



RAGHAV PRIYADARSHI

Chief Executive Officer
Savikalpa Sciences

Raghav is Co-Founder of Koan Advisory, India's leading policy research and advocacy firm. A former investment banker, he has additional commercial interests in the alco-bev, luxury hospitality and realty industries. He also drives philanthropic initiatives encompassing animal welfare, rural infrastructure development and farmer welfare.

“We aspire to be a global leader in phytomedicine”

Raghav Priyadarshi, CEO, Savikalpa Sciences takes us through his company’s vision, product portfolio, R&D initiatives and future outlook

By Rahul Koul

Tell us about the idea behind Savikalpa Sciences and your long-term vision?

Savikalpa Sciences was born out of a desire to dispel the dogma that natural product medicines are ineffective. The company has many foundational drivers. First and foremost is the desire to rekindle focus on natural product medicines, that is drugs made using naturally occurring chemical compounds. We aim to reposition natural medicines as an evergreen pillar of biopharma, after all, some of the most commonly used drugs worldwide are natural compounds or their derivatives -- aspirin, metformin and statins to name just a few!

Another driver is to establish the primacy of cannabinoids -- natural compounds found almost exclusively in the cannabis plant -- as veritable

therapeutic molecules, with wide-ranging pharmacological applications. Most medical cannabis companies, in India as well as around the world, are positioned somewhere in between the medicinal, wellness and recreational spaces. But the standards that should apply to medical products are woefully lacking, leading to huge variability in treatment outcomes. In other words, dispelling myths surrounding the cannabis plant and its compounds, using the crucible of hard science, is another driving pillar at Savikalpa. We wish to change the conversation from "medical cannabis" to "cannabis medicine" and "cannabinoid phytopharmaceuticals".

A third, simpler, yet critical driver is to establish India as the fulcrum of phytomedicine and polypharmacology. In a way, this is the application of modern drug investigation and



development methods to Ayurveda. Herein, we derive hypotheses from traditional medicine systems but apply modern clinical standards to deliver safe, stable and effective medicines -- hopefully at prices that enable widespread access despite the high clinical costs associated with novel therapeutics. We believe this is uniquely achievable in India, if the right support is enabled by the regulators and government at large.

What milestones has been achieved by the company so far?

Savikalpa Sciences is a nascent effort -- but some early milestones achieved are in the preclinical realm. We have

completed in vitro investigations targeting inflammation response, analgesia, fibroblast proliferation, to name a few. We have also completed in vivo studies on a polyherbal topical formulation, which has shown higher anti-inflammatory and analgesic efficacy than almost all topical pain management products which contain diclofenac or lidocaine primarily. These results give us the confidence that we are on the right path -- further bolstered by the endorsement from a small cohort of doctors and patients we are working with who are consistently reporting treatment outcomes better than standard of care interventions.

Key product offerings of the

company for the Indian and global market?

Savikalpa's medical products line, Shunyata, has seven SKUs at the moment. Three proprietary oral formulations, containing cannabinoids as the principal actives, along with minor concentrations of other synergistic natural compounds. We refer to these products internally as "primary formulations", as these are the first products we have brought to market. We have three topical formulations as

well, also primary products. One is a prophylactic targeting migraine, another targeting menstrual cramps, and the third targeting joint inflammation and osteoarthritis in particular.

We have recently done a limited release of our first "secondary formulation", a polyherbal topical pain cream on which we have completed all preclinical biology investigations and which is patent pending. We are very excited about the prospects of this formulation, which we are certain will demonstrate to stakeholders what a focus on science and R&D can achieve.

Our first objective is to serve the Indian patient universe, but once we

complete human clinical trials (in the offing), we shall take select formulations to global markets as well.

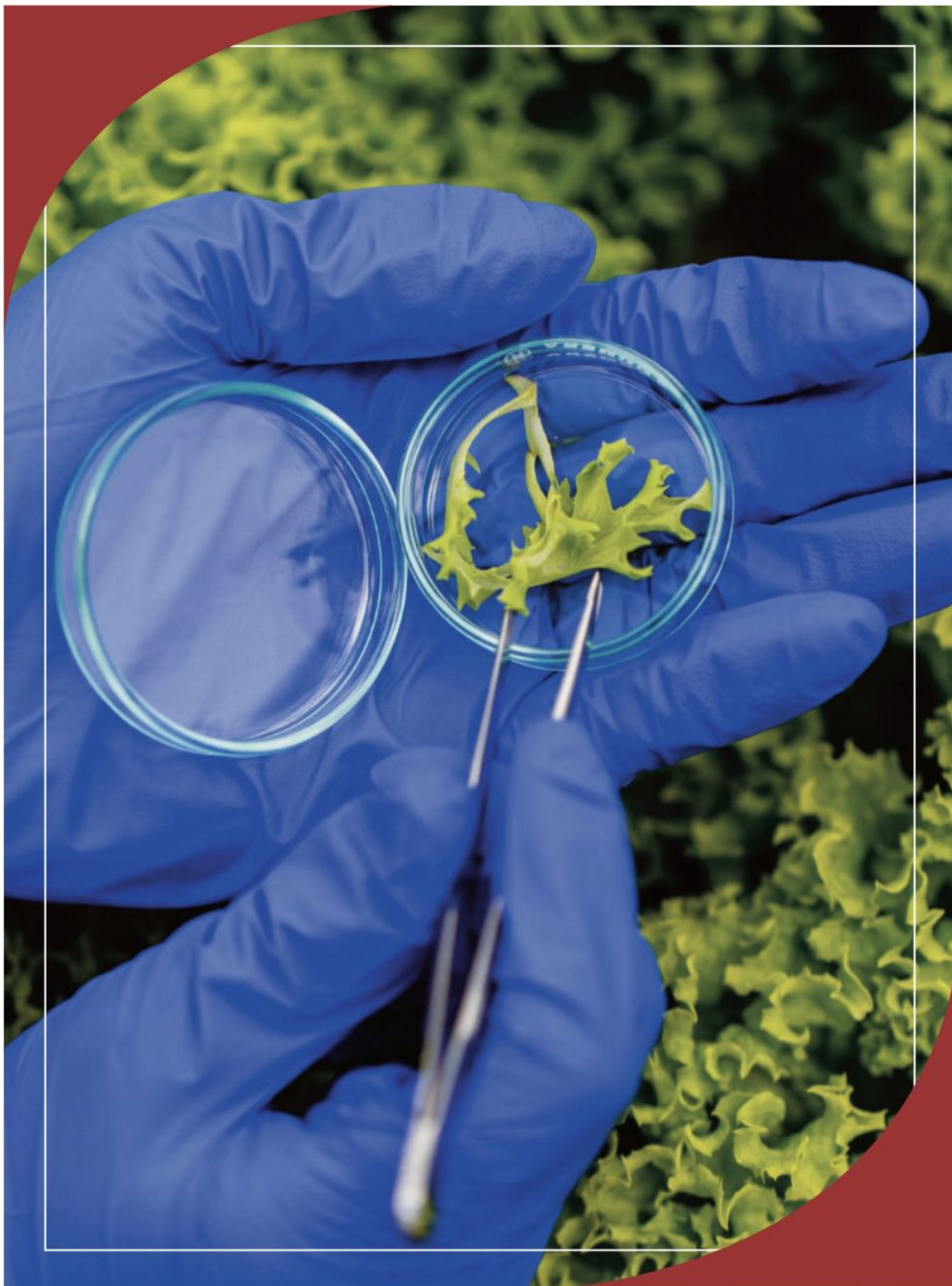
Why is the company promoting cannabinoid medicine? How are you bridging the traditional modern approaches in the process?

The scientific and clinical understanding of cannabinoids is still very limited. This presents an opportunity to work with these compounds -- over 160 phytocannabinoids have now been

identified, but only a fraction have been characterised, and we know but a little about their role in mediating various physiological processes via

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the endocannabinoid system. The research universe is vast, and the therapeutic potential very high. But as mentioned earlier, the danger is that the medical potential of cannabinoids gets stymied due to unscientific approaches to promoting cannabis in pursuit of a quick buck, which can lead to push back instead of wider adoption in the medium term -- and which would be a huge disservice to millions of patients who could benefit from cannabinoid therapy, especially in a country like India.



Specific disease areas are you addressing at the moment?

We are working on palliative care and pain management -- especially cancer pain, sciatica and fibromyalgia. Cannabinoids have the potential to replace opioids in chronic pain management, which we feel is the reason the government should pay particular attention to promoting this particular therapeutic pathway.

Other focus areas include neurological disorders, particularly insomnia, migraine, Parkinson's; dermatological diseases; female reproductive system dysregulations and gastrointestinal inflammatory disorders.

What is the significance of polypharmacology in drug discovery? Latest trends in the segment?

Sometimes, unwittingly or by design, India becomes a pioneer in adopting novel approaches. This is evident in India's space program, India's nuclear program, in the development of Digital Public Goods, to name a few. Similarly, India, at least with respect to the pharma regulatory framework, is a leader in polypharmacology. This is because since 2015, India has had a phytopharmaceutical regulatory regime a perfect blend of classical and modern medicine, which recognises

the synergistic activity of several agents/compounds acting on multiple targets to deliver higher treatment efficacy. It is incumbent on India's biopharmaceutical sector to leverage the opportunity this phyto-regulatory regime allows to create modern, poly-compound medicines with proven safety and efficacy. The onus in this instance is on the private sector and not on government.

Your outlook for the company and the sector in the next 5 years?

We are confident of being a global leader in phytomedicine in years to come. We are working on mission mode to achieve this goal, and are confident that India is the best country to

enable our vision of promoting health and healing.

We also think the medical cannabis industry globally will change substantially, as more and more firms emulate the methods we are pioneering at Savikalpa Sciences and join efforts to shift the narrative away from "medical cannabis" to "cannabinoid medicine" that can be administered to cannabis-naïve patients at home or in a clinical setting, minus the minor yet prevalent side effects of intoxication associated with cannabis.

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