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"Make a difference to the society"

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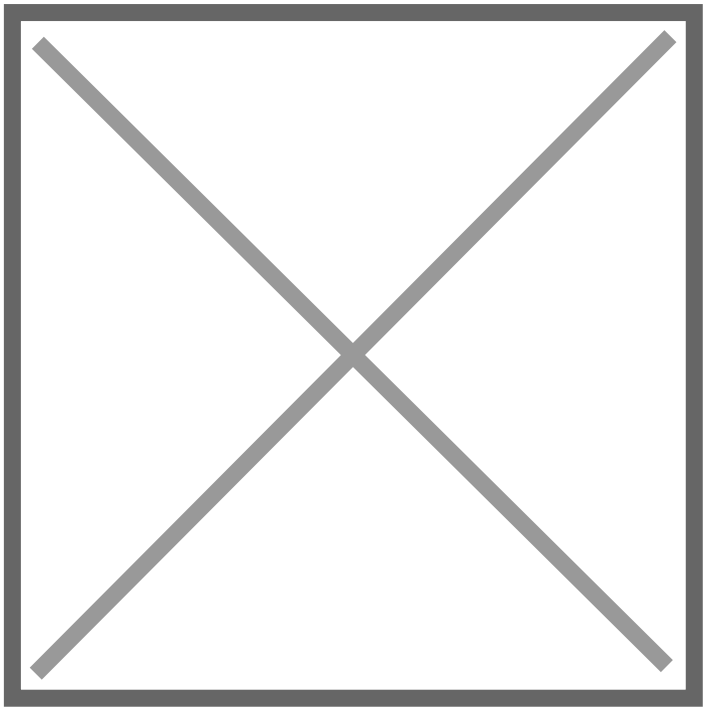


"Make a difference to the society"

Radhika Choudary is associated with Biotechnology as the executive director of the Association for Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE). A lawyer by qualification, she practiced in Shimla for a while before relocating to Bangalore. After a brief stint at Infosys as a technical writer, she joined ZeeNext.com where she took care of its legal portal. She has also been associated with the Karnataka State IT Department.

Speaking about her work, she says "ABLE has been pretty challenging. The industry is still at a nascent stage and now the latest challenge is get ABLE out of this Bangalore-centric mode and open offices in main metros of the country. We successfully launched our US chapter at BIO 2005 in Philadelphia recently and we also plan to make our presence in Europe too and other parts of the world at a later stage."

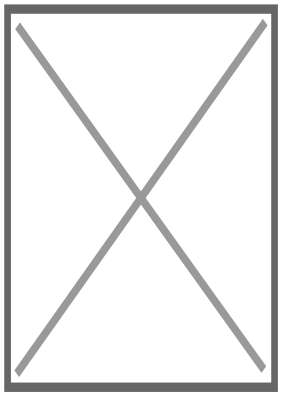
ABLE is working on putting together a national conference to bring together people from different sectors of biotechnology on a single platform and is in talks with the government in this regard. It also intends to float very focused seminars and workshops and initiated this effort with BioInvest seminar in Mumbai which saw the participation of a large number of venture capitalists and others associated with the industry. With an increasing number of global companies wanting to tie up with Indian biotech companies, ABLE plans to conduct a biopartnering conference in the country in 2006.

Talking about an interactive session she had organized last year for minister of science and technology and ocean development, Kapil Sibal, with the heads of various segments of biotechnology and life sciences, she said it turned out be a great success and gave her immense satisfaction. This helped in bridging the gap between the government and industry paving the way for further development and progress.

With so much happening in the Association, Radhika sees a very bright future for ABLE and is happy to be part of the industry during its growth. As a life member of ISCKON, she has been involved in the activities of the Akshaya Patra Foundation which she finds very gratifying and her ultimate aim in life is to start a home for the aged as she feels there is a lack of good old age homes in the country. "I just like this whole idea of giving back to the society and I see that happening a lot in Bangalore," she says.

"We take so much from the society and so little we give back I feel people should make a difference to the society even if it in a small way." she adds. Very passionate about environmental issues, Radhika encourages one and all to plant saplings anywhere anytime and believes that we all need to contribute to make the society a better place to live.

"Enjoy your studies"



Bipin Deshmane, general manager, Shreya Biotech Pvt Ltd, Pune.

Bipin Deshmane, working as general manager at Pune-based Shreya Biotech, is involved in technology transfer, scale-up and production of recombinant biotherapeutic proteins such as human insulin.

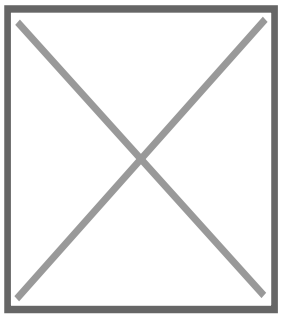
Speaking about his role models who influenced him the most, Deshmane says, "At the international level, Dr Francis Crick, who discovered the structure of DNA along with Dr James Watson in 1953 is my role model. I feel this discovery is the biggest discovery in molecular biology in the last century. Dr Crick can be rightly described as the greatest molecular biologist of the 20th century." At the national level I consider Dr Obaid Siddiqui, another great molecular biologist, who established molecular biology department at TIFR, as my role model. His work on molecular biology of bacterium Ã¢â?¬â??E. coli fungus Ã¢â?¬â??Asperigillus and a fruit fly - Drosophila melanogaster is exemplary and outstanding."

Deshmane has a few suggestions for the student community to step up the ladder of success in biotechnology. He says, "Students should study biotech for pleasure and not for the purpose of taking up exams. The latter approach may help them in short term but will certainly be not useful in the long run. Try to enjoy the study. If you enjoy any work, you don't have to work. Your fundamentals have to be crystal clear. When I interview candidates, I find that their fundamentals are miserably poor."

"The whole world is now a global village. Indian students have to compete with international students along with the locals. Hence they have to update their knowledge not on yearly basis but on a day-to-day basis."

"If biotech students want to enter into the industry, then knowledge of quality assurance, regulatory affairs, cGMP, equipment validation, process validation, analytical method validation, FDA, pollution control etc are very much required. Whether these topics are present in the syllabus or not, whether these topics are taught or not, the students have to acquire this knowledge if they are interested in joining the industry."

"The next big wave after IT is certainly BT"



Lila Poonawalla, member, Maharashtra Biotechnology Task Force

Lila Poonawalla has been associated with biotechnology as a member of the Maharashtra Biotechnology Task Force, which is chaired by Dr RA Mashelkar, director general, CSIR, and as former managing director of Alfa Laval, one of the leading suppliers of equipments to biotechnology companies and as advisor to BioImagene, a Pune-based company.

Lila Poonawalla has a long and active association with companies related to life sciences. She says, "There are great opportunities in this field and in the future these opportunities are only going to grow. Indian core strength areas are new drug discovery, pre clinical and post clinical trials, pharma development, IT applications, early clinical development, drug delivery

assessment and many more areas where experts in biotechnology are required. Big pharma companies across the world are looking at India as an attractive destination for co-development of pharma/biotech products and this type of work requires scientists specializing in biotechnology."

Lila Poonawalla, who began her career by overcoming the first major obstacle of being a woman in the corporate world and rising to the top management level, started the Lila Poonawalla Foundation to help and promote education among women, has some advice for students. She says, "Do not miss the next big wave after IT. It is certainly BT. Not only BT but also nanobiotechnology, the most advanced technology which is poised to meet the medical needs. In healthcare the possibilities of nano technologies are plenty. In pharma companies nano technology promises to be the least expensive way for drug discovery. Investment in the Indian biotech industry is estimated to reach about $10 billion by the end of the current decade from $2 billion now, owing to multinational collaborations and indigenous R&D efforts."

Quality is the keyword

Radha Shekar and Dr Saral Thangam are among the prominent women personnel working at Lotus Labs, Bangalore.

Radha Shekar who is the chief technical officer, is a graduate in pharmacy and has been working in the pharma industry for the last 22 years in areas of product development, contract research activities, quality assurance and regulatory affairs. She has been working with Lotus Labs for the last two years, heading the bioanalytical department where her team estimates drugs in biological matrices like blood, urine, plasma and serum. Radha started her career with Rallis India at their analytical development department in 1983.

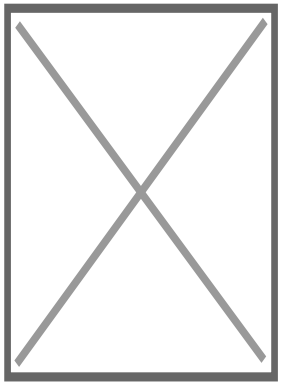
She moved over to Burroughs Welcome India Limited in 1987 at their Mumbai plant, subsequently shifted to Bangalore and joined a company called Eros Pharma where she served as the head of the product development department and subsequently took over quality assurance and regulatory affairs.

Says Radha, "On the job front, we plan to grow at the rate of 100 percent every year for the next few years and the lab is constantly expanding. We have very high technology based equipment and the people we look for are very quality high pharmacists or analytical chemists. In short we employ scientists of very high caliber."

"If you look at future for high technology based core competencies in India, I think India has a very good potential. A lot of multinationals are looking at outsourcing not just IT but a lot of clinical research activities from India. So there is a very high scope for India to become a world leader in this area also," she feels. "We are trying to make Lotus a world class CRO," she adds.

Dr Saral Thangam is medical advisor and headÃ¢â?¬â??quality affairs, Lotus Labs. Her work experience spans 10 years in a number of hospitals, which includes performing Phase III clinical trials at St John's Hospital. She also holds a PhD in an area closely related to clinical research. Basically a physician, Dr Saral who was looking for a career which would help her combine physiology and general medicine and which would be patient-oriented as well as research-oriented, joined Lotus Labs in May 2001. She is also involved in preparing training modules for employees, conducting seminars and conferences and is also associated with the ethics committee of the organization.

"Grants for young scientists will drive innovation and creativity"



Anuradha Acharya, CEO, Ocimum Biosolutions

Anuradha Acharya, CEO and CSA, Ocimum Biosolutions, has worked in several roles from an IT professional to a technical leader with over eight years of experience in full development lifecycle projects. She has worked for Mantiss Information, Chicago, which is now part of Dynegy and SEI Information Systems before establishing Ocimum Biosolutions with Subash Lingareddy in 2000 in Indianapolis.

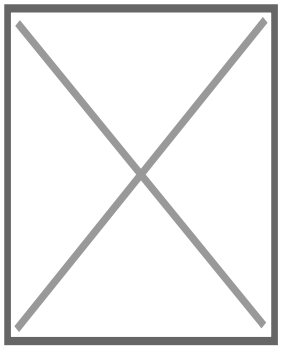
Says Anuradha, "Our technical interests lie in bioinformatics algorithms and lab automation. The primary focus is to be one-stop destination for bioinformatics consulting need and also on development of key ready-to-use bioinformatics software modules and contract research."

Anuradha feels that our country badly needs grants "for the young, energetic, creative but not-so wealthy scientists and entrepreneurs as this is what drives innovation and creativity."

"Human resource development has to be taken really seriously as the foundation of the industry depends on how good our scientists are." Speaking about bioinformatics, she says "The quantity has increased tremendously but the quality still has not which is sad. Unless we can introduce newer technology areas in universities, the new crop of scientists will always be behind their peers. That needs to change."

"We really need to increase the scope of our industry and the type of work we do", she adds. Her take on clinical diagnostics: "We have to realize that while India may not have been at the forefront in this area, the government needs to gather information on all companies and create a solid execution plan for the coming years." Pharmacogenomics is a great initiative, Anuradha feels and hopes her company will be able to play an important role in such advanced initiatives by the government.

"Support young players "



Dr Villoo Morawala-Patell, founder and CEO, Avestha Gengraine Technologies

Dr Villoo Morawala-Patell sees her company Avestha Gengraine Technologies evolving into a biotechnology conglomerate where it is working to provide innovative solutions for global challenges in agriculture and health problems- degenerative conditions, metabolic disorders and infectious diseases.

With a mission "to improve productivity in agriculture and develop agro-technologies that would lead to value addition in food and pharma products", it was at the age of 45 that Dr Villoo founded Avestha Gengraine, the name of which is derived from Zenda Avestha, or book of knowledge, and the latter part from a combination of the words gene and grain. Says Dr Villoo, "I grew up in a well-to-do family but I used to see farmers starving due to drought and I wanted to help them and Avesthagen is the result of this."

Dr Villoo feels human resource is the biggest strength of the biotech industry but "we need to improve on quality to achieve the right kind of growth." "The biotech sector should provide incentives in order to avoid attrition and there is also a need to support young players entering the field," she says. Support should come from the government, the industry and venture capitalists, she adds.

With a doctorate in Plant molecular biology from University of Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg in France with a post-doctoral tenure from University of Ghent, Belgium, Dr Villoo has received several prestigious grants from Institutions including The Rockefeller Foundation, Indo-French Centre for the Promotion of Advanced Research
(IFCPAR) and DFID.