

Dr Manju Sharma gets Padma Bhushan

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Dr Manju Sharma, former DBT secretary, and Dr Ananda M Chakrabarty, the University of Illinois scientist who made history as the first holder of a patented gene in 1981, and Dr Vilayanur Ramachandran, the celebrated researcher on human brain based in San Diego, have been given India's top civilian honors.

Dr Sharma, who played a key role in setting up the forerunner of the world's first biotechnology ministry at the government level, in the early 1980s and later headed it for six years till January 2004, was given the Padma Bhushan Award, India's third highest civilian award, on the occasion of India's Republic Day on January 26. Dr Sharma was the recipient of the second BioSpectrum Life Time Achievement Award in December 2004. BioSpectrum honors biotech industry leaders every year through these awards.

After retiring from the Federal government, she is now an advisor on biotechnology to the government in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Home of India's generics pharma industry and the country's largest industrialized state, Gujarat is making itself an attractive destination for global biotechnology companies. "I am honored by the nation's recognition of my efforts to promote biotechnology," she told BioSpectrum.

Dr Chakrabarty is the celebrated India-born scientist, now an American citizen, who fought a legal battle to win the right to patent a bacterium from the US Supreme Court in 1981. Dr Chakrabarty has also been advising India's DBT for over two decades on strategy. A strong supporter of the Bayh-Dole Act, Dr Chakrabarty's inputs have been vital to the formulation of

similar legislation in India. Dr Chakrabarty has been given the Padma Shri Award, the fourth highest civilian honors given by the Indian government.

Dr Vilayanor Ramachandran, a well-know neuroscientist and researcher of the brain at the University of California, San Diego, has also been given the Padma Bhushan Award by the government. This Chennai-born scientist is the globally known author of the theory of "phantom limbs" and is said to be one of the global scientific leaders trying to unravel the complex working of the human brain by studying the neurons.

The awards will be presented in March by the President of India, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, in New Delhi.