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His passion lies in chemistry

Vasudha Venugopal



The Hindu Raghavendra Ramachanderan who won the first prize at Intel International Science and Engineering Fair. Photo: Vivek Nagarajan
He talks at length about anti-cancer agents and molecular properties, and wonders how nice it would be if all schools encouraged students to approach science with curiosity and passion.

“You don't need to be a chemist to appreciate chemistry,” says Raghavendra Ramachanderan, a 16 year- old-student of St John's International Residential School here who won the first prize for his research in drug synthesis at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in Los Angeles recently.

The global fair, which saw over 1,500 students from 65 countries participating, was attended by nine Indian students.

Two years ago, Raghavendra had approached his parents with a plan to take a break from school because he wanted to immerse himself completely in Chemistry. “Normally parents wouldn't allow such things, but he was not speaking like a child. He knew exactly where his passion was,” says his father R.Ramachanderan.

Magic of chemistry

“The magic of chemistry lies hidden in books. It takes time to unearth that,” says Raghavendra, recalling times when he would go back again and again to chapters he found interesting.

His prize winning project “Drug synthesis, braving legendary challenges,” could help in developing drugs to fight cancer, bacteria and fungus, he says.

The project was undertaken at the University of Madras and at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. “My school, parents, mentors R. Raghavachary and S. Chandrasekaran, every one supported me,” he says. The trigger for all this interest, however, was his Chemistry teacher in class XI. “Subramaniam sir explained the mole concept, relatively boring among all chapters in Chemistry, with such simplicity,” he says.

Besides the \$ 9,000 prize money, Raghavendra, like other winners in the fair will be honoured by having an asteroid named after him.

Use of internet

And while he might be obsessed with chemistry, he does take out time to read Jane Austen and Emily Bronte, and play the veena. His father feels, besides his innate inclination towards the subject, it is his usage of the internet “for the right purposes” that has helped him focus and learn more. Raghavendra explains it differently, “If you love science, science loves you - it is unusually rewarding. Chemistry can be unpredictable, but don't stop hoping!”

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