

History of Cannabis in Sri Lanka

W.S. Weliange¹ and D.A.N.S. Prasannajith²

Abstract

The medical value of Kansa (*Cannabis* spp) is becoming increasingly clear, as it proves to be a versatile, safe, and inexpensive drug. Since 1984, the use of cannabis is illegal and is a punishable offence in Sri Lanka. However, more than 40 countries in the world currently grow cannabis as a major crop especially, for production of food, medicine, fabric, paper, cosmetics and as a spiritual enhancer. In this study a literature survey was done to realize the historical uses of cannabis in Sri Lanka. About 11 medical text books written in Sinhala language were referred which includes *Sarartha Sangrahaya* by King Buddadasa around 341 AD, *Yogasekaraya* written by M.D.R. Appuhami in 1894, *Es Veda Potha* by L.D Pedrik Appuhami in 1906, Sri Lankan Ayurvedic Pharmacopeia by Department of Ayurvedha in Sri Lanka in 1937, *Senehe shathakam* by N.A. Cooray in 1940, *Thel beheth potha* by P.E.P Deraniyagala in 1954, *Atheesara Chikithsawa* by Modern Books Company in 1962, Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants by Gunadasa Somasiri in 1963, *Purana Rahas thel beheth Potha* by Modern Books Company in 1969, *Go Rathnaya* by Modern Books Company in 1980, *Sri Lankawe Deshiaya Guli Kalka Sagaraya* by Leela Ramanayake in 2012 and *Udarata beheth gei ath veda potha* by Samayawardhana Publishers in 2012. Totally 101 medical concoctions were described that contain cannabis as an ingredient and from those 54 illnesses can be cured or prevented. Cannabis had a reputation as one of the most important herbal ingredients in Ayurvedic Medical Concoctions although British rulers prohibited use of Cannabis in Sri Lanka in 1895, and then removed Cannabis from Pharmacopeia of Ceylon by 1914. At present the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes is re-emerging in health care systems in many developed countries but in Sri Lanka due to lack of updated scientific knowledge cannabis is still considered as an illicit drug.

Keywords: Ayurvedha, Illicit drug, Kansa, Medial concoctions

¹ Department of Zoology, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka. Corresponding author's email: wasantha.weliange@yahoo.com

² Jethawana Project, Central Cultural Fund, Anuradhapura.