

'NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE'

DR VIBHA DHAWAN

It all started with plants. Young Vibha was mesmerized with what the nature had to offer and before she could realize it, she had made Botany her area of expertise. Today Dr Vibha Dhawan helms The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), a research institute in New Delhi that specializes in the fields of energy, environment and sustainable development.

Supportive Family

Dr Dhawan was born in Delhi on 4 June

1960 to late Shri Dwarka Nath Dhawan, an employee of NTPC and late Smt Sudershan Dhawan, a social worker. She completed her schooling from Ramjas Girls School, Daryaganj in 1976.

Dr Dhawan was an ambitious student and aspired to be the best in her chosen field. She was fortunate enough to have a family who supported her in this endeavour. "My parents and grandmother always encouraged me to go for higher studies. They always gave me confidence that girls can and must do everything. They

must have a career. I always remember my father's face and words, 'Don't care for small problems which can always be resolved'."

She graduated from Daulat Ram College in botany in 1979. Dr Dhawan pursued her post graduation in Hindu College and obtained M.Phil in 1982 and Ph. D. in 1985 from Delhi University. "During the 70s and early 80s, bio-technology was a new subject and was a very exciting field of research."

Stellar Career

Research associate, Faculty, Scientist, Director, Dean, Vice Chancellor, Executive Director and Director General, Dr Vibha Dhawan went through the entire gamut of the career spectrum.

Currently Dr Dhawan helms the Department Biotechnology Technology (DBT) - TERI - Centre of Excellence (CoE) project on the Integrated Production of Advanced Biofuels and Bio-commodities. Dr Dhawan is focusing on making the production of biofuels economically viable with minimal waste generation. Under her leadership the center is undertaking active research explorations towards the development of advanced biofuel production technologies.





An astute academician, Dr Vibha has been involved in developing and teaching the biotechnology course at TERI University since its inception in 1999. She was involved in developing the curriculum and its continuous upgradation. "The entire course of biotech regulations was conceived and developed in consultation with Michigan State University, USA and initially funded by USTDA. We worked very closely in developing the course curricula and its delivery. This was a challenging task, as there are no textbooks available on this recently evolving subject emerging of commercialization of new biotechnology," she says.

Setting Standards

As a member of NCS-TCP (National Certification System for Tissue Culture Raised Plants), since its inception, Dr Vibha was involved with setting up of SOPs (Standard Operating Principles) for tissue culture laboratories. "The doc-



tête-à-tête with *Anjana*

Women's Day Special



Awards and Recognitions

- Fellow, National Academy of Sciences, India
- All India Biotech Association (AIBA) award, 1998
- Kamal Kumari National Award for Science and Technology, 1998
- Biotech Product and Process Development and Commercialization Award, 2000.
- Women Leadership Agriculture Award 2016
- Indian Women Achievers Sammaan 2017

ument defining the criteria was prepared by me and accepted by the committee with minor suggestions and accreditation of test laboratories for virus testing and establishing clonal fidelity".

Her deep insight in the field of biotechnology made her associate with many coveted projects in India. Although India pioneered many research discoveries in the field of plant tissue culture, it remained an academic exercise confined to laboratories. To bridge the yawning gap between the laboratory and the field, the Department of Biotechnology, GOI, sponsored setting up of two pilot-scale projects for mass scale cloning of forestry species in 1989. Dr Vibha was associ-

ated with one of these facilities since its inception and was responsible for conceptualizing and execution of the project.

Micropropagation Technology Park (MTP) was another project that originated from the enthusiasm of the pilot project. At this facility, besides developing protocols for new species, entrepreneurs undergo hands-on training to generate much-needed manpower in the field of commercial micro-propagation.

Getting States Biotech Ready

Dr Vibha was actively involved in the DBT's Mission for North-East for Quality Planting Material.

Further, in her role as Advisor to the Chief Minister of Assam, she was involved with policymaking related to biotech/bio-resources activities for the state. She remained the state's advisor for two terms from 2006-2016.

Commercializing Biotechnology

Under the leadership of Dr Dhawan, TERI has developed a number of technologies, which have been commercialized globally. She was instrumental in developing strategies for commercialization and negotiations at different levels. TERI's Micropropagation Technology

Park has multiplied a large number of plantlets for Dutch Seed Company for their hybrid seed programme. TERI has also undertaken a project with BP Industries for large scale *Jatropha* cultivation in Andhra Pradesh.

Connecting Biotech with Public

As many misconceptions revolve around biotechnology, Dr Dhawan rooted for interactions that conveyed the truth about biotechnology. "We organize several stakeholder-dialogues in different parts of the country and bring together experts from academic institutions, industry executives, farmers, activists from consumer groups, students and others. The developers of the technology could appreciate concerns over this new technology and the consumer needs, which helped them to optimize their research agenda. The outcome of these meetings was published in the form of a book 'Relevance of Genetically Modified plants to Indian Agriculture'.

Dr Dhawan is a perfectionist at heart, and has always strived to aim for excellence. She has six books and over 50 publications to her credit.

Breaking The Glass Ceiling

Dr Dhawan is among the few women in India to shoulder responsibilities of leadership. Being a woman, she is

Experience with International Organizations

Consultant USAID for setting up of Tissue Culture Lab in Afghanistan May 2016 – August 2016

Deputy Director – Research Partnerships & Co-ordination Borlaug Institute for South Asia Sept. 2011 – Nov. 2015

Coordinator, Asia-Pacific Consortium on Agricultural Biotechnology (APCoAB), an initiative of APAARI (Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions, FAO, Bangkok) May 2004 – April 2005

World Bank: Appointed as Consultant to do a report on Biosafety Regulations in India in 2005

CGIAR CAS-IP – Appointed as Consultant in 2008 for "Strategies study on stewardship and liability in the context of IPR" along with Dr Rebecca Bratspies and Prof. Michael Blakeney.



“Women should have confidence that nothing is impossible. They can overcome any problem through hard work.”

aware of the trial and tribulations that women go through while supporting their career. "It is comparatively difficult for women to reach/sustain top positions, since

they are also deeply engaged with caring for the family and children. Many women thus either opt for lighter jobs or take a break in the early years of their careers. However, I must say women have the unique capability of multitasking and thus can manage multiple responsibilities at any given time. Good support from the family ensures that they reach the top. Also, it is the responsibility of the parents to bring up their daughters and sons on an equal platform. Daughters must appreciate having a career and sons must be taught that they are equal partners for bringing up their children.

