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## Journey to success

Qudsia Tahseen

**I**n Azamgarh Uttar Pradesh where I was born, girls were not expected to have careers. At most they were supposed to be educated up to BA, to be capable housewives. I was lucky enough to have enlightened parents who considered education of prime importance. Being the oldest child in the family, I enjoyed more attention from my parents than my two younger brothers. My father treated me more like a son and many times I have heard him arguing with my mother to let me study and not to press me to do household work.

I was always among the top students in school. Science was my first love and I was fascinated by the working of the human body. In view of my calibre and interest in science my father sent me to the Government Girls' College. I got a merit scholarship after passing high school: this was my first auspicious step towards a scientific career. In view of my enthusiasm and good performance and the limited opportunities at Azamgarh, my parents decided to send me to Aligarh Muslim University where I could easily get admission on the basis of merit.

I learnt a lot while in hostel and the experience gave me a lot of confidence and the ability to live harmoniously with others.

Since I was away from my parents I tried to focus on my work and not get distracted. I chose zoology as a specialization because of my immense interest in it, thanks to my love for animals! The scholarships I got in BSc and MSc were of relief as I was conscious of spending my father's hard-earned money.

I decided to go in for research and opted for nematology as a specialization at the Master's level. The NET examination was introduced that year and I qualified for a Junior Research Fellowship. I owe a great deal to my guide, Prof. M. Shamim Jairajpuri, who was an ideal teacher, very encouraging and supportive of my research endeavours. He prompted me to strive for excellence. It was he who advised me to start work on the developmental biology of nematodes and I did my doctoral thesis with dedication, finishing it in three years. By this time I was married, and staying in a joint family. My husband proved to be very supportive of my academic endeavours.

My first appointment as a faculty was in 1989 in Women's College, AMU even before I received the PhD degree. The appointment came as a reward in recognition to my academic skills but at the same time posed great challenges. Women's College did not have any infrastructure for research and it was a difficult job to teach at college and then to carry out research work in the Department. However, it was during this period I bagged four young scientist awards including those of Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) and Indian National Science Academy (INSA), besides publishing a score of papers in journals of international repute. My efforts paid off and I was transferred to the Department of Zoology, AMU, in 1997.

Thereafter, I could devote more time to research and (in this regard) visited Rothamsted, CABI, University of Reading, British National History Museum (England), Scottish Crop Research Institute (Scotland), University of Ghent, Belgium and University of California, Riverside for collaborative research by availing Royal Society-INSA Bilateral Exchange Programme, Rothamsted International Fellowship and DBT Overseas Associateship.

Encouraged by these collaborations, I submitted proposals for funding which then enabled me to procure some

important equipment for research. For a long time after my appointment, I had to decline guiding many students since I did not have a laboratory to provide them work space. I got an independent laboratory only in 2003, about fourteen years after joining service.

The new lab proved lucky for me. I published extensively, and my work on nematode taxonomy got national and international recognition as I remain the first Asian to receive ONTA special award 2005 for sustained excellence in Nematology. In addition to my parents, I owe a lot to my two children who cooperated fully in all my research endeavours. My daughter was only three years old when I first left for England!

Despite my responsibilities towards my family, my science career has not taken a back seat. I love to do science. If I had to do it all over again I would make the same choices, with the hope that the future would have more opportunities and better infrastructure for women in research.