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Bio-piracy of Indian traditional knowledge

Usama Akram, Jamal Akhtar, Misbahuddin Azhar and Pawan Kumar
CCRUM, India

Unani Medicine is based on the principles put forward by Hippocrates and exploited assimilated by the Physicians of Medieval period. Hippocrates was the first person to establish that disease was a natural process, that its symptoms were the reactions of the body to the disease, and that the chief function of the physician was to aid the natural forces of the body. He was the first physician to introduce the method of taking medical histories. Several assets of Unani medicine are available in different languages i.e. Arabic, Urdu, Persian and other regional languages. These literary assets are easily accessible and thus have been susceptible to misuse across the world. In other words, Classical Unani text is being exploited for bio-prospecting. So it is often misappropriated, because it is assumed that since it is in public domain, communities have given up all claims over it.

Theft of Unani formulations for the treatment of various diseases is not new thing but it is a matter of concern since last couple of decades. However, information regarding Unani Medicine exists in Arabic, Urdu, Persian and other regional languages. The examiners of different national/international patent offices are unable to understand this information as prior art, before granting patents due to language barrier.

Some of the case studies of misappropriation of Unani classical knowledge are discussed in this paper, in which some Unani traditional formulations (mentioned in Unani classical texts) have been claimed for wrong patent.

usamakramdr@gmail.com