Uses of Cannabis

Why in news?

Bhang, obtained from the Cannabis sativa plant or true hemp, is popularly consumed on the occasion of Holi across India.

What is cannabis?

- It refers to a group of three plants with psychoactive properties.
- The Mexican term 'marijuana' is frequently used in referring to cannabis leaves or other crude plant material in many countries.
- **Plants** – Cannabis sativa, Cannabis indica, and Cannabis ruderalis.
- **Products derived**- From the cannabis plant, three main products are obtained namely fibre, oil, and narcotics.
- **Literary references-** There are evidences of medical use of marijuana which can be found in ancient Indian texts such as the Atharvaveda and the Sushruta Samhita, dating back to around 1500 BCE.
- **Atharvaveda**- It hails bhang an edible preparation of marijuana as one of the five sacred plants.
- **Sushruta Samhita**- Marijuana was recommended for health ailments including phlegm, catarrh and diarrhoea.
- **Cultural significance-** It has deep cultural roots in India, with historical ties to Hindu mythology and rituals.
- **Charas-** It is produced by rubbing the resin of the flower from the plant sustains the livelihood of the farmers in the hills.
- **Bhang**- It is derived from the Cannabis sativa plant, holds cultural significance in India, particularly during the festival of Holi where they are ground into a powder, filtered and then mixed with cold, flavoured milk or thandai.

Bhang is essentially a green-coloured paste made from seeds and leaves of the female cannabis plants — they have higher potency and Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content than their male counterparts.

Regulation of cannabis in India

• **Cannabis in India**- The cannabis plant, which can grow to a height of 4 to 10 feet, is predominantly found in the Indo-Gangetic plains Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal – along with the Deccan region.
• **NDPS, 1985**- Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act prohibits the sale and production of cannabis resin and flowers which is a criminal offence, but the use of leaves and seeds of the cannabis plant is permitted.
• **Power of States**- They have the power to regulate and form the State rules for it.
• **Status of cultivation**- Farming of cannabis has been legalised in Uttarakhand.
• **Controlled cultivation**- It is done in some districts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh
• **Regional names**- It is known as Ganzai in Telugu, Ganja in Tamil, and Bangi in Kannada.

What are the uses of cannabis?

- **Medicinal value**- Research indicates marijuana's potential in treating diseases like cancer, AIDS, and epilepsy, with Cannabidiol (CBD) showing promise as a therapeutic agent.

  Marijuana was first used as an anesthetic by a Chinese surgeon.

- **Treat haematoma**- Cannabis ash is applied on animal's skin to treat conditions like haematoma a condition in which blood clots outside of the blood vessels.
- **Cure cattle shivering**- In Himachal Pradesh, boiled cannabis leaves is used to create a solution that cures shivering in cattle.
- **Insect bite relief**- Cannabis leaves are heated, crushed, and applied as a paste to alleviate irritation and pain caused by honey bee or wasp stings.
- **Agriculture**- Treating paddy seed with bhang is effective in paddy seed germination and this treatment is common in temperate areas of Jammu and Kashmir, where temperature during nursery raising is low.
- **Natural pesticide**- In Jammu and Kashmir, farmers use cannabis plants to control threadworms by placing the uprooted cannabis plant in standing water of paddy nursery or crushed cannabis leaves is used in case of severe infestations
- **Industrial uses-** Hemp seed oil derived from cannabis is derived in varnish industries as a substitute for linseed oil and manufacturing of soft soap.
- **Rope making**- Post-maturation, the crop is dried, after which the seeds are collected. The fibre, known for its strength, is then separated from the stems and branches, the extracted fibre is stronger than jute making it suitable for making durable ropes.

Why India should legalise cannabis?

- **Historical usage**-Marijuana has been used in traditional Indian and Chinese medicine for centuries, with ancient texts documenting its medicinal applications1.
- **Global regulation**-Over 18 countries have legalized medical marijuana, with varying degrees of regulation, and studies suggest that legalization does not lead to increased drug use or crime.
- **Dominance of black market**- Studies suggest that drug result in the circulation of poor quality or adulterated drugs, increasing the risks of overdose and poisoning.

- **Job creation**- If cannabis is legalized a new industry dealing with cultivation, processing, packing, and distribution of marijuana would emerge.
- **Reduce illegal trade**- There will be laws regarding the possession, cultivation, and supply of marijuana in the market by the government and not by drug dealer which would reduce the crimes related to illegal trade.
- **Increase government revenue**- Economists have advocated for legalizing and regulating it like other goods as taxing cannabis could generate significant revenue.
- **Supporting local farmers**-In states like Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, where cannabis plants grow, legalizing marijuana would benefit local farmers who currently face challenges due to its banned status.
- **Proper regulation-** Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations has stated that while cannabis consumption is not necessarily associated with significant problems for most users but regulation is necessary to mitigate potential risks and ensure responsible use.

Quick facts

Cannabis Medicine Project
• It is India's first cannabis medicine project. • **Initiative by**- Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR-IIIM), Jammu. • **Mode**- The project is under public-private partnership (PPP) with a Canadian firm. • **Significance** – - Produce export quality drugs for neuropathies, diabetic pains, cancer, etc. - Helps in spreading awareness in J&K and Punjab. - Impetus for huge investment in Jammu & Kashmir.

References

1. Indian Express- Uses of cannabis
2. Down To Earth- Legalsing marijuana in India
3. Indian Express- Brief history of India’s love affair with bhang

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering