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Q14

India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) which has a database containing formatted information on more than 2 million medicinal formulations is proving a powerful weapon in country's fight against erroneous patents. Discuss the pro and cons of making the database available publicly available under open source licensing.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS III · 12 marks · Indian Economy

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Core demand of the question

- Note how **TKDL** fights erroneous patents on Indian medicinal knowledge
- Discuss pros and cons of putting that database under public open-source licensing

Revision summary

TKDL formats over two million Indian medicinal entries so patent offices can see prior art and reject biopiracy claims.

Open-source public release would widen research, audit, and prior-art reach.

It would also let firms copy recipes without filing a patent, weaken community consent, and risk unsafe self-medication.

A middle path is open metadata and a licensed full-text track with benefit-sharing.

The library should stay a defensive tool, not an ungoverned dump of living traditions.

Flow diagram

Traditional texts practice -> TKDL formatted database

TKDL formatted database -> Patent offices reject bad claims

Full open dump -> More research transparency

Full open dump -> Copy without patent ABS gap

Open metadata controlled full text -> Defence plus consent

Conclusion

- Do not confuse "open to patent offices" with "open to every scraper".
- Strengthen **TKDL** in more languages and in oral, community-verified entries with consent.
- Pair the library with faster **pre-grant opposition** and Indian Patent Office examiner training so the weapon is used.

TKDL already works as a closed, formatted shield against wrong patents. Full public open-source licensing would help researchers and catch more claims, but it would also ease copying that never goes to a patent office and could ignore community rights. A split - open metadata, controlled full formulations, and benefit-sharing for commercial use - keeps the weapon without giving away the store.

Facts & figures

TKDL

Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, a CSIR-AYUSH database of formatted Indian medicinal and yoga knowledge for patent search.

Trigger cases

Contested foreign patents on turmeric, neem, and basmati showed that Indian prior art was not visible to examiners.

Defensive publication

TKDL's main use is to block erroneous patents, not to grant new monopolies on old knowledge.

Biological Diversity Act

Indian law on access to biological resources and associated knowledge, including benefit-sharing expectations.

Patent office access

TKDL has been shared with major patent offices under agreements so examiners can search without a public bulk dump.

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