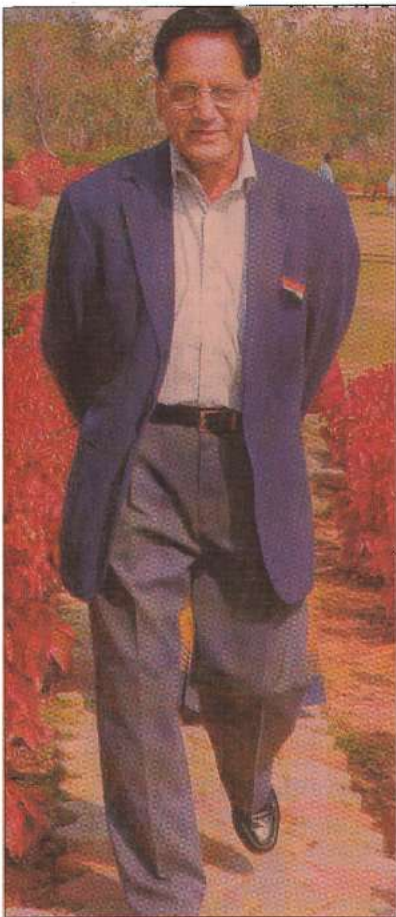


**FINDING  
REMEDIES IS  
LIKE SECOND  
NATURE TO DR  
ANJI REDDY. THE  
MEDICINE MAN  
FROM  
HYDERABAD  
IS NOW  
TARGETING A  
KILLER DISEASE  
— POVERTY**



Championing a  
**DIFFERENT CURE**



## Beyond business

We have all amassed wealth for ourselves. So, why can't we play a role in poverty alleviation? Why can't we make poverty our business

**K**eeping pace with Dr Anji Reddy is no mean task. When we offered to go for a walk with him, we had expected a leisurely stroll. But the DRL chairman's brisk strides caught us by surprise. Can you please slow down a bit so that we can talk while we walk, we pleaded. He flashed one of those impish smiles. Soon, the smile transformed into laughter, as if to say, 'you asked for it'.

Over the next two hours (when we stopped only for the benefit of the photographer), as we discussed a wide range of subjects, the smile never left his face and the laugh-ter kept coming back. The message was loud and clear: A zest for life is not the prerogative of the youth. That, in a sense, explains why the Pyramids are his favourite-it jaunt as he quotes the old adage, 'we are all afraid of time and time is afraid of Pyramids.'

Nearing 70, Anji Reddy is not showing any sign of slowing down. He is concerned about scientific research, molecules, poverty alleviation, livelihood, market forces and India's place in the Sun... 'We have asked the government to get out of business. We have all amassed wealth for ourselves. So, why can't we play a role in poverty alleviation? Why can't we make poverty our business,' he asks.

It was Republic Day. We were in Miyapur on the fringes of Hyderabad. Dr Reddy had just unfurled the tricolour at a function at the Dr Reddy's Foundation (DRF) campus. DRF, which works towards equipping poor children and youth with education and livelihood skills, is as much a passion for Anji Reddy as Dr Reddy's Laboratories, the pharma company he founded in 1984. Today, DRL is a \$1 billion pharma giant.

As we reach the Livelihood Advancement Business School (LABS) run by the foundation, he says, 'We are all looking for livelihood. I came to Hyderabad for a thousand rupee job with IDPL. I have struggled, I haven't taken risks and it was all for livelihood.'

'The most important thing that our foundation does is to address the concern of livelihood. There are new jobs being created everyday and we need to match those with skills. LABS seek to help students gain self-confidence, polish their English and teach them basic skillsets,' he says as we pass the building that houses the facility.

As we walk on, Dr Reddy turns pensive. 'We started out with one building in Secunderabad for our bridge school. With support from several quarters, we have been able to come this far,' he says. 'We somehow think people are selfish. But I was surprised to see a local shoe shop donating shoes to children, when we started out. I was even more shocked when a police constable donated Rs 1,000 for the cause. Weren't they only supposed to take,' he asks.

He goes on to narrate a story that is obviously close to his heart. 'I was sitting at Taj one evening when a young boy (probably a waiter) recognised me and proudly in-troduced himself as a LABS alumni. You know, he was picked up from the streets of Kurnool,' he says.

And listen to this one. 'Reliance Retail is now also hiring from our schools. I am not asking a percentage commission from Mukesh Ambani,' he says.

Creating formulations was a part of the environment that Anji Reddy grew up in. His father, a turneric (haldi) farmer, would add various additives to turmeric paste, depending on the cure required, make little pills out of them and distribute them for free among the local people. Anji Reddy has carried on the tradition except that he will never give the drugs for free. Livelihood matters, you see.

By now we had discovered that Dr Reddy is a man of anecdotes and he drew from his rich and varied experience to drive home many a complex point. Predictably, when we dug deeper about research, quarter-on-quarter heartburns, succession plan, brand India, importance of money, we were quite prepared to rewind with him into a different time and space.

It was 1986. Dr Reddy's Labs arrived on the global pharma landscape that year when the company decided to make ibuprofen with its own novel process instead of the easier copycat approach. Dr Reddy would certainly not have known then that he would replicate the same spirit into something as staid and staple as sambar and rice in the Naandi Foundation canteen, that serves noon-meals to lakhs of poor children to draw them to school. 'I took it up seriously. Now in 70% of schools, it is the only clean meal available. After 100 million meals, we have managed it like our own factories. Even the British education minister had rice and sambar there,' he says, taking as much pride in this as his ibuprofen success. The Naandi Foundation is another NGO supported by DRL.

Anji Reddy's staying power has clearly rubbed off on his flagship DRL. From the innovations in the genomics space, the company has come a long way with a rare tenacity and patience to lead in the drug discovery game. There are many promising candidates in the labs of Dr Reddy's that could have the potential of becoming blockbuster drugs, much like Pfizer's Lipitor, the septuagenarian founder firmly believes. 'All the elements are in place. It may happen in the next five to eight years,' he says with confidence.

Mixing discovery passion with commercial sense, Dr Reddy's formed Perlecan Pharma in 2005 along with ICICI Ventures and Citigroup. Though this company has development and commercialisation rights of four new chemical entity assets in the areas of metabolic and cardiovascular disorders, it is a long haul. Dr Reddy quips: 'IT

companies showing 30% year-on-year growth are putting us into trouble. Friends like Premji (chairman of Wipro) tell me 'if you believe in R&D, just go ahead. Don't worry about what analysts say'.' Similarly, DRL is in a pact with Danish firm Rheosforce for the co-development and commercialisation of balaglitazone (DRF 2593), in the diabetes management space.

The 5-feet something founder of Dr Reddy's is a bundle of energy not usually associated with the stereotypical South Indian business leader. Ask him if business lead-ers north of Vindhyas were more aggressive, he quickly retorts, 'Look at Venu Srinivasan, N R Narayana Murthy or Azim Premji.'

By now, we have reached a pathway lined with a variety of trees and shrubs. He points to one of them which is a mid-sized tree bearing red flowers. 'That flower is scientifically called glycosmus pentoflora (popularly called bottle brush) whose alka-loid has been isolated for the structure of balaglitazone,' he tells us. Balaglitazone is a promising drug candidate from DRL. Stable. Talk of a passion for discovery!

The man, who idolizes Jamsctji Tata, has got his management fundas strictly in place particularly on crucial issues like succession and running of the organisation. Will DRL remain a family-run business, we ask? 'I would have hired the Vivek Pauls to run the company. But they (son Satish Reddy and son-in-law G V Prasad) are able and qualified professionals. They have been working for 14 years. Moreover, other professionals have accepted them as leaders,' he reasons.

When it comes to slightly more ticklish issues, like DRL's possible interest in Merck KGA's generics business, he uses humour to skirt them. 'I am not allowed to discuss all this as the wife of one of my mentor boards is here,' he says.

So we bring him back to his pet subject scientific research. Although India has proven process chemistry skills, is brand India quite there when it comes to re-search? 'It is now established that Indians can beat anyone in the world. DRL is a bigger brand in New Jersey, Princeton. Today, my scientists are invited for dinner and drinks by global players.' His belief and exuberance is infectious and would have us believe that Indians are still hungry for scientific research although the number of PhDs and post-docs that the country produces does not quite reflect the appetite.

The morning sun was now getting hotter. For the first time Anji Reddy looks at his watch. Two hours have passed and he has to move on to other things. Here's his parting shot: 'There was a time when I did not have money to buy an Ambassador car. To-day my market cap is 100 times that of Hindustan Motors.' He then zips past us in his black Honda Accord.

SASWATI CHAKRAVARTI & J PADMAPRIYA