

Believe in taking risks on dreams

By R. Edwin Sudhir/TNN

Bangalore: They're among the best and brightest that the institute has produced. And now, they're teaching and doing research abroad. Winners of the Distinguished Alumni Award, they share their thoughts on how the institute shaped their lives and their prescription for the road ahead.

● **Satya N. Atluri, California:** The



lectures by Roddam Narasimha, C.V. Jogarao, A.V. Krishnamurthy and R.K. Bhatnagar were memorable, and were the cornerstones of my intellectual development.

The day I enrolled at IISc, I was ushered into the office of the then director, Prof Satish Dhawan. He asked me why I chose Aerospace Engineering and what my dreams were. I was overawed that a man of his stature would actually spend time with me. At the very first lecture, I saw how fortunate I was to belong to a diverse and gifted group of students.

I recall spending many an evening and weekends in the libraries, which were excel-

lent by any standard. To be truly world-class, any institution needs among other things: Excellent academic and library infrastructure; an excellent student body; energetic and excellent and young faculty; more endowed professorships and visionary leadership.

● **S.S. Iyengar, Louisiana:** I was introduced to think analytically and solve research problems. This helped me discover many solutions to computer science problems. In the late '60s, I was working on a Masters programme at IISc and after extreme difficulty, managed to make notes from the only book on a certain subject. I understood it a lot better with an inquisitive mind and developed the motivation to be the best.



IISc is perhaps the best research institution in the world because of all the distinguished faculty and students. The problem, however, is the lack of motivation to be the world's best. Faculty members sometimes think small although their abilities are big. A strong student mentoring programme is also needed. Infrastructure facilities can be improved considerably across the campus. Reduce the bureaucratic process and ensure that the junior and senior faculty members work together.

● **K.R. Sreenivasan, Italy:** I got my Ph.D. at IISc and learnt what it means to do serious research there. That has stayed with me even though I have done very different things. The most memorable lecture I



attended was by George Sudarshan. It showed such a remarkable depth and freedom from the shackles of

previous great men in Physics. He could say something like, 'Well, someone like Heisenberg said it could not be done, but here it is. It can be done'. What the institute needs now is more people who are a little more open to taking risks on big dreams.

● **Jamshed Tata, London:** At IISc,

it was for the first time that I realised the value of a mentor-student relationship in understanding the true meaning of scientific inquiry. The most memorable incident happened



on the day I arrived at the institute when I was told that the professor who was to be my research supervisor had left on sabbatical for one year! My disappointment did not last too long as I was welcomed with open arms, and without any bureaucratic problems, in the Department of Pharmacology and Microbiology, where I spent two very happy and

productive two years. The institute should carry on doing what it is best at doing: pick the brightest students and young staff.

● **Tummala Rao, Georgia:** IISc gave me the best



and most rigorous undergraduate education I can ever get at any place. It was the foundation on which rest of my career developed. The professors gave detailed lectures at phenomenal speed and they expected every student to take notes completely. To make sure the students understood, they gave quizzes often. Hardly was a textbook used and yet we learned in depth and in breadth. IISc is not attracting top graduates from IITs or anywhere else, since they go to the US. Its research focus is good but consumption of this research is not there for most part in India. IISc needs to have a first-class undergraduate programme in its campus, both to feed into and enhance the number or quantity of students that Indian or transnational companies need.

▶ ALUMNI GIVE BACK

Narain Mahishi, hon. general secretary, IISc Alumni Association: Of the 25,000-plus students who have passed



through our portals, about 7,000 are members of the Alumni Association. We keep them posted about institute activities and have been giving the DAA since 1977. Apart

from regular donations, some get together to contribute for a special cause. Many living in California sent in Rs 2 lakhs for the IISAA library and hence it's called the California Alumni Library.

R. Krishnan, president, IISAA: It provides a forum for alumni to exchange views on the Institute's growth and how science can be socially relevant.