

EDITORIAL

THE VALUE IS IN THE RESOURCE AND THE AUTHENTICITY.

Over two decades ago environmental protectionists worldwide celebrated a most significant event. It was a landmark deal between the Drug Company Merck, and the National Biodiversity Institute of Costa Rica, "INBio". Until then, Drug companies from the industrialized world were collecting biological specimens from anywhere they wanted and shipping them to the west for research. The country with the resource got nothing. In the deal with Costa Rica, Merck was offering 1.1 million dollars up-front for bioprospecting rights, and a Royalty for any drugs resulting from the research. A share of the payment was to go towards protecting the habitat itself.

It was a significant new beginning. The matter is most relevant to the part of the world where herbal preparations are largely the therapeutic agents of the populations. Systems such as Ayurvedic Medicine, and the Chinese Traditional Medicine, use mainly plant derived therapies, but much of the plant material is drawn from the spontaneous flora such as rain forests. Rain Forests which have been an acknowledged treasure trove of therapeutic agents are very much a dwindling resource, being sacrificial to rapacious overharvesting on the one hand, and the modern development process on the other.

Governments could care less about conservation when it comes to these factors. As a result a large percentage of the species of plants, for example, that are used by Ayurvedic practitioners in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, are identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, (IUCN), as endangered or even extinct. This brings one to the stark fact of the use of adulterant-species - meaning similar species which may not be suitable either on account of toxicity or lack of efficacy- that are employed in herbal preparations.

In the modern context the Practitioner can no longer be relied on to make his own medicines as of yore. Several factors such as the above, ranging from the dire need to save the habitat and the species, to ensuring the authenticity of the ingredients employed in preparations, lend support to scientifically driven factory produced herbal medicines, as the answer to the modern need.

Such medicines, now classified in the west as OTC's, or food supplements, are now increasingly utilized on a self selection basis, due to disillusionment with modern conventional therapies. They form the basis of a Global multi-billion dollar industry.

Hence factory production, with all the rigors of scientific surveillance, ranging from the authentication of the plant species used, through processing, to quality assessment of products, assumes supreme importance.

It is our legacy to preserve the essence of Ayurvedic practice, ensure environmental security, and utilize modern science as the driving force to benefit the health of the people.

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