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## LEGALIZATION OF CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL USE

A 2019 study conducted by the All-India Institutes of Medical Sciences reported that about 7.2 million Indians had consumed cannabis within the past year. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's "Magnitude of Substance Use in India 2019" survey found that 31 million people were current users of cannabis products.

Cannabis in India has been used since as early as 2000 BCE. Cannabis also finds its mention in other historic scriptures like Dhanvantari Nighantu, Sarngandhara Samhita and Kayyadeva Nighantu. Atharva Veda mentions cannabis as one of the five most sacred plants on Earth and says that a guardian angel resides in its leaves. It also refers to it as a "source of happiness," a "joy-giver" and a "liberator".

The Hindu god Shiva is said to have chosen cannabis as his favourite food, after having spent one night sleeping under the plant's leaves and when eating off it in the morning refreshed him. Another legend suggests that when the poison Halahala came out from the Samudra Manthan, Shiva drank it to protect everyone from it. Later, bhang was used to cool him down. Shiva Purana suggests offering bhang to Shiva during the summer months.

Until the 1980s, cannabis and opium were legal in India and were sold in government-run shops and traded by the British East India Company. However, the global movement towards the weed ban was set in motion in 1961 with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. The 1961 treaty had given India 25 years to clamp down on recreational drugs. Under immense pressure from the "War on Drugs" campaign led by President Nixon in the US, the Rajiv Gandhi led government passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act in 1985. However, India promised to limit the export of Indian hemp, on the condition that the definition of cannabis under the convention would be altered.

This move allowed bhang to be left out from the official definition. This small alteration is the sole reason why you can still find people consuming bhang during Indian festivals, in spite of a ban on cannabis in general. Although NDPS allows the consumption of bhang, various states have their own laws banning or restricting its use. In some states, only authorised dealers are allowed to sell bhang. Some states also have rules about the maximum amount of bhang one person can carry and the minimum age of the buyer.

Later, in 2015, the first organised efforts to re-legalise cannabis in India appeared, with the holding of medical marijuana conferences in Bangalore, Pune, Mumbai and Delhi by the Great Legalisation Movement India. Many articles and programs in the popular media have also begun to appear pushing for a change in cannabis laws. Moreover, In 2016, Lok Sabha MP Dharamvir Gandhi announced that he had received clearance from Parliament to table a Private Member's Bill seeking to amend the NDPS Act. Later in 2019, the Delhi High Court agreed to hear a petition, filed by the Great Legalisation Movement Trust, challenging the ban on cannabis. The public interest litigation argues that grouping cannabis with other chemical drugs under the NDPS Act is "arbitrary, unscientific and unreasonable".

Nowhere across the world has prohibition worked cannabis is available everywhere. Secondly, people have no idea what they are buying. We know that leaving supplies in the hands of criminals puts teenagers in particular at risk. They are most susceptible to suffering mental health consequences, including psychosis, from regular use of potent strains available on the street.

Prohibition makes illegal drugs stronger and more potent. This is what happened during the prohibition of alcohol in the US. Although the consumption of alcohol fell at the beginning of the Prohibition, it subsequently increased. Alcohol became more dangerous to consume; crime increased and became "organised". No measurable gains were made in productivity or reduced absenteeism.

Prohibition removed a significant source of tax revenue and greatly increased government spending. It led many drinkers to switch to opium, marijuana, patent medicines, cocaine, and other dangerous substances that they would have been unlikely to encounter in the absence of Prohibition.

Portugal had one of the worst drug epidemics in the world. This prompted the government to take a novel step. In 2001, it decriminalised all drugs (including heroin). Possession and use of drugs were treated as health issues and not crimes. Anyone caught with less than a ten-day supply of any drug — including heroin — received mandatory medical treatment. With no judge, no courtroom and no jail, the number of drug addicts, the usage of hard drugs and diseases due to overdoes decreased.

We still criminalise thousands of people every year, taking up precious police time that could be used to fight serious crime. Careers are blighted for using a substance that no doubt many Members on the Government Benches have used at some stage of their lives. In 2015, Lok Sabha MP for Dhenkanal Tathagata Satpathy started on a Reddit AMA that he supported the legalisation of cannabis, and also admitted to having consumed the drug on several occasions when he was in college.

Moreover, consideration of economic factors like high employee rates, benefits from tax revenue, agriculture aid, no wasting money on prohibition funds plays a vital role in boosting our economy.

However, the regulation allows cannabis, buying marijuana does not mean endorsing it. It means taking responsibility for the risks it possesses.