

## IMPACT OF MEDICINAL PLANTS IN EXPORTS AND IMPORTS IN INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

Medicinal plants are offering a major market due to their demand all over world. There is a vast demand in medicinal plants resulting in a huge trade, national and international level for domestic use and for commercial trade. In this paper, the medicinal plants exports, imports were studied and analysed. From the result we found that the exports of medicinal plants were more compared to imports. But as compared to total exports and imports, medicinal plants are very low. We need to improve the medicinal plants exports, by making their by bioactive products by developing into herbal drugs. By improving our medicinal plants exports, we can get a way to enter into developed countries.

**KEYWORDS:** Medicinal plants, Exports, Imports, Foreign trade.

### **INTRODUCTION**

*“The causes which determine the economic progress of nations belong to the study of international trade”*

Marshall (1890)

International trade has flourished over the years due to the many benefits it has offered to different countries across the globe. International trade is the exchange of services, goods, and capital among various countries and regions, without much hindrance. The international trade accounts for a good part of a country's gross domestic product. It is also one of important sources of revenue for a developing country. Foreign Trade in India was initiated by the Indo-Greek rulers. This strengthened the contact with western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean which had started in the Mauryan period. The Shakas, Parthians and Kushanas brought Central Asia into the orbit of Indian merchant, which in turn encouraged commerce

with China. The Roman demand for spices, textiles, semi-precious stones and other luxuries led Yavana traders from the Eastern Mediterranean to southern and western India. Indian traders in turn were motivated likewise to visit south-east Asia as entrepreneurs. The entire activities really helped the Indian traders and they became the chief beneficiary. Thus prosperity of the merchant community is evident from their donations to religious institutions and from descriptions of the wealthy merchants in contemporary literature. Merchants of Ancient India began Commerce with the Foreign Countries.

In this connection it is quite interesting to note that the Indian merchants had to hire foreign ships for their overseas trade. Hence they had to seek the transport facilities of the foreign trading communities. But the Cholas of South India were an exception. They had their own ships for transporting goods to foreign countries. This helped them to secure predominant position in Indian Ocean. They had several small ships and so many large ships built by them. In the opinion of Pliny the biggest ship built by them had been 75 tons. During the second and third centuries B.C. some goods of Chinese origin were in use in India with names derived from Chinese. During the Kushana rule Silk Route was used for trading purposes. This route covered an area that spread from Central Asia and Afghanistan via Iran and ultimately reached the frontiers of the Roman empire. During the seventh centuries commercial activities in various ports of India gave an impetus to overseas trade.

India is very rich in flora. Plants being a national resource with uses in medicine and cosmetics, their development for domestic consumption. In today the countries of world are depending on exports and imports of commodities on each other. The export commodities have to be available in abundance to pay for the import bill. India has 15 Agroclimatic zones and 17000-18000 species of flowering plants of which 6000-7000 are estimated to have medicinal usage in folk and documented systems of medicine, like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homoeopathy. About 960 species of medicinal plants are estimated to be in trade of which 178 species have annual consumption levels in excess of 100 metric tons. Medicinal plants are not only a major resource base for the traditional medicine & herbal industry but also provide livelihood and health security to a large segment of Indian population.

The oldest written evidence of medicinal plants' usage for preparation of drugs has been found on a Sumerian clay slab from Nagpur, approximately 5000 years old. It comprised 12 recipes for drug preparation referring to over 250 various plants (Kelly, 2009). The Indian holy books Vedas mentioned the treatment with plants, which are abundant in that country.

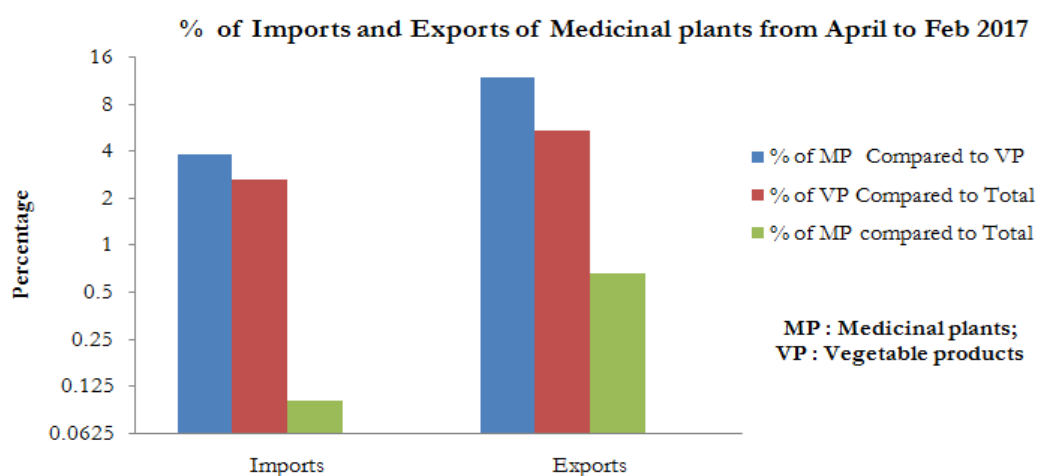
Abundant spice plants used today originated from India: nutmeg, pepper, clove, etc.(Tucakov, 1971). From about 250,000 species of higher plants around the world, only 17% have been scholarly investigated for medical potential (Fransworth, 1992). Therefore, be quite relevant to include the study of foreign trade of these items to assess the effort and achievements in the field of research on Indian medicinal plants. This attempt has been made to show the present status of the export/import trade of the country in medicinal and aromatic plants.

## METHODS

The secondary data was collected from Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India. The data was sorted out and analysed them. The data was then tabulated and graphs were drawn out. The data was compared by percentage change of medicinal plants export and import data with vegetable products and with total exports and imports.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data of Imports showed that Percentage of medicinal plants imports was 3.83% of total vegetable products. Percentage of medicinal plants imports was 0.1% of total Imports. Percentage of vegetable products imports was 2.67% of total Imports to India. The data of Exports showed that Percentage of medicinal plants exports was 12% of total vegetable products. Percentage of medicinal plants exports was 0.66% of total exports. Percentage of vegetable products exports was 5.49% of total exports to India.



**Fig 1: Percentage of Imports and Exports.**

India, as described earlier is a virtual treasure for many medicinal plant species. Despite substantial speed of growth in the medicinal plant market, India's share in world market of medicinal plant and products is a merely 2.5 percent. The export market is growing faster than the domestic market. However, the export is being carried out in form of plants or their parts and not as value added products. Countries that import plant cause perpetually less biodiversity but are technologically advanced which show a higher capability to develop plants products from the imports. The Indian exporters face major limitation while exporting medicinal plants. It is interesting to note that India has negligible patents on plant based formulations, extracts and products. The reason is unknown now. Traditional knowledge held by communities, in the classical sense, cannot be patented. To a great extent of the traditional knowledge that is not recorded is not part of the previous skill. Thus knowledge of the tribal and indigenous communities has novelty, non-obviousness and industrial application which are the basic requirements for acquiring protection under Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement of the World Trade Organization.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), about 70 percent of the world's population relies on plants for their primary health care and some 35,000 to 70,000 species has been used as medicaments, a figure corresponding to 14-28% of the 250,000 plants species estimated to occur around the world (Akerele, 1992; Farnsworth and Soejarto, 1991), and equivalent to 35-70% of all species used world-wide (Padulosi et al., 2002). In today's global market, more than 50 major drugs originated from tropical plants (De Padula al., 1999). As our result shows that the exports are more compared with imports. So we should focus on how to improve medicinal plants exports so as to have international status. Medicinal plants exports should be increased, as the percentage compared to total exports is very low India with its good knowledge of traditional herbal medicine should gain entry into developed countries includes well-documented traditional use. We should standardise medicinal plants into herbal drugs. Herbal drug development is possible only through the development of standardized herbal products from our traditional knowledge. The bioactive products of medicinal plants should be isolated in a large scale.

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