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India foils UK pharma firm's ginger patent

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: India has foiled an attempt by a British pharmaceutical company to claim a patent on using ginger for the treatment of cough and cold.

While Indians have been gulping down steaming 'adrak chai' through generations as a standard home remedy, Nicholas John Larkins, London, filed a patent application (GB2436063) titled "Pharmaceutical composition for the treatment of excess mucous production"

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on March 16, 2006 at the British patent office. The company claimed that the usefulness of ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) and kutki plant (*Picrorhiza kurroa*) for the treatment of cough and lung diseases was its novel and unique finding.

The department of AYUSH and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) intervened and provided evidence from age-old ayurveda and unani books, dating back to the 18th century that talked about ginger and kutki being used alone or in combination with other ingredients to treat cough, bronchial asthma and lung diseases.

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Attempt at knowledge piracy spiked in 2 weeks

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“Within two weeks of India providing evidence, the five-year-old attempt to pirate India's traditional medicinal knowledge was struck down by the UK patent office in 2011,” a health ministry official said.

The books that were referred to as evidence by CSIR included Ilaaj-al-Amraaz (18th century),

Bhaisajya Ratnavali and Bharata Bhaisajya Ratnakara (1000 BC), Bayaaz-e-Kabir (1938 AD), Muheet-e-Azam (19th century) and Khazaain-al-Advia from the 20th century.

“India through the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) submitted its prior art evidences on April 25, 2011. The examiner terminated the patent application before grant,” a health ministry official said.

Ginger has been a popular Indian home remedy for treating cough and cold. Ginger tea drunk hot is known to provide relief to the throat. At times, it is mixed with lemon and honey.

The high concentration of vitamin C in the drink improves resistance levels, lowers toxicity of the infection and reduces duration of the cold.

Till about 10 years ago, around 2,000 wrong patents concerning

indigenous systems of medicine were being granted annually at the international level due to lack of evidence provided by India.

The digital library has been a real boon for India.

More than 2.26 lakh rare medical formulations which were part of the ancient Indian texts have been dug out, transcribed, documented and digitized into the path-breaking the TKDL to protect them from bio-pirates.