

News Details

Genetic Advantage

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HYDERABAD has stood as an inspiration for progressively balancing its old world charm with rejuvenating modernity. The country's fifth largest metropolis is not only known for its pearls but also for its scientific wisdom. With over 100 scientific institutions - nearly 75 colleges offering various subjects in pure science and 4 top universities with specializations in higher realms of science - Hyderabad is a virtual knowledge base.

The city caught the biotech bus fairly early. Its inherent roots as a bulk drugs major and contemporary R&D; institutions helped a great deal in leveraging its traditional strengths to consolidate its biotech business.

But then, in the mid 90s, as in other parts of the country, biotechnology was based more in the safe waters of the lab rather than an industrial scale. There was little, or no knowledge about manufacturing processes, scaling-up and production techniques that could bring biotechnology products into the market place. In this scenario, two biotech companies from Hyderabad entered the space and the first vaccine for Hepatitis-B was rolled out. This set the trend for the future.

Bharat Biotech, with its in-house HIMAX Technology, manufactured the world's first Cesium-Chloride Free Hepatitis vaccine which was introduced in the market in 1998. This was a significant achievement because it proved that we, in Hyderabad, are capable of cutting-edge R&D.;

The government of Andhra Pradesh was quick to identify the biotech sector as one of the "Engines of Growth" in the Vision 2020 document. The establishment of Genome Valley highlights the state's thrust on biotechnology initiatives and fostering scientific intellectual enterprise.

There are nearly a 100 companies in Hyderabad either directly or indirectly involved in manufacturing biotech and bio-pharma products.

What truly characterizes the biotech industry in Hyderabad and sets it apart from the rest of the country is its focus on high-end biotech R&D; products, constant innovation in scaling-up techniques and high quality standards of manufacturing processes.

In terms of qualitative research vaccine development for Third World diseases such as malaria, rabies and neglected diseases such as rotavirus is currently making good progress. Similarly, the biotherapeutics segment is making great strides introducing hitherto undiscovered molecules such as Recombinant Human Epidermal Growth Factor among others.

The market size in Hyderabad is currently growing at a very healthy rate especially in vaccines and therapeutics. Analysts predict that the Hyderabad market shows tremendous potential.

The Department of Biotechnology of AP is currently updating its biotech policy and is facilitating various infrastructure projects besides giving due attention to education and HR development.

An agribiotech incubator is coming up in ICRISAT exclusively for developing new technologies for sustainable agriculture. It will facilitate producing new crops and varieties for food security and for increasing the nutritional value.

An erudite think-tank on biotechnology is probably among the best-known assets of Hyderabad. The think-tank has played a vital role in shaping the launch of \$30-million Biotech Venture Fund as a joint venture between the APIDC Venture Capital and Dynam Venture East, USA, to fund start-up biotech companies, collaboration with the IFC, World Bank, to augment the fund, setting up of an International Life Science Institute in the Genome Valley as a centre of excellence in industry-driven life science research.

It is important to address issues like respect for IPRs, science-based regulatory framework and strategy for innovation. We also need to re-look at the framework of research relations between academia and industry and stress on the need for re-engineering of institutional framework. There is also an urgent need for setting up infrastructure for pre-clinical trials and also for branding and establishing trust.

Hyderabad is sure to rise to the challenge thanks its innovative policies, a supportive facilitator and proactive industry.

The writer is the CMD of Bharat Biotech International