

## **The flight from plant microbes to rural women's benefits**

The WOS A fellowship of the Department of Science & Technology (DST), provided Dr. Akanksha Singh with the initial platform to return back to mainstream science after a phase of career gap due to her marriage.



The alumna of the Banaras Hindu University has now joined as a Scientist C at CSIR CIMAP and says she owes it to this fellowship.

The WOS-A scheme is a major component of the Women Scientist Scheme of DST under the KIRAN scheme, including other schemes to empower women in science and technology. It provides a platform to women scientists and technologists for pursuing research in basic or applied sciences and offers them opportunity to work as bench-level scientists. This scheme plays a pivotal role in gender mainstreaming as it not only prevents brain drain from the S&T system but also train and retain women in the system.

“Women Scientist Scheme by DST came as a ray of hope in my life as before getting the fellowship, I was in the phase of career gap due to my marriage. That was the period which made me realize that I am made for science, and I can be happy in my married and personal life only if I am satisfied in my professional career. This thought triggered me to apply. When the result came out that I was selected for WOS A scheme, my happiness knew no bounds. Not only me, but my entire family was ecstatic with the news as I was supposed to be doing what I had always aspired for in my life, ” recalls Dr. Singh.

“The world needs science, and science needs women and girls. As a woman, I can confidently say that we are the best managers, and therefore we need to identify our potential, break the shackles and open our wings. If we can bring about this slight change in our perception, the sky is the limit for us.” Dr. Singh stressed.

“After successfully completing my WOS A scheme with three international publications, I applied for other schemes of DST. I was fortunate enough that I was funded with another extension oriented project focusing on the upliftment of the socio-economic status of rural women through the propagation of low-cost technologies by WOS B scheme. This was my first exposure to work at the grass root level and working for the people who truly need scientific intervention. Now when I have joined as a Scientist at CSIR-CIMAP; I have decided that apart from working in the core research area of plant-microbe interaction I will also keep working for societal issues because mobilizing science for the masses is the ultimate aim of scientists and researchers around the globe,” she added.

“It was during the WOS A fellowship that I was blessed with a beautiful daughter. And I always proudly tell people that she was one of the main driving forces in achieving the objectives of my project and not a hurdle in my scientific career. Therefore, I always make it a point to encourage women around me to never give up their hopes whatever the situation is. The sooner we accept our life and our reality, the better it becomes for us to move ahead,” Dr. Singh pointed out.

“It is never too late to be what you might have been, so if you are really looking to come back in mainstream science, strive hard, chase your dreams, and then there will be no looking back. It is always difficult for a woman to maintain work-life balance, but the ones who overcome their fears can only conquer the world,” she added.