

Intellectual Piracy

Science and technology have definitely played a major role in human development. The force behind this development has been a highly evolved human brain. With unprecedented progress in science and technology in the present century, human resource and intelligence have assumed greater importance. Intellectual property is now considered to be a valuable asset. In fact the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) has a separate item on Trade Related intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to safeguard the innovative ideas of individuals/firms. However, the recognition of some of the products under TRIPs needs an urgent rethink.

If any idea has to be recognized as an intellectual property, it has to be a novel or an innovative idea/concept in for the betterment of society. This very aspect is thrown to the winds in awarding patents for the mass production of neem and turmeric as medicines to some multinationals.

Neem and turmeric are naturally available native products, which have been in use in every household (in India) from our ancestral times. Their medicinal value was fully known and exploited by our ancestors for the benefit of the society. In fact Ayurveda the Indian medicinal system makes use of turmeric extensively in its medicines. It is the same case even with neem. Neem's great utility, not only as a medicine but also as a natural and ecofriendly pesticide, is known to Indians from times immemorial. But never has India claimed the sole proprietary for any of these herbal wonders. Its use has been open to one and all.

It is only now that the scientists all around the world, especially in the western countries, are beginning to acknowledge the immense potential of these medicinal plants, whose use traces back to the ages of sages in India. The recent identification of turmeric as a more than useful medicine for wounds and bruises and neem as a ecofriendly pesticide under TRIPs has made it mandatory for anyone who wants to use them to pay licence fee to the patented manufacturer. This sounds ridiculous for all of us Indians who have been using neem, turmeric and several other natural herbs for medicinal purposes. And we all know that there is nothing novel in this discovery.

Increasing commercialization might have forced countries like America to adopt stringent patents to reward the hard work and to safeguard the interests of innovators. But patents for neem and turmeric is a clear case of misuse of intellectual property rights. This intellectual piracy should be seriously dealt with and the fruits of nature should be made available to everyone.

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November 1996, Technoworld