

Thakur Family Foundation Takes Aim at Indian Medicines to Protect US Pharmaceutical Profits

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The highly influential Thakur Family Foundation was exposed in a report for colluding with Indian and Western media to tarnish the image of India's pharmaceutical industry to protect the profits of American companies. The systemic targeting of India's pharmaceutical industry comes as American companies face a major challenge to their dominance as Indian alternatives are far more affordable.

According to a Disinfo Lab report, the fake news against Indian medicines is spearheaded by US citizen Dinesh Thakur, a pharmaceutical expert whose claim to fame was exposing Ranbaxy in 2003 and founding the Thakur Family Foundation (TFF). However, before returning to India in 2002-03 to take up a position at Tanbaxy, Thakur worked for ten years in a senior position at the American pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS).

His colleagues, Dinesh Kasthuril and Venkat Swaminathan, also quit their well-placed BMS jobs to join Ranbaxy at around the same time as him but in different branches, before they all left the Indian company and returned to the US after two or three years. Once back in the US, Thakur 'exposed' Ranbaxy to the Food and Drug Administration, which was at around the time Ranbaxy got into a dispute with Pfizer over a generic version of the Lipitor product as it threatened the American company's stranglehold on a billion-dollar market.

Although Pfizer successfully fought against the generic version of Lipitor in the US, the consequential backlash was not only against Ranbaxy - but also against Indian pharmaceuticals and generic medicine, even though multiple US pharmaceutical companies paid higher penalties for a wider range of violations than Ranbaxy did. The success of exposing Ranbaxy and the accumulated whistleblowing money made Thakur decide to further engage in pharmaceutical activism, setting up TFF in 2018.

Through the TFF, Thakur has funded multiple individuals and institutions in India, including journalists, media houses, NGOs, and institutions. Disinfo Lab [highlights India's Newsclick](#) as an example of the penetration of Thakur's influence as in 2013, the outlet exposed "Thakur's motivated narratives against Indian generic med", but in 2021, two of its journalists funded by TFF glorified him as a "public health activist focused on improving health policy in the United States and in India."

However, the influence over Newsclick was mild compared to Thakur's penetration into India's The Wire, which Disinfo Lab says is "run by another India-loving US citizen." Four of The Wire's journalists received approximately \$75,000 for coverage of COVID-19. The Thakur-funded journalists wrote overwhelming negative stories on COVID-19 in India and always quoted so-called experts - who were [also associated](#) with the TFF.

One such journalist from The Wire was Priyanka Pulla, who soon moved on to Bloomberg, an outlet that, in July 2023, pushed fake news that toxins in Indian cough syrup medicine were found in samples taken in Iraq. The test commissioned by Bloomberg and conducted by a Connecticut-based lab, Valisure, contradicted the findings of Fourrts, which did not find any tainted substance in the samples.

It is recalled that in 2022, a US federal court found that Valisure "systemically utilised unreliable methodologies with a lack of documentation on how experiments were conducted, a lack of substantiation for analytical leaps, a lack of statistically significant data and a lack of internally consistent, objective, science-based standards for the even-handed evaluation of data" because the company claimed that Zantac, once a top-selling heartburn medication, was linked to causing cancer.

Yet, despite the reputation of Valisure being put into question, the US Department of Defense entered into a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) with the company to jointly conduct a pilot study to assess the quality of generic drugs supplied to the department, many of which are manufactured in India. Based on Valisure's history, the department's decision to use the company would seem perplexing if there was no evident ulterior motive to continually discredit Indian pharmaceuticals to protect the profits of American companies, such as Pfizer, Merck, and BMS.

India aims to grow its pharmaceutical industry by about four times to \$200 billion by 2030. The South Asian country also has the largest number of FDA-approved plants in the US and exports to 200 countries, in addition to accounting for about two-thirds of global vaccines for World Health Organization requirements. In effect, India is becoming a pharmaceutical powerhouse that, in future decades, has the potential to challenge the US for the top spot.

As Disinfo Lab points out, "this tarnishing of Indian image is not merely against Indian pharma, but as a nested strategy, it aims to target everything Indian. Thakur used Ranbaxy and other cases to paint the entire generic medicine dark. And used generic medicine to paint Indian pharma black," adding that to Thakur, "Any alternative avenue other than foreign medicine is not acceptable."

[The report](#) concludes that Indian generic medicine "is a threat to the US big pharma, which sells medicines at multiple times of cost, and has been pushing against generic medicine for a long time, which might eat into their profits. Not surprisingly, Thakur and Co. have devoted considerable resources to target Indian generic medicine in general" and that "this ruse is used to target the overall Indian pharma, thereby systematically denting the image

to prevent it from ever becoming a competitor to the US pharma.”

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