

## Medicinal Aromatic Plants and Enterprises Development

Chandra Prakash Kala\*

Indian Institute of Forest Management, Madhya Pradesh, India

The Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) in India is one of the leading institutions imparting training, teaching and consultancy on the forestry, environment and allied sectors for past three decades. The Post Graduate Diploma in Forestry Management (PGDFM) is one of the flagship programmes of the IIFM, which is a fulltime two years residential programme. Four year ago, in 2008, I planned to introduce a new course on the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) to the students of PGDFM. Since the PGDFM is opened for the graduates of diverse streames including science, art and commerce, designing the course and its contents become a challenging task. Besides, the PGDFM is a job oriented programme, which has record of 100% placements for all the batches since its inception.

Before indulging fully in structuring the course on MAPs, I was in the impression that it would be an easy task as I have had over 20 years of experience on the MAPs. But soon I realized that it was not so easy as I thought earlier. Once I started compiling literature, the task became too complicated, not because of scarcity of literature but the availability of huge amount of valuable and multidimensional literature on MAPs. The uses of plants as medicine are mentioned in the Rigveda – one of the oldest vedic literature written around 4500-1600 BC. Apart from the continuous accumulation of knowledge on MAPs from antiquity, the number of scientific institutions and colleges dealing with multiple research and developmental issues of MAPs have been established today. At present, several other disciplines including biotechnology, molecular biology and biochemistry have been embedded in MAPs and thus studying MAPs requires the basic understanding of such associated discples as well.

The multidisciplinary nature of MAPs, which include traditional knowledge systems, agrotechnology, biotechnology, molecular biology, conservation biology, marketing, finance, law and policy also inflated the level of my efforts in selection of suitable course contents. I discussed such problems with the experts of MAPs including my faculty colleagues at IIFM, and after several rounds of discussions and suggestions made by experts, I thought to specify the objectives and scope of the course. In order to make the course reasonable and acceptable for the students of diverse backgrounds, I focussed the course towards enterprises development, and finally the course was designed with the title 'Medicinal Aromatic Plants and Enterprises Development' (MAPED). This helps me to restrict and screen the literature on MAPs focussing enterprises development. The basic concepts and significance of MAPs remain the part of the course.

In 30 sessions course in which each session is of one hour, apart from imparting general knowledge on MAPs, the different case studies on

cultivation and conservation practices, demand and supply, deveoping market infrastructure, laws, policy, and patent issues are included. Some success stories on micro and macro enterprises in MAPs are incorporated in the MAPED course. This course also includes various international policies and guidelines such as Good Agriculture and Collection Practices of Medicinal Plants developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), norms of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA of USA), Article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), patents and patent procedures in different countries. This helps to widen the understanding of its taker on MAPs in larger perspective.

The MAPED course content is appreciated by the students and it is expected that such courses on MAPs are the need of hour, which not only pass on knowledge and creat awareness through generations but also develop the skilled man power to develop and strengthen the MAPs sector. Most of the valuable knowledge on MAPs evolved through number of trials and errors over centuries, especially on medicinal plants, has declined in the past due to several reasons including ignorance and some inherent problems in transferring the knowledge through generations [1,2]. Even today, many traditional herbal practitioners do not disclose the medicinal properties of some valuable medicinal plant species. If concerted efforts are not made timely in documenting such valuable knowledge it may be lost forever.

Today, the significance of traditional knowledge on medicinal plants to the society can be adjudged by the example of *Artemisia annua* – which was used long back in the Chinese Medical System but remained ignored for long period of time [3]. The rediscovery of *Artemisia annua* for curing malarial fever using modern scientific tools is a lesson to the society to appreciate, scientifically validate and transfer such an extremely valuable knowledge through all possible medium of communications. It is a matter of great pleasure to me to introduce the 'Medicinal and Aromatic Plants' journal to the readers as I feel that the gaps in documentation and dissemination of informaiton on the MAPs will be bridged by this journal.

### References

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\*Corresponding author: Chandra Prakash Kala, Indian Institute of Forest Management, Madhya Pradesh, India, E-mail: [cpkala@iifm.ac.in](mailto:cpkala@iifm.ac.in)

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