CHAPTER - 17
GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR MEDICINAL USES OF AYURVEDA, HERBAL PRODUCTS, NEUTRACEUTICALS AND ALTERNATIVES*

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Ayurved is one of the most ancient systems of medicines in the world. Ayurvedic medicines are one of the most ancient systems of treatment in India & now spreading globally. Natural Products are also a part of our everyday life. Right from the inception, India has a rich heritage of usage of Ayurvedic & Herbal medicines supported by neutraceuticals.

Ayurveda and Herbal have just recently started rising on the horizon of alternative system of medicine. Ayurveda and Herbal were being practiced and used all over the world for many years but have only recently started getting legal acceptance in many countries in the world as alternative system of medicine.

India is called “Botanical Garden of the world” as it is the largest producer of medicinal herbs. Out of more than 25000 plants of medicinal value, only 10% are used for their medicinal value. Around 1800 species are systematically documented in the codified Indian systems of medicine. These herbal products are preventive, protective, nutritive and curative.

Botanically, a herb is a plant with a non woody stem which withers and dries down after flowering. The term applies to all plants whose leaves, stems, roots, flowers, fruits and seeds have medicinal uses.

There are thousands of Herbs which can be processed to prepare their extracts in the form of liquid, paste & powders.

As per W.H.O. report, more than 80% of the world population uses medicines made from Herbal and natural products.

Current Global market of Herbal & Ayurvedic medicines is estimated to be more than US$ 100 billion, out of this E.U. accounts for about 40%, Japan 20%, USA 10%. The Asian countries together account for 30% of the global market. During last decade importance of Alternative medicine was realized and with the inclination to this, the growth rate of Ayurvedic & Herbal industry can be put more than 30% for the last 25 years.

The world, which due to technological advances, developed medicines which are quick acting, potent and capable to treat & provide symptomatic relief, has now started to feel the need for longer lasting & more fundamental cures for their problems of health. Attention now being shifted from relief to prevention & cure. The intention to go back to nature & use natural materials & methods of ancient times. The support to this use of food supplements / neutraceuticals is promoted in USA under law called DSHEA. These industries have rapid growth of more than 3 trillion dollars – industry comprising of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, nutrients, micronutrients & above all herbs.

The opportunities are enormous in India the only constraint is this system is not recognized in most parts of the world legally as a system of medicine / health care, allowing qualified doctors to practice the profession, advise & prescribe Ayurvedic & Herbal medicines & neutraceuticals. Whatever is happening in few countries is due to individual efforts in personal capacity & success stories heard some time. A new model & statutory clearances for facing this challenge is now required. Recent developments in Italy and U.K. with Lord Walton Committee, the coming up European law on traditional medicines are all putting more challenges & requirements to be met.

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Concurrently more & more discussions are emerging about source of herbs & their collection, cultivation, harvesting, post harvesting practices, storage, microbiological & other contamination characteristics. These provide more challenges, Notifications about export of such natural materials, need for sustainable development & the recently enacted Biodiversity Act add more aspects to be taken care of.

Ayurveda accounts for more than 80 percent of user profile of traded medicinal plants, with 719 plants being used in this sector . The lowest number of species (49) are being in modern system of medicine. It is estimated that over 8000 units are engaged in preparation of wide range of herbal products using medicinal plants. Most of the units are in the Ayurveda system of medicine. There are also licensed practitioners numbering around 500,000, who believe in processing the plants themselves and preparation of medicines. Besides, there are also estimated one million folk healers in and around villages of India. There also medicinal plants cultivation and consumption at home level (Tulsi and Aloe vera and such others) which are beyond the estimation for commercial cultivation. Based on the current commercial consumption levels in the ISM sector (Rs.384 crore), and export level (Rs.463 crore only crude drugs), it is estimated that commercialization of medicinal plant cultivation was to the extent of Rs.847 crore (in 2001-02) in India.

During the last decade, there has been a growing interest in traditional and alternative systems of medicine in many developed countries. Medicinal plants are the oldest known health-care products. Their importance is still growing although it varies depending on the ethiological, medical and historical background of each country. Herbal medicines are assuming greater importance in the primary health care of individuals and communities in many developed as well as developing countries and there has been an increase in international trade in herbal medicines.

Because of their uniqueness Ayurvedic products as an alternative system of medicine, and many herbal products of Indian origin, have very good potential to win a considerable share of the world market. Reportedly, UK, UAE, Sweden, Indonesia and USA (3 Countries) have already recognized Ayurveda as a health care system and thirty more countries are on the verge of doing so. India with its wide variety of climatic and soil conditions has ample scope in gaining a foothold in the global plant based pharmaceutical market. But the promotional efforts by industries and government have not been sufficient to achieve the required potential presented by the markets abroad. Thus an appropriate planning and action based on the market requirements is essential.

India has 45000 diverse plant species spread over 16 different agro-climatic zones, 10 vegetation zones, 25 biotic provinces and 426 habitats of specific spices . Besides, India has up to 18,000 flowering plants, 2500 algae, 23,000 fungi, 1600 types of lichen and 1,800 varieties of bryophytes. Of this vast quantum around 15,000 to 20,000 are of medicinal value, but out of this only, 7,000 to 7,500 plants are used by traditional medicine systems in India.

In the light of such situation, there is a need for establishing backward and forward linkages for the herbal sector and strategies for their seamless integration for a sustainable growth oriented performance of the sector, specifically on the export front.