

Vikram Sarabhai



Vikram Sarabhai (12 August 1919 – 30 December 1971) was one of the greatest scientists of India. He is considered as the Father of the Indian space program. Apart from being a scientist, he was a rare combination of an innovator, industrialist and visionary. He was instrumental in establishing the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL). He was also the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. He along with other Ahmedabad-based industrialists played a major role in the creation of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He was a great institution builder and established or helped to establish a large number of institutions no less than 42 institutes in diverse fields such as Science, Industry, Management and Education. He also played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

VIKRAM SARABHAI



Where & when born

Vikram Ambalal Sarabhai was born on August 12, 1919 at Ahmedabad, Gujarat to Ambalal and Sarla Devi.

Brief life history of the person

Vikram Sarabhai was born as one of eight children in an affluent family of progressive industrialists. He had his early education in a private school, "Retreat" run by his parents on Montessori lines. He grew up in a highly political atmosphere, being part of the elite that led India to independence and subsequently formed its first governments, personally meeting many leaders of the Congress Party such as Jawaharlal Nehru. Vikram's mother Sarladevi was a social activist, feminist and promoter of Montessori schools in India and his sister was a political activist. His aunt Ansuayaken was a leader of the national labour movement.

After graduating from the Gujarat College in Ahmedabad in 1937, he went to England for his further studies. He enrolled at the St. John's College, University of Cambridge from where he received the Tripos in Natural Sciences in 1939. Returning to India after the outbreak of World War II, he joined the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore to carry out research on cosmic rays. This was something he undertook on the advice of the eminent scientist C.V. Raman. His first scientific paper 'Time Distribution of Cosmic Rays' was published in 1942.

He married the celebrated classical dancer Mrinalini in 1942. The couple had two children. His daughter Mallika and son Karthikeya too became famous personalities in their own rights.

Spouse: Mrunalini sarabhai, famous classical dancer, she is sister of India's freedom fighter and revolutionary Dr Laxmi Sahgal.

Daughter: Mallika Sarabhai, (Film and Theater artist, classical dancer, leading social activist, owner of popular art Academy "Darpan")



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The family used to holiday in the Himalayas. Vikram Sarabhai saw the advantages that high altitudes provided for the interception of cosmic rays, so next time he brought with him cosmic rays counters, which were transported up there on a pony. During a visit to his mountain station in Gulmarg, near Alpathari lake, in 1943 to carry out high altitude experiments, he conceived the idea of a dedicated laboratory for cosmic and atmospheric physics. He returned to Cambridge in 1945 to further his research on cosmic rays and earned his PhD for his thesis 'Cosmic ray investigations in tropical latitudes'.

He was visiting Thiruvananthapuram to attend the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Thumba railway station being built to service the newly created Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station. Vikram Sarabhai passed away in his sleep on December 30, 1971 at Halcyon Castle, Kovalam in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Career & Contribution to Scientific world and India

He returned to India when the country had newly become independent. Sensing the need for better scientific facilities in the country, Sarabhai convinced the charitable trusts his family managed to establish

Vikram Sarabhai was instrumental in establishing the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad in November 1947. K.R. Ramanathan, an atmospheric scientist was the founder director of PRL and under his able guidance the institution went on to become a leading research organization dedicated to cosmic rays and space sciences. The laboratory was established in a few rooms in M.G. Science Institute of the Ahmedabad Education Society, which was founded by his parents. Subsequently, it got support from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Department of Atomic Energy.

The year 1957-1958 was designated as International Geo-physical year (IGY). The Indian program for the IGY had been one of the most significant ventures of Sarabhai. It exposed him to the new vistas of space science with the launching of Sputnik-I in 1957. Subsequently, the Indian National Committee for Space Research was created, of which Vikram Sarabhai became Chairman.

He was the founding director of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad which was the second IIM in the country. Along with businessman Kasturbhai Lalbhai he played a key role in setting up the institute of learning in 1961.

He was the driving force behind the setting up of the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology University (CEPT University) in Ahmedabad in 1962 which offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in



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disciplines like architecture, planning and technology.

In 1965, he founded the Nehru Foundation for Development (NFD) which is dedicated towards the promotion of basic study on the current problems of societal and individual development.

During the 1960s he also established the Vikram A. Sarabhai Community Science Centre (VASCSC) for promoting science and mathematics education among students and the general public. The organization aimed at stimulating interest in science subject among the masses.

Sarabhai was fully supported in his ventures by Dr. Homi Bhabha who was a pioneer in the field of nuclear research in India. Vikram Sarabhai, set up the first Rocket Launching station (TERLS) in the country at Thumba near Thiruvananthapuram on the Arabian Coast, as Thumba is very close to the Equator. The first rocket with sodium vapour payload was launched on November 21, 1963. In 1965, the UN General Assembly gave recognition to TERLS as an international facility.

After the sudden death of Homi Bhabha in an air crash, Vikram Sarabhai was appointed Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission in May 1966.

His most significant contribution to India was the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) which he helped to establish in 1969. The major objective of the organization is to advance space technology and apply it for national benefits.

Sarabhai set up Ahmedabad Textiles Industrial Research Association (ATIRA), which helped the booming textiles business in Ahmedabad.

Not stopping with all these, he went ahead and set up the Blind Men Association (BMA) which helps visually-challenged people with the necessary skills and support.

Along with his wife Mrinalini Sarabhai, he founded the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts.

Other well-known institutions established by him include the Faster Breeder Test Reactor (FBTR) in Kalpakkam, Variable Energy Cyclotron Project in Calcutta, Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) in Hyderabad and Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) in Jaduguda, Jharkhand.

As a result of Dr. Sarabhai's dialogue with NASA in 1966, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was launched during July 1975 - July 1976 (when Dr.Sarabhai was no more).



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Dr. Sarabhai started a project for the fabrication and launch of an Indian Satellite. As a result, the first Indian satellite, Aryabhata, was put in orbit in 1975 from a Russian Cosmodrome.

Awards & Achievements

- Dr. Vikram Sarabhai was awarded with Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Medal in 1962 and
- Padma Bhushan in 1966.
- Posthumously awarded Padma Vibhushan in 1972

His Famous Quote

Dr. Sarabhai emphasized the importance of a space program in his following quote:
"There are some who question the relevance of space activities in a developing nation. To us, there is no ambiguity of purpose. We do not have the fantasy of competing with the economically advanced nations in the exploration of the moon or the planets or manned space-flight. ". "But we are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally, and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man and society."

Sources

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