

Broadening horizons: career in intellectual property

In India, once you obtain a doctorate degree, it is an unsaid rule to go to the US for post-doctoral work – a mandate to hone your research skills. Although I liked science, laboratory work did not excite me enough and I made my mind to quit research . . . and my US visit. At the time when I took the decision, I thought I will be the only one to do so, but over a period of time I met many a people who bid farewell to their research.

The big question was, now what? My senior asked me whether I was interested in pursuing a career in Intellectual Property (hereafter IP). At that point the only knowledge that I had about IP was while doing research one of the lab-mates had mentioned about a free course on 'Basics of IP' conducted by WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization, Geneva). The carrots for me were: (a) that it was free and (b) I would get a certificate from WIPO. Little did I realize then that it was my first step towards a career which would later earn me bread and butter.

IP is vast and multidisciplinary and one gains exposure to various fields. Under the IP umbrella comes copyrights, trademarks, patents and geographical indications, to name a few. As researchers, we are mostly aware of copyrights

and patents. In the current scenario one must be aware of other forms of IP as well.

We never think of having a full-fledged career in IP, the most common myth being that one has to be a lawyer to pursue a career in IP. About 90% of people whom I meet ask me whether I am a lawyer, and are taken aback when I tell them that I am a Ph D in biochemistry. The next question is why did I leave research to pursue IP. Another myth! One never leaves science if he/she opts for IP as a career. I have to reiterate the fact that I have not left science. In fact now I am exposed to varied fields such as molecular biology, immunology, agri-biotech and also information technology, to list a few. Earlier, while doing my Ph D, my world revolved only around proteins – I did my research in protein chemistry.

In fact, one need not be a Ph D to build a career in IP. The basic qualification is to be a technical graduate; so science graduates are also eligible to appear for the Patent Agent exam. One need not be lawyer to have a career in IP. One can also work as an IP analyst in legal process outsourcing/knowledge process outsourcing or a biotech/software/pharma companies as an 'in-house expert'. Being

from a similar field one can also contribute to the technology by giving creative inputs and be in constant touch with the latest in subject. An IP/patent analyst can help in leveraging IP for business advantage, doing competitive analysis to understand the market scenario, thus adding value to company.

Many a time I come across cases where people think that their work is novel and inventive, but after conducting a prior art search, I find that it has been either published in a journal or in a patent document. So much money and effort is wasted in reinventing the wheel. So my advice to researchers is even if one is not interested in pursuing a career, one must know how to conduct prior art search and derive maximum benefits from the patent documents. It is said that 70% of information that one finds in a patent document is never found anywhere.

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Agriwastes as substrate for *Trichoderma* formulation

Sarma¹ has aptly depicted the use of agriwaste-straw for mass culturing of *Trichoderma*, where farmers themselves can mass produce *Trichoderma* in their own fields. I would also like to add that the major criterion in selecting the substrate for mass production of any fungal antagonist is that the viable inocula must be produced in an inexpensive medium and the cost of production for treatment of large areas must be competitive with that of the chemical fungicides. The economics of mass production of biocontrol agents is an important aspect and should be kept in mind, because the success of any biocontrol technology will be judged by the economic feasibility of its imple-

mentation. Using readily available crude agricultural by-products, economic mass production of microorganisms can be achieved.

Another option, more particularly in the sugarcane-growing belt, is the use of bagasse as a substrate for *Trichoderma*. Bagasse is inexpensive and produced in large quantities (India is the second largest producer of sugarcane, with an estimated 281.17 mt production in 2005–06; 1 q of sugarcane produces approximately 33 kg of bagasse). It is a waste product and moreover, maintains good viability of *Trichoderma* without specialized storage systems. Being a cellulolytic fungus, *Trichoderma* spreads profusely on it,

which can be directly applied through soil mixing, seed dressing or even making a spore suspension. It can also be used as an enhancer in composting.

1. Venkateswara Sarma, V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2009, **96**, 1164–1165.

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