



Himachal Pradesh Contemplates Legalizing Cannabis Cultivation

For Prelims: [Cannabis Cultivation](#), [Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances \(NDPS\) Act, 1985](#), [Bhang](#), [World Health Organization](#).

For Mains: Pros and Cons of Cultivating Cannabis, and Related Laws in India.

Source: [TH](#)

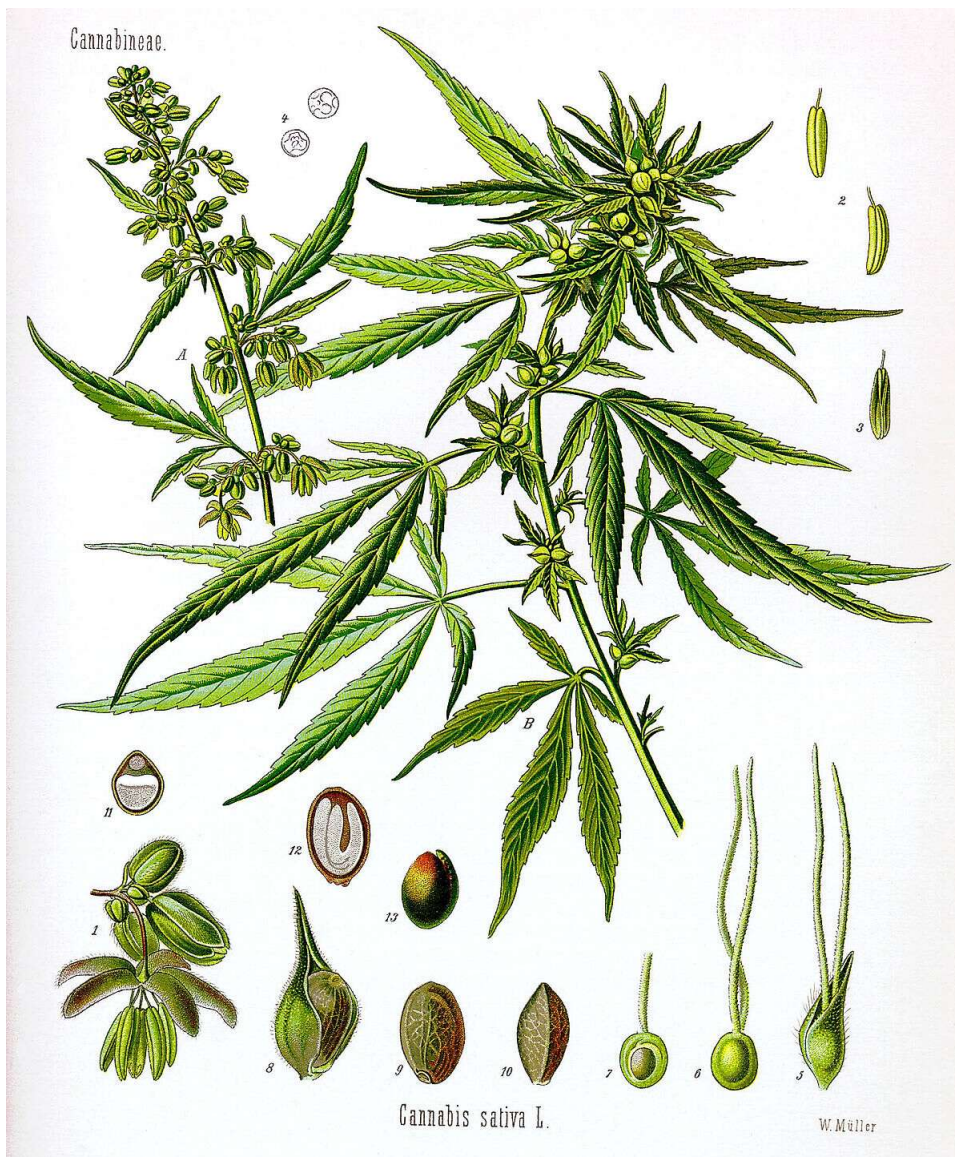
Why in News?

The Himachal Pradesh government is exploring the possibility of **Legalizing Cannabis (Hemp)** cultivation, aligning with farmers' **longstanding demands to lift the ban on cultivation**.

- The [Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances \(NDPS\) Act, 1985](#) permits states to make **rules regarding cannabis cultivation for fiber, seeds, or horticultural** purposes, under **Section 10 (a) (iii)**.

What is Cannabis?

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▪ About:

- According to the **WHO (World Health Organization)**, cannabis is a generic term used to denote the several **psychoactive preparations of the plant *Cannabis sativa***.
 - According to the WHO, cannabis is by far the **most widely cultivated, trafficked and abused illicit drug** in the world.
 - Most species of **cannabis are dioecious plants** that can be identified as either male or female. The unpollinated female plants are called hashish.
- The major psychoactive constituent in cannabis is **Delta9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)**.

▪ Definition by NDPS Act, 1985:

- According to the NDPS Act “cannabis plant” means any **plant of the genus cannabis**.
 - ‘Charas’ is the separated resin extracted from the cannabis plant. The NDPS Act covers separated resin, in whatever form, whether crude or purified, obtained from the cannabis plant and also includes concentrated preparation and resin known as **hashish oil or liquid hashish**.
 - The Act defines **‘ganja’ as the flowering or fruiting tops of the cannabis plant** but it clearly excludes the seeds and leaves.
 - The Act illegalises any mixture **with or without any neutral material**, of any of the two forms of cannabis, charas and ganja, or any drink prepared from it.
 - The legislature **left seeds and leaves of the cannabis plant** out of the ambit of the Act, because the serrated leaves of the plant have negligible THC content.

What are the Benefits of Cannabis Cultivation in Himachal Pradesh?

- **About:**
 - Hemp, a variant of Cannabis sativa cultivated for industrial and medicinal applications, is currently grown in parts of Himachal Pradesh, albeit illegally under the **NDPS Act of 1985**.
 - Himachal Pradesh's neighboring state, Uttarakhand, became the **first in India to legalize cannabis cultivation in 2017**.
 - Controlled cultivation also occurs in some districts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Support for Legalization:**
 - **Diverse Application:**
 - Advocates of legalization point out that cannabis has **diverse applications beyond recreational use**. These include phytoremediation, fiber and cloth manufacturing, **medicinal purposes**, and the pulp and paper industry.
 - **Alternative Income:**
 - Hemp cultivation can generate revenue for Himachal Pradesh and provide an alternative income source for locals.
 - **Traditional and Medicinal Uses:**
 - The traditional uses of cannabis in Himachal Pradesh, such as rope making (from hemp fibers), shoe making and seed consumption. The ban on cultivation disrupted these local practices.
 - Legalizing cannabis for medicinal (Pain Management, Anti-Inflammatory Properties), industrial, and scientific purposes will harness its medicinal properties and boost state revenue.

What are the Concerns Related to Cannabis Cultivation in India?

- **Drug Addiction:**
 - Approximately 95% of drug addicts in Himachal Pradesh use cannabis and its derivatives. Critics argue that **legalizing cultivation may entice youth towards cannabis use** and potentially lead to lifelong addiction, undermining the socio-economic contributions of drug-addicted youth.
- **Health Risks:**
 - Cannabis use can have adverse **health effects**, including impaired cognitive function, **respiratory issues (when smoked)**, and **an increased risk of mental health disorders**, particularly in individuals with a genetic predisposition. Concerns about the public health impact of widespread cannabis use are paramount.
- **Psychiatric Issues:**
 - Cannabis use, especially in high quantities or over an extended period, can lead to **psychiatric issues, including anxiety**, depression, and psychosis. Legalizing cultivation could exacerbate these problems if not coupled with adequate mental health support and education.
- **Illicit Market:**
 - Legalization may not completely eliminate the illicit cannabis market. There is a risk that the illegal production and distribution of cannabis will continue alongside legal cultivation, **potentially leading to increased criminal activities and law enforcement challenges**.
- **Enforcement Challenges:**
 - Regulating cannabis cultivation and use poses significant challenges for law enforcement agencies. Determining legal limits, enforcing age restrictions, and preventing diversion to the illicit market require a robust and well-funded regulatory apparatus.

What are the Initiatives to Tackle Drug Addiction?

- The [Narco-Coordination Centre \(NCORD\)](#) was constituted in 2016 and the scheme of “Financial Assistance to States for Narcotics Control” was revived.
- Seizure Information Management System has created a complete online database of drug offences and offenders.
- National Drug Abuse Survey to measure trends of drug abuse in India through the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment with the help of National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of AIIMS.

- **Project Sunrise:** It was launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2016, to tackle the **rising HIV prevalence** in north-eastern states in India, especially among people injecting drugs.
- '**Nasha Mukt Bharat**', or **Drug-Free India Campaign**

Way Forward

- Crafting a comprehensive regulatory framework that balances medical access with prevention of misuse remains a critical challenge in this ongoing discourse.
- It is essential to conduct comprehensive research on the various aspects of cannabis, including its medicinal properties, potential economic benefits, and health risks.
- Develop a robust regulatory framework that addresses concerns about drug abuse, health risks, and criminal activities.
- This framework should include clear guidelines for licensing and oversight of cannabis cultivation, production, and distribution. Age restrictions, product labeling, and quality control measures should be part of the framework.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. India's proximity to the two of the world's biggest illicit opium-growing states has enhanced her internal security concerns. Explain the linkages between drug trafficking and other illicit activities such as gunrunning, money laundering and human trafficking. What counter-measures should be taken to prevent the same? **(2018)**

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