increases dopamine for night time use [6]. *Cannabis Indica* is assumed to be originated from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Morocco or the Asian subcontinent near Tibet, where the climatic condition is suitable for its growth. European botanist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck first published a description of *Cannabis Indica* which he discovered in India back in 1785. Hence the prefix “*Indi-*” is put [7]. *Cannabis sativa*, on the other hand, is a species of the Cannabaceae family (hemp) that grows tall to around 4.5 meters with spaced branches and narrow leaves, originated in the equatorial countries of Colombia, Mexico, Thailand, and South East Asia and thrive in warmer weather and is one of the oldest and biggest psychoactive plant used for food, fiber, medicine, oil etc. It has been used by innumerable ethnic societies in Asia [8.]. Now, it is one of the most widespread species in nature. It is found in various habitats ranging from sea level to the temperate and alpine foothills of the Himalayas, from where it was probably spread over the last 10,000 years [5]. *Sativa* plants are also generally a lighter shade of green than the *Indica* strain. *Sativa* strains take longer to grow, takes ten to sixteen weeks to be fully grown and require more light. Medicine produced from *Cannabis Sativa* plants have lower CBD and higher THC counts. The major qualities of *Sativa* medicinal strains include: anti-anxiety, anti-depressant, treats chronic pain, increases focus and creativity, increases serotonin (a neurotransmitter involved in the regulation of learning, mood, sleep, anxiety and appetite) for day time use [7].

## 2. Cannabis Usage in India

Cannabis usage is rooted in the ancient history of India. It has been used for many purposes by many ethnic societies such as Uttaranchal, an ethnic region in the Northern part of India, where the plant is a part of the local culture. Shah [8] in his study of cannabis described the indigenous uses and ethno botany of its seed, seed oil, stems, fiber, leaves, inflorescences and resin along with various recipes of seeds. His study concluded that its cultivation should be promoted in the Himalayan regions of India, which grows naturally as the climate there is favorable and also embedded with the way of life for the rural people living in the region. Similarly, Godlaski [9] stated that cannabis has been used in India for thousands of years since the time of myths, mythology and folklores. The practice of consuming cannabis can be traced from legends such as the *Vedas* (the ancient sacred books of Hinduism) about the origin of cannabis and its relationship to Shiva dating about 1400 BC. It is mentioned in his work that many worshippers of Lord Shiva, the



Figure 1: Cannabis Sativa



Figure 2: Indica

Sources:

1. [www/res.cloudinary.com/woahstorklearn/image/upload/v1496420060/Sativa\_vs\_Indica\_Comparison\_ur82a1.png]
2. [www.hcillinois.com/images/lists/189/indica%20v%20sativa.jpg]

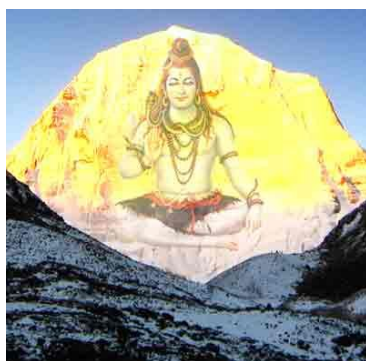
Hindu God, consumed cannabis orally in the form of *bhang* on *Shivaratri* (auspicious holy day dedicated to Shiva) and other festival days that worship Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is considered as the destroyer of evil, lived the life of an ascetic on Mount Kailash [10] as shown in Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5.

According to an ancient Hindu legend, when the Gods stirred the heavenly ocean with the peak of Mount Mandara, a drop of *amrita* (sacred nectar) fell from the sky. Where it landed, the first cannabis plant sprouted. Lord Shiva brought the plant down from the Mount for the benefit of mankind [11]. Since that time, the use of cannabis has been closely associated with the devotion to Shiva. The Vedas call cannabis a source of happiness, joy-giver, liberator that was compassionately given to humans to help human beings attain delight and lose fear [12, 13]. According to another legend, Shiva wandered off into the fields after an argument with his family. Upset by this family conflict and fatigued by the hot sun, he fell asleep under a leafy plant. When he woke up, he noticed the beautiful plant under which he found shade and decided to try the leaves of the plant. He was immediately rejuvenated. Shiva made the plant his favorite food and he became known as the *Lord of Bhang* [14]. Thus, *Bhang* is the most commonly consumed preparations of cannabis in India, made from the leaves of Hemp by grinding it, also known as ganja, weed or pot and is generally consumed on the day of *Shivaratri* (the day of worshipping Shiva), also offered it to images and statues of Lord Shiva. According to another belief in traditional India, Bhang is used to destroy the evil eyes of demons, because it is believed in ancient India religion that the cannabis plant contains spirit which can counter the activity of demons [15]. The *Sathus* (Holymen of India) who are devoted to Lord Shiva, and having an ascetic life, consume cannabis quite often but not in the form of bhang, by smoking the highly resinous buds of the female plant or the resin itself which is called, *hashish*, in small

clay pipes. These pipes are called *chillum* and sadhus use them in rituals of worship, meditation, and yogic practice [16]. Chillum smoking is usually done in religious social occasion, smoking in rotation by passing it in a clockwise circular form. The first person fills the bowl and passes it to the second and the second person raises the bowl to his forehead and utters a short formula, chanting “Bum Shankar!” dedicated to the act to Shiva. He then lights it with two matches, representing the male and female poles of the universe. When all the hashish has been consumed, the last person taps the ashes into his hand and puts them on his tongue to swallow. These ashes are believed to have powerful medicinal properties [17]. Ratsch [17] comments that chillum smoking is a relatively elaborate process that demonstrates the profound respect the consumer has for the plant as well as shows the religious rituals and tradition which is closely associated with hemp smoking. Touw [3] comments that such behavior would seem to indicate that the use of cannabis is as sacred, significant, and highly respected as is the use of wine in Holy Communion by Christians according to his experience on and sadhus use them in rituals of worship, meditation, and yogic practice [16]. Chillum smoking is usually done in religious social occasion, smoking in rotation by passing it in a clockwise circular form. The first person fills the bowl and passes it to the second and the second person raises the bowl to his forehead and utters a short formula, chanting “Bum Shankar!” dedicated to the act to Shiva. He then lights it with two matches, representing the male and female poles of the universe. When all the hashish has been consumed, the last person taps the ashes into his hand and puts them on his tongue to swallow. These ashes are believed to have powerful medicinal properties [17]. Ratsch [17] comments that chillum smoking is a relatively elaborate process that demonstrates the profound respect the consumer has for the plant as well as shows the religious rituals and tradition which is closely associated with hemp smoking. Touw [3]



**Figure 3:** Lord Shiva holding Bhang syrup



**Figure 4:** Lord Shiva meditating on Mt. Kailash



**Figure 5:** A sadhu smoking cannabis on Shivratri

Sources:

3. [<https://www.festivalsofindia.in/img/shiva-aum.jpg>]

4. [<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/c2/73/6b/c2736bd186b3ab79500a122a35aebf6c-hindu-deities-hinduism.jpg>]

5. [<https://www.iciclesadventuretreks.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/1119.jpg>]

comments that such behavior would seem to indicate that the use of cannabis is as sacred, significant, and highly respected as is the use of wine in Holy Communion by Christians according to his experience on *Shivaratri*, an auspicious holy day dedicated to Shiva. It should be noted that the use of cannabis in India, both for religious and for medicinal purposes, is not something that happened only in the distant past, but it continues till the present. Given the very negative view of some developed nations concerning the use of cannabis, it might seem reasonable to expect that the Indian government might also adopt such a view, however due to the common use of cannabis and its very strong association with religious worship, it cannot be forbidden. Toward the end of the colonial domination of India by Great Britain, a large-scale study of cannabis usage in Indian society was conducted by a specially appointed commission [18]. The Commission conducted a very large number of interviews with cannabis users throughout India and concluded that the use of cannabis was highly beneficial to Indian society both as a substance used in religious observance and as a medicine [9].

As a result, it can be said that cannabis usage is closely related to traditional culture and their rituals. Researching relevant historical background and examining associations would give insight into how these substances were viewed in various cultures and the place that they had in those cultures and its functions in history. This has been supported by Gumbiner [14] who stated that cannabis usage has a long history in India, associated closely in Indian legends and religion such as in the *Vedas* (Sacred book of Hindus) [12]. He, too, mentioned the close connection of Lord Shiva and *cannabis/ bhang* in India. In course of time, Cannabis usage is confined not only in the legends or myths but continues in different ages such as soldiers drinking bhang before entering battle in order to make themselves bold, fearless and brave in the battlefield while fighting the enemy during the middle ages.

There are different ways of consuming cannabis in India at that time, as a drink, or boiling it with milk and mixing it with nuts, spices like almonds, pistachios, poppy seeds, pepper, ginger and sugar. Yogurt can also be used instead of milk. But generally, it is rolled and eaten in small balls. Other preparations of cannabis in India are called *ganja* and *charas*. Stronger than bhang, *ganja* is made from the flowers and upper leaves of the female plant. *Charas* is the strongest preparation and is made from blooming flowers. Similar in strength to hashish, *charas* contains a lot of resin. Both are smoked in an earthenware pipe called a *chillum*. The pipe is usually shared among 2 to 5 people, making smoking a communal activity especially for religious occasions.

The British found the use of cannabis so extensive in colonial India, that they commissioned a large scale study in the late 1890s [19] since they were concerned that the abuse of cannabis was endangering the health of the native people and driving them insane. This made the British government who ruled India at that time to ask the government of India to appoint a commission to look into the cultivation of hemp plant, preparation of drugs from it, trade in those drugs, the social and moral impact of its consumption and possible prohibition. Along with commission, over 1,000 standardized interviews were conducted throughout India by eminent British and Indian medical experts by sampling a large and diverse group of people in a range of situations, from farmers to hospital psychiatrists. After years of detailed work, the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report produced six volumes of data and concluded that suppressing the use of herbal cannabis (bhanga) would be totally unjustifiable since its usage had religious sanction among Hindus since ancient time, and is harmless if used in moderation. Furthermore, prohibition would be difficult to enforce, with many outcries by religious clerics, and possibly may lead to the use of more dangerous narcotics. These findings, conducted over 100 years ago,

are surprisingly relevant today [18, 20].

The Hindu beliefs about cannabis usage shows the capacity of cultural systems to order and direct the course of complex phenomenal events as the effect of its use shows diverse and contradictory effects which depend not only on dose, frequency and way of administration, but also on subjective and cultural contexts. Cannabis effect is considered to be two dimensional: *provide motivation to work and improve motivation*. While cannabis appears to interfere with execution of highly complex tasks and the long-range planning that accompanies them, it may facilitate concentrated focus on repetitive endeavors. As a result, the Hindu belief system accommodates the usage of low potency cannabis preparations as *bhangthandai* in such a way that prescribing its use becomes beneficial as the drug is also taken in a ritualized context, facilitating concentration and relaxation. It is taken at times, such as in the evening or on holidays, in which focus on the immediate moment is a welcome change [21]. Cannabis, as a psychotropic drug, is rooted in India, used both as a narcotic and medicine in association with the social and religious functions of India and mentioned as a sacred herb in the religious holy books of India [13]. During certain social and religious rites of India, hemp boughs were thrown into fire to destroy evils and overcome enemies. In each region of India, cannabis is offered in different ways according to the locally most favored form of God. To worship Goddess Durga, it is customary to drink bowls of a cannabis preparation and to offer them to others. Similarly, in Madras, *Kama* (god of love), as well as *Shiva* and *Kali*, are worshiped with cannabis offerings [18]. Cannabis has different names in ancient India [4] as cannabis is held to bestow supernatural influence and powers on the user [18]. This practice of using cannabis in the socio-religious functions or rituals continue even to this day. Due to its close association with Hindu religion, countless Indian households in the ancient times grow a cannabis plant or two so as to be able to offer cannabis to a passing sadhu (holy person), or smoked by everyone present during an evening worship of Lord Shiva [22]. Beside the socio-religious uses of cannabis, it has long been used as a medicine for various kinds of diseases and ailments [18, 23]. Particular mention can be made for the use of cannabis as medicine for neurologic conditions [24], as antispasmodic in epilepsy, convulsions and tetanus, for treating paralysis, against hemorrhoids [25] and as a remedy for delirium during fever [24].

From the above review, many ancient texts of India quoted that cannabis plants were used for ailments besides the social and religious aspects. The following are some of the ailments that Indian medicine men have used cannabis to treat for thousands of years:

- Headaches and migraines
- Gastrointestinal disorders
- Generalized and localized pain

- Easing childbirth
- Clearing phlegm
- Sharpening the appetite
- Aiding & quickening digestion
- Refreshing the mind and intellect
- Curing insomnia
- Relieving dysentery
- Anemia and weight loss
- Cough [26].

This shows that cannabis has been used in India not just for social and religious aspects but for medicinal purposes for many centuries. The push to legalize cannabis for therapeutic use is not confined just to the United States but also to India. Doctors in India are pushing for further studies on the efficacy of cannabinoids in cancer patients. However, it is hard to make effective use of this herb legally due to strict laws imposed on the Indian people [26].

Rao [27] said that doctors in India are pushing for further studies on the efficacy of cannabinoids in cancer patients. An article in the Times of India (TOI) Newspaper on Jan 2, 2015 reported that the doctors proposed the government to lift ban on cannabis for medical research. According to the oncologists of India, ganja or marijuana may be frowned upon as a banned recreational drug, but it is high time that the Indian Medical Council make proper use of this herb, as it can be an effective cure for cancer. Their interest in cannabis research was raised up during the recent debates against tobacco farming. The oncologists of India campaigns against tobacco cultivation, as it is the main cause of cancer production, while encouraging cultivation of cannabis, as it can be used for curing many kinds of diseases. The oncologists of India cannot pursue research on cannabis as procurement of the plant is illegal in India. Dr. Vishal Rao, a surgical oncologists on Jan 2, 2015 in TOI compared the situation of cannabis usage in the US and India for medicinal purposes. According to him, 21 states in the US are prescribing derivatives of cannabis for cancer treatment, quite contrary to India, which is lagging behind other countries in cannabis research. According to Dr. Rao [27] cannabis derivatives prevent blood supply to cancer tumour. As cancer cells are hungry cells, once there is discontinuity in the blood supply, they shrink due to lack of glucose. In addition, it is helpful in reducing nausea and vomiting sensation for cancer patients who undergo chemotherapy. This made the oncologists of India approached the government with a proposal to legalize medicinal use of cannabis, to enable the researchers to pursue research on the medicinal benefits of cannabis derivatives and to make available cannabis plants for research purposes. They made it clear that they do not encourage to use the herbs for recreational purposes. However, in the current situation of India, speaking about marijuana is a taboo even among the medical fraternity, leaving aside the medicinal properties of cannabis compounds. Mention can

be made of some drugs from cannabis derivatives such as dronabinol, which is used to treat loss of appetite among HIV positive and AIDS patients who have suffered drastic weight loss, and nabilone, used for treating cancer patients, who have nausea and vomiting sensation induced by chemotherapy and can also be used for chronic pain management. At last the efforts of these doctors bear fruits when India lifted its ban on cannabis research in 2015, and hosted its first-ever medical cannabis conferences to spread awareness of the therapeutic uses of the cannabis plant [26].

### 3. Cannabis usage in Thailand

Cannabis also called “*ganja*” in Thailand is a popular plant in the history of Thailand. The name cannabis has many considerations to different groups of people in Thailand. The police and government consider it to be a dangerous substance and users are charged as criminals, the common Thai people consider it as a recreational substance abused by youngsters for pleasure, while the medical fraternities and oncologists consider it as a miracle plant with a variety of medicinal and industrial uses. Blair [28] analyzes the history of cannabis usage in Thailand and the cultural and political factor affecting its cultivation and usage.

Traditionally cannabis has been used extensively in daily life in Thailand for many purposes, particularly as a cooking condiment in *kway teeow rua* or boat-noodle soup, and for recreational purposes [29]. Thai cannabis were introduced to the US by American troops, when they were in Thailand during the Vietnam War (1955-1975) [30]. However, the use of cannabis as a spice in Thailand is currently outlawed, but is still found in provincial markets in the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia.

Thailand’s association with the recreational use of Cannabis first sprang into international public spotlight during late 60s. Wars at that time, have led an ideal vehicle for the cross-pollination of cultural ideas and activities and the United States soldiers based in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era was no exception to this process. As Thailand was the main station for US soldiers serving in Vietnam, there were more US soldiers in Thailand than in Vietnam. A number of US soldiers were introduced to the recreational use of cannabis during Vietnam War, when they patrolled through fields of wild growing cannabis in Thailand. Reports at that time indicate that US troops began smoking marijuana soon and the arrests for marijuana possession reached a peak of up to 1,000 a week [28]. The use of marijuana or cannabis can be indirectly traced to the negative cultural impact of Vietnam War, when the soldiers were based in Thailand. The Drug Enforcement Administration’s Intelligence Division in a 2001 report, revealed that Thailand was Southeast Asia’s major cultivator of cannabis and producer of marijuana in the 1970s and 1980s.

Thai weed is 100% sativa, and therefore is prone to be more effective in bringing happiness, lethargy and relaxation to the recreational users due to its high THC content. Thai youth have a pro cannabis culture in their social life. This pro cannabis culture can be seen primarily in their selection of music and fashion. Mention can be made of the “Hippy Movement” in Thailand as the “*Peua Cheewit*” or “for life” social movement in the 1970s. The movement was for restoration of the democracy in Thailand at that time. In addition, Thai Folk Songs sung by Carabao and Maleewanana, well known bands at that time, were related to marijuana or “*gancha*” as is commonly known in Thailand. Among the Thai youths, Reggae music is also very popular and many Reggae fans follow Reggae culture related to cannabis plant to show their support by enjoying music and wearing T – Shirt symbolizing support of cannabis plant, as wearing cannabis leaf logo t-shirts all over Thailand[30].

In addition to social, recreational and kitchen uses, Thai cannabis plant were used for manufacturing of clothing and other textile product, particularly by the Hmong Hill tribes, a minority ethnic group originally from China, who dwelled in the mountainous area in the Northern part of Thailand [31]. The fibers from the cannabis plant, as well as hemp plants, were woven together, making it some of the most popular and common materials used in Thailand’s manufacturing of fashionable garments, ropes, clothing, accessories and other textile products. These textile made from cannabis or hemp fibers were the indigenous products of Northern Thai people. With the passing of Thailand’s Narcotic Act in 1979 [30], Thailand prohibits cannabis cultivation, with the exception of Hemp plant, used till today for clothing and other accessories production. As a result, hemp plant is currently used to make clothing in Thailand and is currently one of the world’s leading suppliers. The Thai government, being aware of the economic productivity of these fibers, approved the official proposal of industrialization and cultivation of cannabis hemp in the region in 2009, and since then hemp fiber industry is a popular export item and has been developing gradually. Beside this, it was also used in early *Muay Thai* martial arts. Muay Thai Fighters would protect their hands during the games with hemp hand wraps that ended in seashell-shaped knobs even though this method of hand-protection is being replaced by Western-style boxing gloves in the 1920’s [29].

Beside the above usage of Thai cannabis plant for social, recreational and textile industry, Thai cannabis is also applicable for medicinal usage even though the CBD content of Thai seeds is quite low. Traditional Thai medicine and massage practitioners used cannabis to treat a variety of health conditions such as, analgesic, sedative, massage oils and astringent. It is also used for treatment of depression, stress, pain



and fatigue. This made the Thai Institute of Healing Arts to consider cannabis as an analgesic and sedative to control pain [29].

In the past, Thailand had no laws prohibiting cannabis use or possession. However, with the formation of the League of Nations International Opium Convention of 1912, Thailand, also called Siam, enacted anti-drug legislation, followed by introduction of the first anti-drug laws, the Narcotics Act B.E. 2465, in 1922 and Marijuana Act B.E. 2477 in 1937. According to Marijuana Act, anyone who plants or possesses marijuana seeds, or who imports or exports marijuana, would be subjected to imprisonment for up to one year, or to a fine not exceeding 500 Baht. Sections 7, 8 and 10 of the Act imposed a jail sentence of not more than six months or a fine for those who were caught possessing, buying, selling or using marijuana. Those who had already planted marijuana before the Act was passed were given one year in which to harvest and dispose of their crop.

In 1979 Thailand passed the Narcotics Act, which prohibited cannabis use in all forms. Under the Act, anyone caught producing, exporting or importing Thai weed are liable for imprisonment of between 2 and 15 years and/or a fine of up to 1.5 million Thai baht (up to \$40,000 USD). After this act, production and cultivation of Thai cannabis receded and moved to the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia.

Recently, Thailand's medical fraternities came to recognize the importance of the medicinal properties of cannabis even though cannabis/marijuana was used in Thailand as a traditional medicine, until it was banned in the 1930s. The medical fraternities aim to bring awareness to the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand, pressuring them with a rewritten draft of the country's drug laws to legalize the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes. According to this proposed draft, medicinal cannabis would be available over-the-counter for patients with a valid prescription from their doctor [32]. According to a recent news published on December 25, 2018, Thailand's parliament has voted to amend the Narcotic Act of 1979 to approve cannabis for medical use, with a key lawmaker calling it a "New Year's gift" to the Thai people. Recreational use will remain illegal. However, complete legalization of cannabis is still an ongoing debate. There are various opinions, both pros and cons, even from the medical fraternities. Some fear that legalization will be harmful to children as they may use it for recreation and this will affect their brain development. According to the latest media, Anutin Charnvirakul, a contestant and leader of *Bhum Jai Thai* (Proud to be Thai) party, for the March 24 General Election in Thailand, after almost five years of military rule, campaigned for legalization of household cannabis plant. The party supports the legalization of recreational cannabis after Thailand last year became the first Southeast Asian nation to allow medical cannabis. In an interview, he said

that his Bhum Jai Thai party would allow each Thai household to grow up to six cannabis plants, and this is expected to help Thai people to supplement their incomes by earning as much as \$2,200 per kilogram of the crop [33].

It is not the first time that Thailand is making attempt to address cannabis laws. At the moment, farmers are allowed to grow hemp but not marijuana, a kind of cannabis with high effect. South East Asia has some of the world's toughest penalties for drug usage or possession, and Thailand is the first in the region to allow medicinal marijuana/cannabis with strict prescription for consumers from a recognized physician or certified doctor according to the Bangkok Post Newspaper. Licenses for production and sale of the product will be strictly controlled.

#### 4. Summary and Conclusions

From the review of literatures, we can compare and contrast cannabis usage in both countries. Cannabis usage has a long history in India, associated closely with Indian legends, religion and religious rituals such as the close connection of Lord Shiva and cannabis, commonly called *bhang*, *charas* or *ganja*. On the other hand, there is scarcity of literature dealing with cannabis usage in the remote past in Thailand. However, some literature can be traced here and there which deals with cannabis usage by the American soldiers during the Vietnam war, when the soldiers were based in Thailand and their introduction of Hippy culture after they returned to USA, by smoking and inhaling cannabis which they had brought from Thailand. Due to acculturation and assimilation of cultural process, many Thai youths, imitated the hippy lifestyle of American people, and became a patron of cannabis plant, cannabis logo etc. Thai youth used cannabis mostly for social and recreational purposes and many have a pro cannabis culture in their social life. This pro cannabis culture can be seen primarily in their selection of music and fashion. Thai youths usage of cannabis is culture related along with recreation as can be seen with the popularity of Reggae Music in Thailand. This shows their support of Thai culture related to the preservation and tradition of cannabis plant by enjoying music and wearing fashion T – Shirt having cannabis leaf logo. Beside the recreational use, Thailand's cannabis textile products is very popular in international markets. Thai hemp plant is currently used to make clothing and is currently one of the world's leading suppliers. This highlights the important difference between India and Thailand cannabis usage, where religious culture is an important part in India, unlike in Thailand, which is more for recreation and textile production.

However, there is an important similarity in both countries with regard to the ongoing debates regarding the legalization of cannabis usage in medical re-

search and therapy. After debating the pros and cons of cannabis usage from various sources as mentioned in the review, it is concluded that a beneficial consensus will be brought about soon to legalize the cannabis usage for medicinal purposes in both countries. Thus, the push to legalize cannabis for therapeutic use is not confined just to the United States but also happens to India and Thailand. Doctors in India and Thailand are pushing for further studies on the efficacy of cannabinoids in cancer patients and the day will not be far off when the incurable diseases like cancer can be prevented or cured with cannabis therapy.

## 5. Recommendation

The current article was framed by reviewing available literatures from various sources. It can be recommended that a research should be conducted further to find out the scientific study of cannabis in both India and Thailand, with a special focus on the medicinal properties of cannabis and the legalization process of medicinal cannabis usage in the two countries as well the outcomes of the attempts.

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