

Sam's world of science

PRIYADERSHINI S.

PRINT · T T

Tweet G+1 0 in Share 2 Pin it Share 4

Entrepreneur Sam Santhosh is leading genetic research with his laboratories across the country. Genomics is the next big thing for humanity, he says



gene manSam Santhosh, CEO SciGenome, loves reading and archaeologyphoto: H.vibhu

Asecond innings is almost always about new beginnings and not always about cricket. For Sam Santhosh, Silicon Valley entrepreneur from the State, it is about embarking on a completely new path of genetic research, different from his earlier preoccupation with the software industry. It is also about his fascination for the prehistoric and related travels to remote archaeological digs.

His first success story was marked by several business acquisitions in the US and in the founding of an IT company Calsoft, a product re-engineering firm, in 1992, which grew to global proportions. He sold it handsomely in 2009 and began his second innings.

entrepreneur, a man who now wishes to wield his experience in ways to help societies, monetise new opportunities and indulge in his varied interests - history, mathematics and reading to name a few.

When most entrepreneurs still looked at genetic research with unease Sam pre-empted the next big thing that will be the vehicle of change for

humanity as was the computer 30 years ago. He switched to genetic research founding SciGenom Inc.- a genomics R&D organisation, in 2010.

“The entire genetics research has been a long struggle. It took three billion dollars, 12 years of work and 15 countries to arrive at the first human genome sequence but genomics is the future, the next big thing, a much bigger revolution than computers. This may take another 25 years to play out but its impact on humanity will be bigger. This is the best chance, specifically for India, to use this moment for related research that will be useful to the people and country,” he says sitting in the boardroom of Hotel Le Meridien, on the sidelines of a global convention on genetic research hosted by his foundation. The first such mega event was held in Thiruvanthapuram in 2011 followed by, next year, in Chennai.

Hailing from Thrissur, and after his MBA from IIM Kolkata, Sam worked on his own in Kochi for three years, computerising businesses before he left for California in 1991. The eco-system there nurtured an out-of-the-box thinking, a trait that he wishes to ingrain into young mindsets here.

“If Steve Jobs was in India, he would have definitely done well but he could not have founded Apple - though he did come to India and drew his philosophy from here,” he says implying that scientific thinking needs to be stoked among students and start ups here and that India has the philosophical edge to back that. In payback mode Sam organised a reading initiative in 2014 along with Kairali channel to inculcate reading habits among MBA students. His gene research lab in Kochi and the spin-off companies MedGenome, soon to become in Silicon Valley parlance, a unicorn, Agri-Genome in Hyderabad are satellite labs into research, DNA Sequencing and Analysis and promote scientific thinking. “DNA sequencing is the powerhouse. It is a technology that will help other industries find solutions. In fact, we incubate solutions,” he says.

Currently Sam is savouring the moment with top scientists who are working on important discoveries, debunking myths, finding answers and exploring the unknown. “It’s an exciting field,” he says, adding that the capacity and funding for scientific research in India is low.

In his new scheme of things his other passions - reading and travelling - play an important part. He travels often guided by his keen interest to archaeological digs where he diligently follows unearthing the dead past, the latest being to the dig in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, where the Chola empire excavations dating back to 950AD are underway. “The biggest story unsaid in South Indian history is about the second Chola Empire, from 950AD-1300 AD. In this part of the world not only was it the biggest empire but its influence in South and South East Asia is under appreciated,” he says revealing his deep interest in history of South India, something that he wishes to collate in detail.

With altruistic diversions has business taken a back-seat in his second innings? His work model is new and is about off shoots and spin-offs from a core concept. “People have not done this before, but wealth will be generated through spin-offs,” he says adding sequencing services will incubate other services. “This is the goal. It made sense to invest.” With a clear roadmap for scientific development in the future and buzzing with novel ideas Sam wishes that the scientist in India would be more appreciated. For his business is all about the power of the scientist and of monetising the power of science for humanity.