

Protecting India's traditional knowledge

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For centuries, Indian housewives have used homemade remedies based on cow's milk to cure constipation – but in 2009 Swiss giant Nestle applied for a patent to protect a similar product of its own.

Earlier this year, India successfully fought off Nestle's attempt at the European Patent Office (EPO) to secure a patent, saying that using cow's milk as a laxative was mentioned in ancient texts and was therefore not new.

Indian government officials are fighting hundreds of other cases to try to protect the country's "genetic heritage".

Vinod Kumar Gupta is the head of India's **Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)**. The library is a digital database established in 2001 to record 250,000 traditional formulations.

Evidence from the **TKDL** is key to protect India's traditional knowledge. A U.S. patent application was made by Britain-based firm Provexis on the use of banana extracts as treatment for diarrhoea. But documentation from the digital library proved that India already had the knowledge and hence the patent was withdrawn.AFP