www.ijarp.com ISSN 2456-9992 Page: 01-11

International Journal Advanced Research Publications

Review Article

Volume: 02
Issue: 04

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR HERBAL MEDICINE

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Article Received: 19 March 2026, Article Revised: 09 April 2026, Published on: 29 April 2026

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DOI: https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.6221

ABSTRACT

Herbal medicine has become one of the fastest growing sectors of healthcare in the modern world because consumers are increasingly shifting toward plant-based therapies and natural treatment systems. Herbal formulations are used for immunity improvement, digestive care, skin disorders, liver protection, stress management, and several chronic illnesses. Although these medicines are obtained from natural plant sources, they cannot be considered automatically safe and effective without scientific monitoring. Problems such as adulteration, contamination, wrong plant identification, heavy metal presence, microbial growth, false therapeutic claims, and poor manufacturing quality can make herbal products harmful to public health.

Because of these concerns, regulatory control has become a highly important part of herbal medicine development. Regulatory requirements refer to the legal rules, quality standards, safety guidelines, manufacturing norms, testing procedures, packaging controls, and approval systems that ensure herbal medicines are safe, standardized, and reliable for human use.

In India, herbal medicines are mainly governed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, Ministry of AYUSH guidelines, Pharmacopoeial standards, and Good Manufacturing Practice requirements. At the international level, organizations like the World Health Organization also provide quality and safety guidelines for herbal medicines used globally.

INTRODUCTION

Medicinal plants have been used by human beings for thousands of years for the treatment of various diseases. Ancient systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Chinese medicine, and folk healing depended heavily on herbs, roots, bark, flowers, and seeds. Even today, herbal medicine continues to hold an important place in healthcare because many people believe that

natural medicines are safer, economical, and more holistic than synthetic drugs.

The popularity of herbal products has increased rapidly due to growing awareness about immunity, chronic disease management, preventive healthcare, and wellness therapy. Herbal formulations are now available in the form of tablets, capsules, syrups, powders, oils, teas, ointments, nutraceuticals, and cosmetic preparations. This expansion has created a huge commercial herbal market.

However, with this rapid growth comes a major concern. Not every herbal medicine sold in the market is pure, genuine, or safe. Some products may contain wrong plant species, adulterated ingredients, pesticides, heavy metals, microbes, or misleading claims. Since many consumers assume that natural means harmless, they may use such products without understanding the hidden risks.

This situation creates the need for proper regulation. Regulatory requirements are necessary to ensure that herbal medicines are manufactured scientifically, tested properly, labeled correctly, and supplied under legal quality standards. Without regulation, the herbal medicine industry can become unreliable and unsafe.

Therefore, regulatory control acts as the backbone of trust between traditional herbal knowledge and modern pharmaceutical acceptance.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The project has been prepared with the following objectives:

- To understand the need and importance of regulation in herbal medicine.
- To study the legal framework governing herbal drugs in India.
- To analyze manufacturing license and GMP requirements.
- To examine quality control and standardization procedures.
- To study safety, efficacy, labeling, and documentation norms.
- To understand export regulations and international standards.
- To identify major challenges faced in herbal medicine regulation.

CONCEPT AND IMPORTANCE OF HERBAL MEDICINE REGULATION

Herbal medicine regulation means the legal and scientific system through which herbal products are controlled before they are manufactured, marketed, sold, or exported. Regulation is necessary because medicinal products directly affect human health, and any error in composition or contamination may lead to serious consequences.

Many people think that herbal medicines are naturally safe because they come from plants.

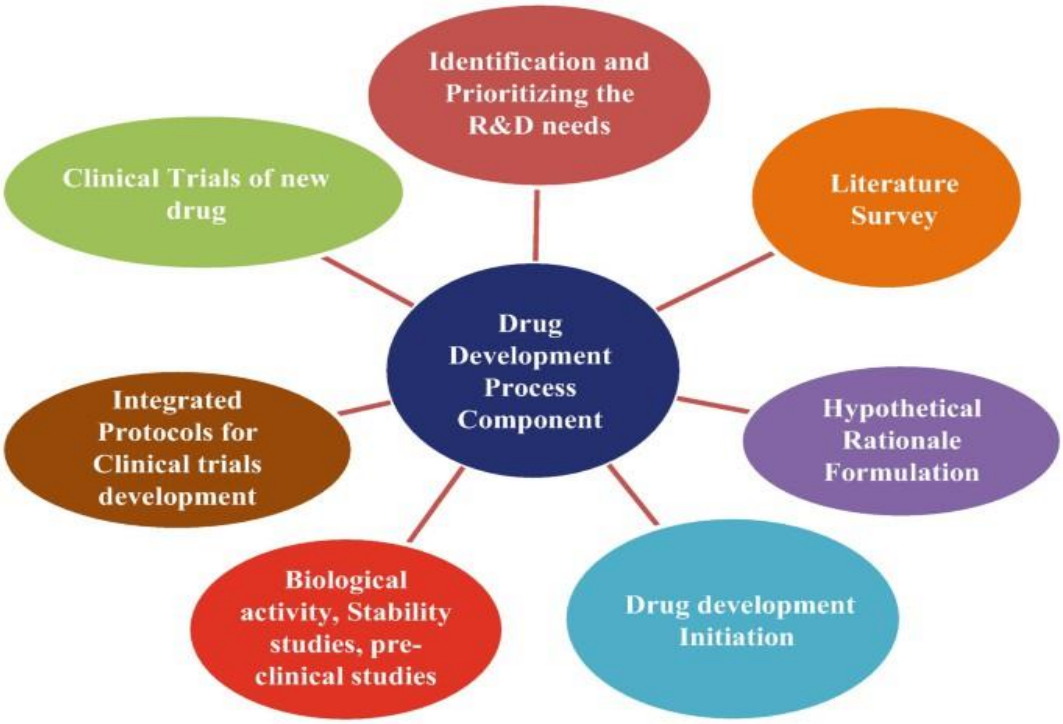
This belief is only partially true. A medicinal plant may be beneficial, but if the wrong species is collected, if the herb is stored badly, if pesticides remain on it, or if microbes contaminate the product, then the medicine may become ineffective or dangerous.

Another reason regulation is important is standardization. Herbal drugs are biological materials, so variation can occur depending on climate, soil, harvesting season, drying method, and extraction process. Without regulation, every batch may have different strength.

Regulation therefore ensures:

- correct identity of herbs
- consistent quality
- proper dosage
- safety for consumers
- truthful therapeutic claims
- legal accountability of manufacturers

Thus, regulation transforms herbal medicine from simple traditional use into scientifically reliable healthcare products.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR HERBAL MEDICINES

In India, herbal medicines are regulated mainly under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** and **Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945**. These laws provide the legal foundation for manufacturing, quality control, sale, and licensing of Ayurvedic, Siddha, Unani, and proprietary herbal formulations.

The major regulatory bodies involved are:

- Ministry of AYUSH
- State Licensing Authorities
- Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy
- Central Drugs Standard Control Organization
- National Medicinal Plants Board

These agencies monitor product approval, licensing, GMP certification, standardization, pharmacopoeial standards, and export support.

Herbal medicines are legally classified as:

- Classical Ayurvedic/Siddha/Unani medicines
- Proprietary Ayurvedic medicines
- Herbal supplements
- Nutraceutical formulations
- Medicinal cosmetics

This classification determines what kind of approval documents are required.

MANUFACTURING LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

No herbal medicine can be legally manufactured without obtaining a proper manufacturing license. Any pharmaceutical company or Ayurvedic unit that wants to produce herbal drugs must apply to the State Licensing Authority under AYUSH.

For obtaining a license, the manufacturer must provide:

- registered manufacturing premises
- list of machinery and equipment
- qualified technical staff

- raw material storage facility
- finished goods storage area
- sanitation and hygiene compliance
- documentation system
- water and waste disposal arrangement

GOOD MANUFACTURING PRACTICES (GMP)

One of the most important regulatory requirements for herbal medicine is compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices, commonly called GMP. Herbal medicines are made from biological raw materials, and these raw materials can easily become contaminated by dust, microbes, fungus, moisture, insects, pesticides, or improper handling. Therefore, manufacturing cannot be done in an ordinary room or unscientific setup.

In India, GMP standards for Ayurvedic, Siddha, and Unani herbal medicines are prescribed under **Schedule T of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules**. These standards make it compulsory for manufacturers to maintain hygienic factory conditions, suitable machinery, trained workers, quality documentation, and contamination-free production.

Under GMP, the following conditions are mandatory:

- Separate raw material storage room
- Clean processing and manufacturing area
- Proper drying and extraction equipment
- Dust-free packaging room
- Finished goods storage area
- Water purification arrangement
- Worker hygiene facilities
- Pest control system
- Batch manufacturing record maintenance

The objective of GMP is simple: every batch of herbal medicine should be prepared in the same quality, same purity, and same strength. If GMP is not followed, one batch may be effective while another may be contaminated or weak.

Thus, GMP acts as the quality backbone of herbal pharmaceutical production.

The authority inspects whether the unit is suitable for medicine production. If conditions are fulfilled, the AYUSH manufacturing license is granted.

This licensing process is important because it prevents unqualified people from producing medicines in unhygienic or unscientific conditions

RAW MATERIAL AUTHENTICATION AND QUALITY CONTROL

Raw material is the heart of any herbal medicine. If the plant material itself is wrong, adulterated, low quality, or contaminated, then the final medicine cannot be effective no matter how good the packaging looks. Therefore, one of the strictest regulatory requirements is raw material authentication.

Herbal manufacturers must verify:

- correct botanical identity of plant
- correct part used (root, bark, leaf, fruit, flower etc.)
- freshness and maturity
- absence of foreign matter
- no fungal growth
- no pesticide residue
- no heavy metal contamination

Sometimes one medicinal plant is replaced by a similar looking cheaper species. This is called substitution or adulteration. Regulatory systems strictly prohibit such practices.

After authentication, the raw material is tested through:

- organoleptic examination
- microscopic identification
- physicochemical analysis
- phytochemical screening
- moisture content determination
- ash value determination

These tests help ensure that the herb is genuine and pharmaceutically acceptable.

Quality control continues even after manufacturing. Final herbal medicine must also be tested

for:

- microbial contamination
- shelf stability
- active constituent consistency
- pH and moisture
- absence of toxic residues

Thus, raw material authentication and quality control are extremely necessary for trustworthy herbal medicine.

SAFETY AND EFFICACY EVALUATION

Many consumers think that herbal medicines are automatically safe because they come from plants. This assumption is not always correct. Some medicinal plants naturally contain toxic alkaloids, strong glycosides, allergens, or heavy metals absorbed from soil. In addition, contamination during processing may make the product harmful.

Therefore, safety evaluation is a compulsory regulatory requirement. Safety evaluation includes:

- acute toxicity studies
- chronic toxicity studies
- irritancy studies
- microbial safety testing
- heavy metal testing
- aflatoxin testing
- pesticide residue analysis

This testing helps determine whether the medicine is safe for human consumption.

Apart from safety, efficacy is also important. A herbal medicine should actually perform the therapeutic action it claims. For classical Ayurvedic formulations, long traditional use may serve as supportive evidence. But for proprietary herbal formulations, manufacturers may need:

- literature support
- pharmacological studies
- phytochemical evidence

- clinical observations
- published scientific references

PACKAGING, LABELING AND DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

After a herbal medicine is manufactured and tested, regulation does not end there. Packaging and labeling are also legally controlled because this is the part directly visible to the consumer.

A herbal medicine label must clearly mention:

- product name
- category of medicine
- full ingredient list
- batch number
- manufacturing license number
- manufacturing date
- expiry date
- dosage instructions
- storage conditions
- caution/warning if any
- manufacturer name and address

Part XVII of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules gives details regarding labeling and packing standards for Ayurvedic, Siddha, and Unani medicines.

False claims such as:

- guaranteed cure,
- instant permanent treatment,
- miracle disease reversal

are legally objectionable if not scientifically justified. Documentation is also compulsory. Manufacturers must maintain:

- batch manufacturing records
- raw material purchase records
- testing reports

- complaint records
- distribution records
- recall records

These documents create traceability. If any product problem occurs later, the company can be investigated.

EXPORT AND INTERNATIONAL REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Today herbal medicines are not sold only within India. Ayurvedic and herbal products are exported to many countries including the USA, UK, Germany, UAE, Canada, Australia, and Southeast Asia. But export requires additional regulatory compliance.

For export herbal medicines generally require:

- AYUSH manufacturing license
- GMP certification
- WHO-GMP certification
- Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (CoPP)
- Certificate of Analysis
- IEC code
- export documentation
- phytosanitary compliance
- country-specific labeling norms

CDSCO issues CoPP and WHO-GMP related export support documents for many ASU herbal drugs intended for international markets.

International buyers often demand:

- contaminant-free assurance,
- multilingual label instructions,
- standardized active constituents,
- heavy metal compliance,
- microbial safety reports.

This means export-quality herbal medicine requires much stricter documentation than

ordinary local sale products.

CHALLENGES IN HERBAL DRUG REGULATION

Even though regulatory systems exist, herbal medicine regulation still faces several practical challenges.

The first challenge is lack of complete standardization because herbs are natural materials and their composition changes with climate, soil, harvesting time, and storage.

The second challenge is adulteration. Many small manufacturers use low-grade herbs or substitute species to reduce cost.

The third challenge is weak scientific evidence in some products. Traditional claims are sometimes used without sufficient pharmacological proof.

Another major challenge is poor post-marketing surveillance. Many herbal products are sold online and locally without proper complaint monitoring.

Export compliance is another issue because different countries have different herbal laws, and meeting all standards becomes expensive.

Therefore, the herbal sector still needs stronger harmonization between traditional knowledge and modern pharmaceutical science.

CONCLUSION

From the entire study, it can be concluded that regulatory requirements play a very important role in transforming herbal medicine from simple traditional remedies into scientifically dependable healthcare products. Herbal medicines may come from natural plant sources, but natural origin alone does not guarantee purity, safety, or effectiveness.

Because herbal formulations can suffer from adulteration, contamination, poor manufacturing, wrong labeling, and false claims, legal regulation becomes absolutely necessary. Licensing, Good Manufacturing Practices, raw material authentication, quality control testing, safety evaluation, labeling norms, and post-marketing surveillance together create a protective framework for both consumers and manufacturers.

India has developed a strong regulatory base through the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, Ministry of AYUSH, GMP standards, and pharmacopoeial guidelines. However, continuous strengthening is still required because the herbal medicine market is growing rapidly at both national and international levels.

Therefore, it can be clearly said that regulation is the bridge that connects ancient herbal knowledge with modern pharmaceutical trust. Without proper regulation, herbal medicine

remains uncertain; with proper regulation, it becomes a reliable component of global healthcare.

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