

NIIST scientist wins CSIR Young Scientist Award 2019

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Sasidhar B.S. recalls how, years ago, the people of the Andhra Pradesh village he hailed from would trudge large distances just to consult a doctor. Or to buy medicines.

“Even for small things you had to travel nine or 10 kilometres to another village. For the shops, you travelled 30-40 kilometres,” Dr. Sasidhar, relaxing in his office at CSIR-National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (CSIR-NIIST), Pappanamcode, said on Saturday.

The painful childhood memory contributed to his choice of a career; that of a scientist whose research areas are organic chemistry and discovery of life-saving drugs.

Dr. Sasidhar is now a senior scientist with CSIR-NIIST's Chemical Sciences and Technology Division.

On September 26, the 35-year-old accepted the CSIR Young Scientist Award in Chemical Sciences 2019 from Union Minister of Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan. The award recognised his “contributions in organic chemistry, particularly in the area of



Sasidhar B.S. receiving the CSIR Young Scientist Award 2019 from Union Minister of Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan.

pharmaceuticals and agrochemicals.” Dr. Sasidhar said he owed the achievement to Dr A. Ajayaghosh, director, CSIR-NIIST, and his colleagues. His group is engaged in the development of drugs for therapeutic applications – notably anticancer, antiobesity and antimicrobial agents – through target-based chemical synthesis as well as natural product-based approaches. “The latter approach is significant as Kerala and the Western Ghats are rich in medicinal herbs,” Dr. Sasidhar, who has a PhD in medicinal chemistry, said.

Mango ginger

Mango ginger (*Curcuma amada*, or, in Malayalam, *manga inji*) is an example. Dr. Sasidhar's group has discovered a potent antiobesity agent from this plant. Like-

wise, they have also pinpointed biologically significant molecules from plant sources that could treat cancer and microbial infections.

A recipient of the Kerala State Young Scientist Award in 2017, Dr. Sasidhar is from an agricultural family from Hospet that later moved to Mallikarjunapalli village in Andhra Pradesh to grow rice and jowar. Later, Sasidhar went to Guntakal for his education. While pursuing his masters in organic chemistry at Gulbarga University, he received a ‘push’ towards his career. “It was our annual day and Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was visiting. He advised me to work on drug discovery to serve the society,” he said.

Dr. Sasidhar is married to Vanisri K., a homemaker. The couple has a daughter, Saanvi S.