

The Biotech Park for Women: it's different

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The announcement of the human genome sequence and the strides made in genetic engineering has made biotechnology as the next knowledge-based industry. The government of Tamil Nadu, which ranks second in software exports is now all geared to meet the new wave by setting up bio-valleys in the state. The state is already ready with five bio-valleys --- Biotechnology Incubator Park, Golden Jubilee Biotech Park for Women Society, Bioinformatics and Genomics Center, Marine Biotechnology Park and Medical Plants Biotechnology Park.

The Golden Jubilee Biotech Park for Women Society is the first Biotech Park for women in India, was started with the mission to provide opportunities for professionally qualified women to take to a career of remunerative self-employment through the organization of environment friendly biotechnological enterprises.

The seed for such a park was laid in 1996 at a meeting of women scientists and technologists. This meeting was organized by United Nations Development Program-United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDP-UNIFEM) and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Chennai. This was also recognized as one of the priority areas identified by the department of biotechnology (DBT), government of India, in the report of the working group for the formulation of the ninth five-year plan (1997-02). The Park was included among the approved programs for commemorating the Golden Jubilee celebration of India's independence, hence the name The Golden Jubilee Biotech Park for Women Society.

The government of Tamil Nadu has supported this endeavor by allotting 20 acres of land in Siruseri Village, just 25 kms from Chennai, inside SIPCOT-IT Park. The park which commenced commercial operations in May 2001 is designed based on the

principle of decentralized production supported by appropriate centralized services to promote a series of biotechnology based enterprises to capture niche markets like - agro, food & nutrition, medical & healthcare, environment & energy.

“When the park was conceptualized in 1996 we got nearly 200 applications from women entrepreneurs. Actually I was one among the first to register as an entrepreneur. But over the period many of them dropped out with reasons of marriage and children. Currently there are seven entrepreneurs and 20 sheds available in the park,” says Dr Sucharita Kumar, an entrepreneur at the park. Subsequently, she has become the CEO of the park too.

The park offers pre-built industrial sheds designed to suit various types of industrial sheds designed to suit various types of industries. The sheds are of 1,000 sq ft each in 2,800 sq ft of land. The sheds are available for a monthly rent of Rs 5,000 per month. In addition to this the park also offers on long and short-term lease, land modules for building factories or to set up agro-biotechnology activities.

“Opportunities for women in India is very limited. The self-employment of women will give them social empowerment. In this park we are trying out some unique initiatives rather than giving them out just sheds. We want to capture the niche markets like agro, cosmetics, healthcare, food and nutrition etc. The attempt is to connect the rural women with the urban,” Dr Sucharita observed.

Though the entire project seems good but there are many obstacles in materializing it. “It takes nearly a years time to identify an entrepreneur. The greatest lies in motivating these people to undertake a project and go forward. Moreover they are not willing to take risk with regard to money. The venture capitalists (VC's) talk of funding but not for people at the lower level. We had taken this issue with the DBT to ask the VCs to fund for people with lesser financial background,” says Dr Sucharita.

Marketing forms 90 percent of the hurdle. So the group at the park have decided to sell the park as a whole and not their product alone. “Wherever an entrepreneur will go she will not sell her product but the park entirely. Here our whole idea is not to look at the other entrepreneur as a competitor but everyone here is to add value to the other,” she added.

Green Galore

This is a unit at the biotech park, which makes sambar and rasam powder but with healthy herbs. The unit called foodgrants hcerbalinc has branded its product as Green Galore and a packet of 100 gms costs Rs 20. The traditional Indian sambar and rasam powder has been fortified with the inclusion of herbs. So a Green Galore rasam packet will have in addition herbal products like dry ginger, long pepper, eclita and amla. This according to the unit people will have additional percentage of calcium, carotene , and vitamin-A.

The unit was started some four months back and is being run by Vijaylakshmi. The products are available only in the super market and not in the open markets.

Bio-Controls

Elbitech Innovations Ltd is a registered office at the biotech park run by Dr Bama. The products developed here are eco-friendly natural organic bio-inputs for applications in sugarcane, cotton, cereals, pulses, coffee, tea, vegetables & fruits, nuts & oil seeds, spices & herbs etc. The bio-inputs when applied together, as a program is believed to increase the yield, taste and also increases the shelf life of the produce. Added to that it reduces the irrigation, chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides expenses. Elbitech range of products works on the principle of potency effectiveness and self-multiplication.

Bio-Food

The biotech park will soon be equipped with a food-testing lab. Interspace Biotech Private Ltd of the BK Group has entered into a tie-up with a UK-based company called RSSL to set up a food testing-lab in the biotech park, which will be called Center for Research and Applied Food Technology (CRAFT). CRAFT will become operational from April this year. Interspace has already an R&D lab inside the park. Besides the company is importing lactic acid from Belgium-based company called Galactic. Lactic acid is a preservative used in food, pharmaceuticals and industrial applications.

Tex Bio Tech

Opened very recently at the Park is Tex Bio Tech a group concern of Textan Chemicals (P) Ltd. It manufactures biotech specialty products for the leather, textile, paper, poultry and pharmaceutical industry.

Dream Finders

You want to have care for your hair. Dream Finders, occupying shed No: 10 in the park has launched from Malaysia 'Silk Coatz', treatment for the hair with vitamins and proteins, which gives treatment for dry hair, split end and hair damages. 160 mls of the bottle costs Rs 391.

Foot Notez is yet another product from Dream Finders. It is a pedicure biocleaner with organic sulphur, neem and lime extracts.

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