1. INTRODUCTION
Since the early human existence, many natural products came into practice for human welfare by sheer intuition or more appropriately by trial and error. In the long struggle to overcome the powerful forces of nature the human beings have always turned to plants for food, shelter, clothing, weapons and healing. When pain or injury or disease struck, ancient people have little choice but to turn to plants. Developed empirically, by trial and error, many herbal preparations were remarkably effective. Throughout human existence plants were virtually all that was available to healers.

Plants are rich sources of chemicals and potential sources of effective medicines. Plants have beneficial effects on long-term health when consumed by human beings, and can be used effectively to treat human diseases (Lai et al., 2004). According to WHO, approximately 80% of world population relies mainly on the traditional medicines for the primary healthcare (Handa et al., 1991).

Medicinal herbs have been use for thousands of years in one form or another under the indigenous systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani. Since independence in 1947, India has made tremendous progress in Agro technology, process technology, standardization, quality control, research and development etc. (Chaudhari et al., 1996).

Herbal medicines are in great demand in the developed as well as developing countries for primary healthcare because of their wide biological activities, higher safety margins and lesser costs. They also offer therapeutics for age-related disorders like memory loss, osteoporosis, immune disorders, etc. for which no modern medicine is available. Public, academic and government interest in herbal medicines is growing exponentially due to the increased incidence of the adverse drug reactions and economic burden of the modern system of medicine.

Herbal medicines as the major remedy in traditional system of medicine have been used in medical practices since antiquity. The practices continue today because of its biomedical benefits as well as place in cultural beliefs in many
parts of world and have made a great contribution towards maintaining human health (Sane et al., 2002).

Many herbs have shown positive results in-vitro, animal model or small-scale clinical tests but many studies on herbal treatments have also found negative results (Srinivasan et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2000). Natural medicines induce fewer side effects than conventional drugs. Although man first started looking into his surroundings for plants and herbs for medicine to cure illness with potential as effective remedies of unconquerable and almost fatal ailments, but still herbs have continuously remained mysterious to him. While most of this mystery remains unrevealed, the scientific quest for herbal therapies and further experimentation go to show totally revolutionary perception.

Initially the principles underlying usage of those of plant or herbal medicines and remedies were far from scientifically defined. The practice of herbal medicine was linked with magical cures, witchcraft, divinity and superstitions. Infect, the origin of most herbal remedies can be traced to the wise man of the past, sages, mystics etc.

Crude drugs of natural origin, i.e. obtain from the plants, animal and mineral sources and their active chemical constituents is the core subject matter of pharmacognosy. These are not only used for the treatment of various diseases but also in cosmetic, textile and food industries. The second half of the nineteenth century brought with it a number of important discoveries in the newly developing fields of chemistry and witnessed the rapid progress of herbal science.

The revival of interest in herbal drugs and other natural products is mainly due to the increased awareness and mounting scientific evidence of harmful side effects of most of chemotherapeutic agents, antibiotics, cortisones. The modern developments in the instrumental techniques of analysis and chromatographical methodologies have added numerous complex and rare natural products to the armoury of phytomedicine.

Researchers in the field of herbal drugs have diverted their minds, in search of drugs useful in diseases like cancer, diabetes, atherosclerosis, hepatitis,
ischemic heart disease, oedema, arthritis, hypertension, brain disorders like alzheimer's disease, parkinson's disease, anxiety and multiple sclerosis etc. Apart from other causes, there are evidences showing the involvement of free radicals in some of these diseases.

Problems associated with modern drugs (Samanta et al., 2000)

1) High cost and long time needed for development
2) Toxicity (adverse effects)
3) Non renewable sources of basic raw material
4) Environmental pollutions by chemical industry
5) Inadequate specially in management of chronic diseases

Advantages of plant based drugs

1) Renewable sources
2) Cultivation and environmental friendly
3) Local availability
4) Plant constitute to be a major sources of new lead generation