

India's "hot" biotech start-ups

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This is the 11th anniversary editorial of BioSpectrum, which I am writing in a row since 2003. BioSpectrum was born in the stable of IQ Tech Media in 2002. It changed hands to become part of CyberMedia in late 2002 and stayed there for more than 10 years until September 2013. And now it is part of MM Activ Sci-tech Communications. The publisher may have changed. But what has not changed with BioSpectrum is its chosen role: to be the catalyst for the growth of India's biotechnology industry.

This editorial will be in four parts to highlight four major trends or events that are nudging the biotech industry in a way that may alter its contours in the coming years.

11 "hot" biotech start-ups

Dr Krishna Ella, a scientist turned first-generation entrepreneur, received the first BioSpectrum Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2003 when his company Bharat Biotech International, Hyderabad, had revenues of only Rs15 crore. In 2013, when

Dr Ella was chosen the BioSpectrum Person of the Year, Bharat had revenues in excess of Rs300 crore. Bharat Biotech is one of the handful of companies picked up by software Moghul and philanthropist Mr Bill Gates for special mention in 2013 for its role in pushing affordable healthcare to all corners of the world.

So can we identify the current decade's Bharat Biotechs in the making? That is what the BioSpectrum team set out to do for the 11th Anniversary Special issue. There has been frenetic entrepreneurial activity in the biotech sector in the last five years. What we have presented in this issue is a list of 11 companies that came up in the last five years, which we consider to be the winners in the next decade. The 11th listing is a collection of companies that are operating in the genomics area that have been bunched together. For each of them have something unique to offer that will make waves in the coming years.

The first wave of biotech entrepreneurship started in the late 1990s and the second one in the 2004-06 period. Many of these companies have reached reasonable size. Some have fallen by the wayside. Some can pick up the pieces if they are offered some support systems.

Can someone help the current set of entrepreneurs with tips and help them avoid the pitfalls of their predecessors? This has been one question bothering me and many others in the biotech ecosystem for some time.

However, I need not worry about this anymore. Dr Anand Anandkumar of Cellworks, Bangalore, and few like-minded entrepreneurs have come up with a brilliant solution. They have set up a company that will help start-ups. Escape Velocity Accelerator (EVA) is the name of the Bangalore-based company that is going to handhold new entrepreneurs and let them defy the gravity of growth.

"EVA is an accelerator helping start-ups in the life sciences and healthcare domains turn their venture into sustainable high value companies that operate in the exciting intersection space of information technology and biotechnology," declares the mission statement. A dozen mentors have already signed up to accelerate Indian biotech. You are surely going to hear about them in the next few months.

The future of Indian biotechnology is in safe hands.
