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## A strong dose to check wrong patents

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Traditional medicinal knowledge of India comprising two lakh formulations can no longer be pirated at the international level. After nine years of pursuit, the government has signed a historic agreement with the European Patent Office (EPO) to prevent the grant of wrong patents concerning Indian systems of medicine at the international level.

Close to 2,000 wrong patents of Ayurvedic, Unani and Sidha yoga systems of medicine are still being granted annually at the global level. The starkest examples of such wrong

patenting, causing economic losses to India, is the grant of patent on the wound healing properties of turmeric in 1995 by the US Patent and Trade Mark Office and on anti-fungal properties of neem granted at the EPO.

But all this is set to change, with the experts of AYUSH and Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) creating the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) database, which has been made available to the patent examiners at the EPO and its 34 member nations. In the past, most wrong patents were granted because India's traditional medicinal knowledge existed only in Sanskrit,

Hindi, Arabic, Urdu and Tamil - languages which international patent examiners did not understand.

But TKDL has broken these language barriers by converting the information in local languages into open domain textbooks in five international languages — English, Japanese, French, German and Spanish. All this information has been made available in 30 million A4 size pages to EPO. So far, 81,000 formulations in Ayurveda; 104,000 in Unani and 12,000 in Sidha yoga have been digitalised under TKDL.

"Now patent examiners at EPO will be in a position to establish prior

art in case they receive patent applications based on Indian systems of medicine. For example, if someone wants to patent the sexual disinhibiting properties of white mulberry, patent examiners would know that such qualities already exist in Indian traditional formulations. They can then refuse the grant of new patent."

VK Gupta, IT head, CSIR  
With TKDL, India can now protect its two lakh medical formulations (like neem and turmeric) at no cost. Till now, all India could do was oppose a wrong patent in case it came up. On an average, it takes five to seven years to oppose a patent at the international level. The process costs Rs 3 crore per case.

**Traditional  
Medicines**