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"Having worked abroad, I decided to move back to start my own company and make a difference"

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I come from the breed of researchers turned entrepreneurs. Identifying a target for a small molecule drug from a bevy of probable ones has always been one of the central challenges in drug discovery. I along with other co-founders are trying to provide a technology that can aid in making the target screening process more accurate.

Originally, I have a chemistry background, having completed my masters from Devi Ahilya University. I later worked as a production chemist at Lupin Laboratories for a year. After that, a quest for higher education, which could help me to explore my interest in the biological aspect of drugs, led me to pursue a research program at National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS).

The institute was a game changer for me as a person, because it is here that I first learnt what it means to do science. I learnt a lot from that lab. This was the point of time that I decided to continue doing research. Further hard work and interest in this direction helped me get to the Ohio State University for my PhD. I got a good publication for my PhD thesis, which then facilitated my job at Eli Lilly.

Having worked in Eli Lilly in the US after my PhD, I decided to return to India to start an innovative technology company in early 2010. Since then, I along with my team have developed a "Subcellular location specific target capturing" technology for isolating potential drug targets. Our studies have shown that the technology has the potential to significantly reduce the identification of false positives and provides upto 50-70 percent savings in time and cost during target validation.

We are now capitalizing on our previous experience of working with a large pharma company to develop a technology base that could aid companies in drug discovery. Our goal is to allow complete acceptance of the technology.

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We started Shantani Proteome Analytics in March 2010, but the thought of returning to India and starting our own company germinated in March 2009, when we visited the NCL Innovation park campus and saw the laboratories to start with. We started building this technology there so that we could leverage its potential, and we thought that was pretty cool like any other scientist who hopes his work adds value to the whole system. We had very good scientific training. We took around a year to build the technology to an extent where we could ask for funding.
Everyday was a challenge as we did not know if we would get the money. We had to take each day as it came. It was very tough especially for the founders.

It took a while to get used to all the administrative challenges, and we have had to be very patient. It has been a great learning experience so far. Things have been looking up since we secured some funding last year.

(As told to Manasi Vaidya)