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IICT Hyderabad launches autobiography of former Director Dr A V Rama Rao

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“My Life My Way”, an autobiography of Dr A V Rama Rao, was unveiled at CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) auditorium in Hyderabad. Eminent chemical engineer and former director of Institute of Chemical Technology- ICT (UDCT) Prof M M Sharma launched the autobiography as a part of joint book release programme and Alumni association meet.

Prof. Sharma commended Dr Rao's extraordinary courage in venturing into the pharmaceutical industry post-retirement, an uncommon feat for a scientist.

To begin with, Dr Rama Rao focused his research on synthetic dyes and advanced studies on plant and insect pigments. Association with Corey at Harvard University shifted his focus to studies related to the synthesis of biologically active natural products and he turned his attention to antitumour antibiotics, macrolides, immunosuppressants, and cyclic peptides.

After his return to India and resuming his career at NCL, he set up a school for the synthesis of biofunctional molecules. Later, he guided the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology to become one of the top schools in India and introduced private and public sector industry participation in the research projects of the institution.

The contributions of Dr Rama Rao are reported to be noteworthy in the area of organic synthesis, especially asymmetric synthesis. He is known to have developed cheaper methodologies for the synthesis of anti-tumour antibiotics such as Anthracyclines, Fredericamycin-A, Cervinomycins A1 and A2, Aronorosin, and Lavendamycin.

Mumbai-based pharma firm Cipla utilised the cost-effective methodology Rao introduced in the manufacture of Azidothymidine (AZT), the first curative drug in the disease management of AIDS. His research has also helped in the synthesis of the HIV inhibitors namely Betzalladines, Calanolides, Mischellamines, and Abbot's protease inhibitor.

He holds 30 patents, for chemical synthesis and isolation processes, many of which are in use with drug manufacturers in the US and India. Besides being a member of many government policy-making bodies, he has been associated with the World Health Organization and the Ozone Cell of United Nations Environmental Programme.