

# CURRENT SCIENCE

Volume 74 Number 4

25 February 1998

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Protection of IPR

This refers to the article on 'Protection of intellectual property rights' by C. R. Bhatia (*Curr. Sci.*, 1997, 73, 809). I fully agree with his views expressed about patent laws and GATT agreements. Really, most of us are still unable to realize the post-GATT repercussions regarding patents and Trade-Related Intellectual Property Systems (TRIPS). The general public has almost no understanding about these agreements. The Gene Campaign, an NGO under Suman Sahai is doing a marvelous job and this organization has been doing yeoman's service to the country in creating an awakening in masses for the last several years. Even those who know the things are unable to accept the harsh realities of GATT. After globalization, things are changing very fast and we have to keep pace with time as we know that 'time and tide wait for none'. But the real tragedy with most of us is that we are still harbouring ostrich beliefs and cherish some rosy day dreams about possible reforms taking place in this international pact. Now the time has come when we should abstain from wishful thinking since these are meaningless. We have to compete with others by facing ground realities. In this connection India has to gear up its own R&D programmes to develop new know-how and hi-tech that can generate wealth for the nation. Knowledge is wealth now and we have to work in that direction to create knowledge. Any new

idea/thought or technological thing that can be exploited to generate wealth for the prosperity of a nation must be protected, and properly paid for in the form of patent and copy rights. This is the theme of GATT regime. Nothing is wrong in this because it will induce competitiveness among the countries to hunt for something new and better.

Besides going for new knowledge, we should also be careful enough to save our rich traditional knowledge. India is very prosperous in this domain. Turmeric, *Curcuma longa* (haldi) has been a part of growing up for most Indians and has been a grandmother's panacea for a variety of cuts, wounds, and muscular sprains and inflammations since time immemorial. In 1995, two US scientists, Suman Das and Harihar Cohly from the University of Mississippi Medical College procured a patent on tumeric claiming that they had, for the first time, proved the wound-healing properties of turmeric. A great hue and cry was made in India and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) on behalf of Government of India filed a case in a US court. Very recently after a legal battle, CSIR has emerged victorious. The CSIR cited a lot of references from old Indian medical literature and research papers from the *Indian Journal of Medical Association* of 1953. Now the patent is cancelled. But this is not all. Many pirates have entered into the Indian garden and

are looking to rob us as they want to profit from traditional oriental wisdom.

A classic example of neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) can be mentioned which is a native of India and its various products have been in use since thousands of years back as insecticide, pesticide and microbicide in household and agriculture. Between 1985 and 1995, at least 37 patents have been granted in the world on the properties of neem and most of them are given on the pesticidal property. India could bag only 3 patents which is really a poor performance. We are lagging far behind the multinational giants. It is high time for us to wake up and make all-out efforts to save our rich traditional knowledge, otherwise it will be too late. In the first week of January while inaugurating the session of Indian Science Congress Association at Hyderabad, our prime minister has made an important announcement that government will give top priority to intellectual property rights of Indians and will set up several patent offices in the country to help the patentees and patent-seekers.

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