

Honoring Biotech's Innovators

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Six years ago, I was on the way to Hyderabad from Bangalore in an early morning flight in October, along with some colleagues from the biotech industry. We met Bala Manian, the serial entrepreneur who had returned from the US to set up ReaMetrix to use Indian expertise and develop innovative products for the world. He explained in detail how he plans to “Act locally. Think globally.” We explained to Bala the concept of BioSpectrum Industry Awards and he generously gave his inputs on making it a success.

We were traveling to meet in the office of Prof. D Balasubramanian at the LV Prasad Eye Hospital who had agreed to chair the 1st BioSpectrum Industry Awards Jury. Prof. Balu, as he is widely known to the world, after the meeting talked excitedly about the experiments in his laboratory to harvest stem cells in the eyes and how they could be used to restore vision. Six years later, these two Balas have continued their innovative steps and in the process made a huge difference to the lives of hundreds of people by their innovative steps.

And these two Balas will be coming together under the BioSpectrum aegis as they both figure in the 2009 BioSpectrum Awards list, unanimously chosen by the 7th BioSpectrum Awards Jury headed by Prof Samir K Brahmachari, Director-General, CSIR. Prof Balu's insights and knowledge in 2003 help BioSpectrum to launch the awards program by choosing the first set of truly outstanding personalities like Dr M S Swaminathan, Dr Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw and Dr Krishna Ella in the first year. Now Prof. Balu will be honored with the “BioSpectrum Life Time Achievement Award 2009” for the outstanding influence he has exercised on the Indian biotechnology sector in a variety of ways. Whether it was in laying the foundation for the

growth of University of Hyderabad which today has one of the country's finest life sciences school or in consolidating the success of CCMB after taking over from Dr P M Bhargava or in playing the pivotal role in incubating India's first fully plain biotech company, Shantha Biotechnics, Prof. Balu has left his strong impressions on the world. And by restoring the sight to over 700 people, the L V Prasad Eye Institute is setting another milestone in the annals of healthcare under his leadership.

Bala Manian's ReaMetrix, started in Bangalore, has lived up to the founder's visionary expectation. The jury's decision to give the "BioSpectrum BioProduct of 2009" to Dry Tri-T STAT, a novel enzyme which plays a key role in HIV detection and management is a product for the masses. The world's first US FDA approved product, available in a dry form, could replace the currently widely used liquid-based alternatives in HIV detection kits which make them dependent on expensive and complex cold chain network. The ReaMetrix product will drastically reduce the cost of HIV tests and increase the reach of technology to the people who need it most.

There are two other outstanding winners of the other two BioSpectrum awards in 2009. The quiet, unassuming Hari S Bhartia, co-chairman of Jubilant Organosys is the "BioSpectrum Person of the Year 2009". And the brothers-in-business duo of Apruva Shah and Binoy Gardi, co founders of Ahmedabad-based but globally visible Veeda Clinical Research are the joint-winners of the "BioSpectrum Entrepreneur of the Year 2009".

Back in 2004, over a cup of coffee at San Francisco airport during our visit as part of the CII biotech delegation to the BIO convention, Hari Bhartia had shared his vision of how India will emerge as a research laboratory of the world for drug discovery and clinical trials. Bhartia's Jubilant group has been in the forefront of the transformation of India into the CRO destination. I am sure the Jubilant story and the Bicon group company Syngene's early visibility and success helped in the formation of Veeda Clinical Research and others in this sector indirectly.

With the who's who of the industry and these eminent award winners present in Bangalore for the Awards Nite on December 22, I look forward to the occasion to make them share their success stories in their own words, in an entirely new format this year. See you all on December 22.

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