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## Obsessed with excellence

Kamal Ranadive  
(by R Bhisey)

**K**amal Samarth was born in Pune in 1917. Her father taught biology at Ferguson College, Pune and ensured that all his children, including his daughters, were well educated. Of all his children, Kamal was the brightest. She went to a girls high school 'Huzurpaga: the H.H.C.P. High School for girls' and studied botany at Ferguson College. Further she joined the Agriculture College, Pune where she worked on the cytogenetics of annoneaceae for her Master's degree. Following her marriage to J. T. Ranadive, Kamal Ranadive moved to Bombay close to Tata Memorial Hospital which brought her in contact with V.R Khanolkar, a renowned pathologist and great visionary, who founded the Indian Cancer Research Centre. Kamal worked under his guidance for the Ph.D. degree from the University of Bombay.

After a post doctoral stint in the laboratory of George Gey who developed the HeLa cell line at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, Kamal Ranadive returned to India and established the first tissue culture laboratory at the Indian Cancer Research Centre. In the early 1960s tissue culture media and other reagents had to be prepared in the laboratory. To fulfill these needs Dr Ranadive recruited a team of biologists and bio chemists.

Quick to recognize talent, sincerity and integrity in her colleagues and students, Kamal Ranadive encouraged them to work in various areas of cancer biology. She strongly believed that scientists who went abroad for postdoctoral work should return to India and develop new areas of research in their perspective laboratories. A staunch nationalist, she instilled the same spirit in her colleagues, enough that most of them returned to work in India, making Cancer Research Institute a renowned centre for cancer research. Her unique quality for allowing individual scientific talents to bloom, in fact resulted in the formation of three new divisions, carcinogenesis, cell biology and immunology besides tissue culture.

Her work on animal models for understanding patho-physiology of cancer was extremely important. She was among the first to recognize the connection between cancer susceptibility and interaction between hormones and tumor virus. The so called Indian Cancer Research Institute (ICRC) mouse studied by her group turned out to be an excellent model for work on leukemia, breast cancer and cancer of oesophagus. In addition to this she continued her work on leprosy bacteria, which eventually led to the preparation of a Leprosy vaccine.

Dr Ranadive, fondly addressed as “Bai” by her colleagues and students had an imposing personality. A strict disciplinarian, she instilled the spirit of hard work in her students; her lab was busy till late in the night! She was the recipient of many awards including Padma Vibhushan and the Watumal Foundation award for her work in the field of leprosy.

She founded the Indian Women Scientist Association (IWSA) with the goal of spreading science to masses particularly women and children. IWSA, a hostel for working women and a building that houses a community centre besides IWSA office, continues to hold many activities even today. After her retirement, Dr Ranadive worked on the nutrition and health of tribal women and children in Rajur in Maharashtra. This project was a huge success, providing awareness about nutrition and medical care to tribals and training women health workers as primary health care givers.

Those of us who were fortunate to know Dr Ranadive closely recall her generosity and hospitality. Discussions would always veer to science, new ideas, achievements and what needed to be pursued and was relevant to the country's need. I did not work under her although my husband was her doctoral student and later a colleague. I came to realize her total sincerity and commitment to science when she visited us in Philadelphia in 1969. Before the visit, she had asked us to invite Indian post-docs with whom she could have an informal chat. The reason was obviously to find out if any of them would return to India.

How would one remember this somewhat private, yet warm hearted and highly revered daughter of India? With her generosity, integrity and obsession with advancement of excellence in science, Dr Ranadive made an indelible impression on my mind.