



Interview

In Profile: Ananth Dodabalapur, Professor of Electrical Engineering, University of Texas

Professor Dodabalapur was born in Bangalore, now known as the high-technology capital of India, in 1963. His father is an engineer and both of his grandfathers were professionals: one was a surgeon and the other a civil engineer. His mother has authored a book on music in the Kannada language. South and west of Bangalore are beautiful forests, which were responsible for Dodabalapur's love for serene woods. During his Bell Laboratory days, Dodabalapur married Rati Chitnis. They have two children — Sonia and Siddharth. Dodabalapur's non-professional activities include attending Renaissance Weekend meetings, which are national gatherings of people of various professional disciplines.

The Professional Side

What is your earliest recollection of science?

When I was 12 or 13, I undertook a project to find the scientific names of all trees on my school campus and label them. I didn't realize it at the time but I was doing research.

Who and what were the most influential factors leading you to a career in science?

Teachers who inspired and teachers who imparted confidence.

What do you love about your job?

The intellectual freedom and the excitement.

What parts of your job could you do without?

None really. Even writing research proposals is a creative exercise!

What characteristics do you see as necessary for your position?

Vision, insight, passion, and perseverance.

What inspires and motivates you?

I like reading biographies.

Where do you look for ideas?

Beyond and in-between traditional disciplines.

Which trends in the scientific community are you pleased about?

An increased degree of interdisciplinary work and awareness of other fields.

Are there any such trends that concern you?

Reduction in funding for unfettered research in the physical sciences and engineering.

What is your most satisfying achievement?

Being a key player in the Bell Labs organic device effort between 1992 and 2001. Almost every day brought with it a chance for some exciting new work in collaboration with superb colleagues.

What scientific discovery would you like to have been responsible for?

Inventing the transistor!

What is your most important scientific goal for the future?

Creating the right environment to inspire and motivate my students.

The Personal Side

How would your family and friends describe you?

Absent-minded, easy going but hard working.

How do you spend your free time?

With my kids and reading (chiefly on airplanes).

Where, in the world, is the best place you've been?

The redwood forests of northern California and tropical forests in parts of southwestern India.

What is your book tip?

I re-read books a lot. I have a favorite set of books that I keep coming back to, to achieve a "resonance" with the thoughts of the author. Schopenhauer, Thoreau, and Russell are among my favorites.

What music do you listen to?

Western classical (Beethoven and Tchaikovski are my favorites) and Indian classical music (such as sitar).

And films?

While I like serious and thought provoking books, I like action movies as a relaxation and break from the thinking process.

If you had not become a scientist, what would you have become?

When I was 24, I nearly gave up science and engineering for philosophy.

Who is your most admired person/scientist?

The list of admired scientists is large but C. V. Raman and Dick Feynman are noteworthy examples.

What do you value in your friends?

Common interests.

What is your most important personal goal for the future?

To better fulfill my many responsibilities.



Dodabalapur graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, in 1985 with a degree in Electrical Engineering after which he joined the University of Texas at Austin, where he completed his Masters and Ph.D. degrees, the latter in 1990 on III-V semiconductor microstructure growth and characterization under the supervision of Ben Streetman. He joined Bell Labs the same year and remained there until the fall of 2001, when he rejoined the University of Texas at Austin as a Professor of Electrical Engineering. At the University of Texas, Dodabalapur is a member of the Microelectronics Research Center, The Center for Nanoscience and Materials, the Texas Materials Institute, and is also formally associated with the Department of Chemistry.

Photos: University of Texas



