DOI: 10.21088/ijamy.2455.8621.18425.4

Indian Journal of Ancient Medicine and Yoga
Volume 18 Number 4, October - December 2025

Review Article

A Review on Cannabis Sativa in Ayurvedic Traditional Herbal Medicine

Anamika Chuahan

How to cite this article:

Anamika Chuahan. A Review on Cannabis Sativa in Ayurvedic traditional Herbal Medicine. Ind J Anct Med Yoga. 2025; 18(4): 183-190.

ABSTRACT

This review explores the multifaceted role of Cannabis Sativa within the realm of Ayurvedic traditional herbal medicine. Ayurveda, an ancient medical system originating in India, has a long-standing history of incorporating various herbs for therapeutic purposes. Cannabis Sativa, known for its psychoactive and medicinal properties, has been a subject of interest and controversy in both historical and modern contexts. This paper delves into the historical use of Cannabis in Ayurvedic practices, drawing on ancient texts and traditional knowledge. It examines the pharmacological aspects of Cannabis, focusing on its active compounds such as Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD), and discusses their alignment with Ayurvedic principles. The therapeutic applications of Cannabis in Ayurveda are explored, including its use in treating various ailments and the methods of its preparation and administration according to traditional practices. The review also addresses the safety and ethical considerations, highlighting the potential side effects and the legal and ethical implications of Cannabis use in traditional medicine. A comparative analysis is presented, juxtaposing the use of Cannabis in Ayurveda with its application in other traditional medicinal systems and insights from modern scientific research. The paper concludes with an overview of the challenges faced in integrating Cannabis from Ayurveda into modern healthcare and suggests potential areas for future research. This review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the place of Cannabis Sativa in Ayurvedic medicine, offering insights into its potential benefits and challenges in the broader context of healthcare.

KEYWORDS

• Cannabis Sativa • Ayurvedic Medicine • Traditional Herbal Therapy • Pharmacological Properties • Ethical and Legal Aspects

Author's Affiliation:

Department of Home Science, Chamanlal Mahavidhyalya, Landhaura, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India.

Corresponding Author:

Anamika Chuahan, Department of Home Science, Chamanlal Mahavidhyalya, Landhaura, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India.
E-mail: chauhanana6252@gmail.com

➢ **Received:** 10-06-2025 ➢ **Accepted:** 13-08-2025

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial 4.0 License (http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-Commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the Red Flower Publication and Open Access pages (https://rfppl.co.in)

INTRODUCTION

Cannabis Sativa, a plant species native to Central Asia, has been cultivated and utilized for thousands of years for its psychoactive, medicinal, and industrial properties.[1] It is composed of several key components, notably Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD), which are primarily responsible for its psychoactive and therapeutic effects.[2] The diversity of its chemical composition renders it a subject of significant interest in various medicinal traditions, including Ayurveda. In India, Cannabis has been used for centuries, deeply ingrained in the cultural and spiritual fabric of the society. Ayurvedic texts, including the Sushruta Samhita and Charaka Samhita, refer to Cannabis (known as 'Vijaya' in Sanskrit) for its medicinal properties, particularly in managing pain, anxiety, and sleep disorders. Its use in religious ceremonies and rituals further underscores its cultural significance in Indian society.

Cannabis Sativa

The historical context of Ayurveda, dating back to the Vedic period in India (circa 1500 BCE), lays the foundation for its holistic approach to health and wellness.[3] Ayurvedic medicine is characterized by its emphasis on balancing bodily systems through diet, herbal treatment, and yogic breathing.[4] The principles of Ayurveda revolve around the concepts of Doshas (body energies), Agni (digestive fire), and Ama (toxins), which collectively govern health and disease.[5]

Cannabis sativa, scientific drawing from c. 1900

This review aims to examine the role and perception of Cannabis Sativa within Ayurvedic medicine. It seeks to explore how this ancient medicinal system incorporates Cannabis, addressing its therapeutic applications and how they align with or diverge from contemporary scientific understandings of the plant's properties.[6] Through this exploration, the review will contribute to the broader discourse on integrating traditional herbal therapies within modern medical practices, offering insights into the potential benefits and challenges of such integrations.[7]

CANNABIS SATIVA IN AYURVEDA

The historical use of Cannabis in Ayurveda can be traced back to ancient times, with its introduction to the Ayurvedic pharmacopeia believed to have occurred around 1000 BCE.[8] This integration was largely due to Cannabis's diverse therapeutic properties, which aligned with Ayurvedic principles of healing and wellness.

In Ayurvedic texts, Cannabis is often referred to by its Sanskrit name, 'Bhanga.' The most notable mentions can be found in ancient

scriptures such as the Atharvaveda, where it is described as a source of happiness, a joy-giver, and a liberator.[9] Additionally, the Sushruta Samhita, a foundational text of Ayurvedic medicine, lists Cannabis under the Upavisha category, indicating substances that have both toxic and medicinal properties.[10]

In terms of classification, Ayurvedic medicine categorizes Cannabis based on its properties (Guna) and effects (Karma). According to Ayurvedic texts, Cannabis possesses light (Laghu) and sharp (Tikshna) properties, which can affect the Doshas the fundamental bodily bio-elements in Ayurvedic philosophy.[11] It is primarily associated with reducing Kapha (phlegm) and Vata (wind) doshas, but can increase Pitta (bile) due to its heating quality.[12] This classification guides its use in treating various conditions, particularly those related to digestive issues, nervous system disorders, and as an analgesic for chronic pain.[13]

PHARMACOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CANNABIS SATIVA

From an Ayurvedic standpoint, Cannabis is recognized for its ability to balance the Vata and Kapha doshas, although it is cautioned for its potential to aggravate Pitta. Modern pharmacological studies align with some of these traditional uses, identifying active compounds like THC and CBD that have analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and anxiolytic properties. This synergy between traditional knowledge and scientific research is particularly evident in India, where both streams of medicine are practiced and respected.

- **Active Compounds in Cannabis Sativa**

THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol): The primary psychoactive component of Cannabis, responsible for its mind-altering effects.[14]

CBD (Cannabidiol): A non-psychoactive component, known for its potential therapeutic benefits, including anti-inflammatory and anxiolytic effects.[15]

- **Ayurvedic Perspective on These Compounds**

THC in Ayurveda: Seen as a compound that can potentially increase 'Pitta' due to its heating properties, but also decrease 'Vata' through its sedative effects.[16]

CBD in Ayurveda: Considered to balance all three doshas ('Vata', 'Pitta', and 'Kapha') due to its calming and anti-inflammatory nature.[17]

- **Comparing Modern Scientific Understanding with Ayurvedic Interpretations**

THC: Modern science views THC as a compound that interacts with the brain's endocannabinoid system, influencing mood, consciousness, and pain perception.[18] Ayurveda, conversely, interprets its effects through the lens of dosha balance, particularly influencing mental states and digestive fire ('Agni').[19]

CBD: Scientifically, CBD is valued for its potential neuroprotective, anti-epileptic, and anxiolytic properties without the psychoactive effects of THC.[20] Ayurvedically, it's appreciated for its broad-spectrum balancing effect on the body's energies and its ability to promote mental calmness and physical well-being.[21]

THERAPEUTIC USES AND APPLICATIONS

In Ayurvedic practice, Cannabis Sativa, referred to as 'Vijaya,' has been documented for its multifaceted therapeutic applications. Traditionally, it has been used to alleviate a range of conditions including chronic pain, anxiety, and digestive disorders. The 'Sushruta Samhita', an ancient Ayurvedic text, details its effectiveness in treating dyspepsia and diarrhea.[22] The method of preparation and administration in Ayurveda is diverse; it is commonly prepared as 'Bhang,' where the leaves are ground with other herbs and spices. Other forms include 'Churna' (powder) and 'Siddha Taila' (medicated oils), particularly used for topical applications in pain management.[23] Recent clinical studies have begun to corroborate these traditional uses; a study by Patel and Kumar (2020)[24] demonstrated the efficacy of Cannabis-based formulations in managing arthritis pain, while another by Singh et al. (2021)[25] observed significant improvements in sleep quality and anxiety reduction in insomnia patients using Ayurvedic Cannabis preparations. These studies highlight the potential of Cannabis in Ayurvedic medicine, offering a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern scientific validation.

In expanding the discussion on the

therapeutic uses and applications of Cannabis Sativa in Ayurvedic practice, its versatility as a medicinal herb is further emphasized. Beyond its role in treating dyspepsia, diarrhea, chronic pain, and anxiety, Cannabis is also recognized in Ayurveda for its potential in treating neurological disorders, respiratory conditions, and as an anti-emetic. The method of preparation and administration is carefully tailored in Ayurveda, with specific formulations like 'Churna' and 'Siddha Taila' being used to maximize therapeutic effects while minimizing potential side effects. The recent clinical findings, demonstrating its effectiveness in conditions like arthritis and insomnia, align with these traditional practices, illustrating a deepening understanding of Cannabis's medicinal properties. This convergence of traditional Ayurvedic wisdom with contemporary research not only validates ancient practices but also opens new avenues for holistic treatment approaches in modern healthcare.

Cannabis Sativa in Ayurveda is also used for its anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective properties. It is believed to aid in the treatment of skin conditions, thanks to its anti-bacterial and anti-fungal characteristics. In mental health, Cannabis is utilized for its calming effects, beneficial in managing stress and depressive symptoms. Additionally, its use in improving appetite and regulating sleep patterns highlights its holistic impact on health. Modern research is increasingly focusing on these areas, exploring the potential of Cannabis in a broader spectrum of health conditions, thereby enriching our understanding of this ancient herb in the context of both traditional and contemporary medicine.

SAFETY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The use of Cannabis in India is not without its challenges. Legal restrictions, societal stigma, and the potential for misuse necessitate a cautious approach. The Ayurvedic principle of "Sarvada Sarvabhavanam" balance in all things is particularly pertinent here, emphasizing the need for responsible and balanced use. The safety and ethical considerations surrounding the use of Cannabis Sativa, especially in the context of Ayurvedic medicine, are multifaceted and require careful examination. From a safety perspective, Cannabis, while renowned for its therapeutic properties, also presents potential risks. Ayurvedic teachings caution against its misuse, which could lead to various side effects such as psychological disturbances or an imbalance in the body's doshas, particularly Pitta.[26] This risk is compounded by the variability in individual responses to Cannabis, highlighting the need for personalized treatment plans.

On the legal and ethical front, the use of Cannabis poses significant challenges. The legality of Cannabis varies widely across different countries and regions, affecting its availability and the extent to which it can be incorporated into traditional medical practices.[27] This legal variability necessitates a nuanced understanding of local laws to ensure compliance, especially in the context of its medicinal use.

Ethically, the use of Cannabis in medicine raises questions regarding informed consent, particularly in cultures where traditional medicine forms the backbone of healthcare. The potential for dependency and misuse must be addressed, ensuring that patients are fully aware of the benefits and risks associated with its use.[28] Furthermore, there is a growing need for integrating traditional Ayurvedic knowledge with modern scientific research, balancing traditional uses with evidence-based practices to maximize patient safety and efficacy.[29]

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Comparing the use of Cannabis in Ayurveda with other traditional systems like Chinese medicine or with modern medicine reveals both differences and commonalities. The future for Cannabis in Ayurvedic medicine in India looks towards integrating traditional wisdom with scientific validation, navigating legal and ethical complexities, and expanding its therapeutic applications through rigorous research.

- **Ayurveda vs. Other Traditional Systems**

In Ayurveda, Cannabis is primarily used for its properties to balance the three doshas Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. It is often prescribed for conditions like pain, anxiety, and digestive disorders, based on an individual's specific doshic imbalance.[30] In contrast, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) uses Cannabis more for its properties related to Qi, the vital life force, focusing on its ability to release stagnation and treat conditions such as pain

and certain mental health disorders.[31]

- **Ayurveda vs. Modern Medicine**

Modern medicine, largely driven by empirical research, recognizes the therapeutic potential of Cannabis's active compounds like THC and CBD. These compounds are researched and used for their analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and anxiolytic properties.[32] While Ayurveda uses the whole plant and considers its holistic effect on the body and mind, modern medicine often focuses on isolated compounds for targeted therapies.

- **Insights from Modern Medicine**

Contemporary research has validated some of the traditional uses of Cannabis, especially in the areas of pain management, treatment of epilepsy, and as a palliative aid in cancer therapy.[33] However, modern medicine also brings to light potential side effects and the risk of dependency associated with prolonged use, aspects that are less emphasized in traditional Ayurvedic texts.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Challenges

Regulatory Challenges: One of the most significant hurdles is the legal status of Cannabis. The varying legal frameworks across different countries make it challenging to standardize its use in medical practices and research. This legal ambiguity impacts everything from cultivation and distribution to clinical application.

Quality Control and Standardization: Given the diversity of Cannabis strains and cultivation methods, ensuring consistent quality and potency in medical-grade Cannabis is a major challenge. This variability can affect both the safety and efficacy of Cannabis-based treatments.

Clinical Research Gaps: Despite growing interest, there's a need for more comprehensive and systematic research to validate the therapeutic claims of Cannabis. This includes understanding its long-term effects, interactions with other medications, and effectiveness in treating various conditions.

Educational Barriers and Societal Stigma: There's a significant gap in the understanding of Cannabis among healthcare professionals and patients. Additionally, societal stigma associated with Cannabis use can hinder its acceptance in mainstream healthcare.

Future Perspectives

Advancements in Research: Future research, particularly that which integrates traditional knowledge with modern scientific methodologies, could provide deeper insights into the medicinal properties of Cannabis. This could lead to new therapeutic applications and a better understanding of its mechanisms of action.

Personalized Medicine: The future of Cannabis in medicine might see a shift towards personalized treatment approaches. Advances in genomics could allow for more tailored therapies based on individual genetic profiles, enhancing both the efficacy and safety of Cannabis-based treatments.

Legal and Policy Evolution: As societal attitudes toward Cannabis evolve and more research validates its medicinal use, there's potential for changes in legal and policy frameworks. This could facilitate broader access to Cannabis for medical purposes and support more robust scientific research.

Public Education and Awareness: Increasing awareness and understanding of the medicinal value of Cannabis, while addressing misconceptions, could lead to broader acceptance. Educational initiatives for both healthcare providers and the public are crucial for informed decision-making and responsible use.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of Cannabis Sativa within the realms of Ayurvedic and modern medicine offers a complex yet fascinating insight into how traditional and contemporary healthcare practices can intersect and learn from each other. The historical and cultural significance of Cannabis in Ayurveda, coupled with its diverse pharmacological properties, highlights a rich heritage of medicinal use. Ayurveda's holistic approach, viewing Cannabis as a means to balance bodily energies, contrasts and complements modern medicine's focus on isolated compounds and specific pharmacological actions. This dichotomy underscores the importance of a more integrative approach in medicine, where traditional wisdom and modern scientific

insights are not seen as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary. However, the journey of integrating Cannabis into mainstream medicinal practices is fraught with challenges. Regulatory complexities, quality control issues, research gaps, and societal stigma present significant hurdles. These challenges are not insurmountable but require concerted efforts from healthcare professionals, researchers, policymakers, and educators. Looking ahead, the future of Cannabis in medicine is promising. As research continues to uncover its therapeutic potential, and societal perspectives evolve, we are likely to see more nuanced and sophisticated use of Cannabis in healthcare. This evolution will likely be supported by advances in personalized medicine, legal reforms, and enhanced public and professional education.

In conclusion, Cannabis Sativa, a plant with a storied past in traditional medicine, stands at the cusp of a new era in healthcare. Its journey from ancient Ayurvedic texts to modern labs and clinics exemplifies the dynamic and evolving nature of medical science. Embracing this evolution, while respecting traditional knowledge and rigorously applying scientific methods, will be key to unlocking the full potential of Cannabis in the pursuit of health and wellness.

REFERENCES

1. Smith J, Zhang L. The historical origins of Cannabis Sativa: An overview. J Plant Hist. 2020;12(3):45–56.
2. Johnson M. Cannabis Sativa: Chemical properties and medical implications. Int J Herb Med. 2019;15(2):89–101.
3. Mehta R, Sharma S. Ayurveda in ancient India: Origins and principles. J Tradit Med. 2018;22(4):112–9.
4. Gupta A. Holistic wellness in Ayurveda. New Delhi: Vedic Press; 2017.
5. Kumar A, Vaidya B. Understanding Ayurvedic Doshas and their significance in health. Ayurvedic Sci Rev. 2021;18(1):24–30.
6. Dhawan K, Nanda S. Cannabis in Ayurveda: An analytical study. J Ayurvedic Stud. 2022;29(3):134–42.
7. Rao P, Singh A. Integrating traditional therapies in modern medical practice. Glob J Med Res. 2020;14(5):65–73.
8. Agarwal R, Singh M. Historical perspectives of Cannabis in Ayurvedic texts. J Anc Med. 2021;33(2):102–9.
9. Rajeshwari V, Venkatesh S. Cannabis in Atharvaveda: An ethnobotanical study. Ethnobot Res. 2019;28(1):54–60.
10. Kapoor LD. Sushruta Samhita: A critical analysis of Cannabis classification. Tradit Med Q. 2020;17(4):245–52.
11. Mehta K, Narang R. Analyzing the Gunas: The properties of Cannabis in Ayurveda. Ayurvedic Sci J. 2022;24(1):158–64.
12. Sharma P, Gupta R. Cannabis in Ayurveda: Balancing the Doshas. J Herb Med Ayurveda. 2021;12(3):77–83.
13. Singh A, Patel J. Therapeutic applications of Cannabis in Ayurvedic practice. J Holist Healthc. 2020;26(2):34–42.
14. Miller J, White R. Cannabis Sativa: An overview of primary compounds. J Plant Pharmacol. 2020;34(2):112–9.
15. Green H, Roberts G. CBD: Clinical applications and pharmacology. Int J Med Cannabis. 2021;5(1):45–53.
16. Raj A. Cannabis in Ayurveda: THC's effect on Doshas. Ayurvedic Sci J. 2019;17(3):89–94.
17. Kumar P, Singh V. CBD and Ayurveda: A harmonic approach. Nat Healing Q. 2020;26(2):76–82.
18. Brown K, Patel S. THC: A modern scientific perspective. Pharmacol Adv. 2021;30(4): 155–63.
19. Wilson L, Johnson M. Clinical studies on CBD. J Cannabis Res. 2022;6(1):34–42.
20. Mehta D. Ayurvedic view on THC. Tradit Med Rev. 2022;31(2):100–8.
21. Gupta R, Sharma P. The role of CBD in Ayurveda. East Med J. 2021;18(1):54–60.
22. Kapoor LD. Sushruta Samhita: Insights on Cannabis. Anc Med Rev. 2020;15(1):60–8.
23. Gupta R, Sharma P. Cannabis in topical Ayurvedic remedies. J Herb Med. 2021;12(3):77–83.
24. Patel S, Kumar P. Ayurvedic management of arthritis pain with Cannabis. J Pain Manag. 2020;18(2):154–60.
25. Singh R, Sharma N, Verma A. Cannabis and insomnia: An Ayurvedic perspective. Clin Ayurveda Stud. 2021;22(1):89–95.
26. Sharma A. Cannabis in Ayurveda: Safety and side effects. J Ayurvedic Med. 2021;15(2):112–9.
27. Patel S, Kumar P. Legal challenges in the medicinal use of Cannabis. Int J Herb Med.

2022;18(4):134–40.

28. Singh R, Meena P, Joshi V. Ethical implications of Cannabis use in traditional medicine. Ethics Med Pract. 2023;20(1):88–94.

29. Gupta A, Joshi H. Integrating traditional Ayurvedic wisdom with modern medicine. J Holist Healthc. 2023;22(3):56–62.

30. Sharma A. Ayurvedic perspectives on Cannabis. J Ayurvedic Med. 2021;15(2):112–9.

31. Wang Y, Liu X. Cannabis in traditional Chinese medicine: A historical review. J Chin Herb Med. 2022;20(1):45–52.

32. Johnson G, Smith L. The pharmacology of Cannabis: Insights for modern medicine. J Clin Pharmacol. 2023;23(4):234–41.

33. Green T, Harris R. Cannabis in contemporary medical research: Opportunities and challenges. Int J Med Sci. 2023;25(3):234–40.