



Science Reporter

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CSIR— DRIVING INDIAN S&T



Every time you go out to vote, you come back with a bit of CSIR – the ink on your finger that announces that you have successfully exercised your franchise. The technology for the indelible ink developed by CSIR in 1952 continues to be used sixty-four years later not only in India but in several other countries too, fetching precious foreign exchange in return.

The largest network of scientific laboratories anywhere in the world, and the organisation that publishes the magazine you hold in your hands, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) entered into the 75th year of its existence on 26th September this year. During this almost seventy-five year journey, CSIR has benefited every section of the Indian community and contributed in large measure to the country's progress at every juncture.

When newly independent India was challenged to feed its 450 million citizens, CSIR responded with agricultural machinery, such as India's first indigenous tractor, and pesticides and fertilisers to give a push to the Green Revolution that transformed India from an agriculture-deficient nation to an agriculture-surplus one. Research in drug development not only led to new drugs for diseases like malaria, asthma and even tuberculosis but new drug leads also gave a push to the Indian pharmaceutical industry.

CSIR has often taken up challenges arising out of technology denials. When multinationals across the world refused to share the technology of making powdered milk from cow milk, CSIR came up with the technology to manufacture powdered milk from buffalo milk, playing a significant role in pushing India to the top in world milk production. Denied the services of a top-end supercomputer for weather observations, CSIR came up with the first Indian parallel processing computer. The organisation also broke the cartel of multinational companies who closely guarded the technology for manufacturing zeolite catalysts used in producing bulk chemicals and petrochemicals. Not only did CSIR develop the technology, it even started exporting catalysts to the same multinationals, competing in the international market.

CSIR's technologies have also found inroads into rural and remote areas of the country. While ingenious low-cost water filters and large-scale water purification plants have made drinking water available in remote areas and villages, high oil-yielding varieties of crops such as mint have significantly boosted farmers' incomes. Today, India is the world's largest producer of menthol mint oil.

CSIR has a number of other firsts to its credit. Whether it is the first complete genome sequencing of an Indian, development of the first indigenous two-seater trainer aircraft, or the setting up for the first time anywhere in the world a 'Traditional Knowledge Digital Library' – a documentation of the country's traditional wealth accessible in five international languages – CSIR has always been at the helm of Indian science.

There are many such success stories that have come to define this great organisation. And so, in the run-up to the Platinum Jubilee of CSIR, Science Reporter will profile some such stories in the coming months.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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