



Vikram Sarabhai

Vikram Sarabhai (1919-1971)

Vikram Sarabhai was born on 12 August 1919 at Ahmedabad. He had his early education in a private school, 'Retreat' run by his parents on Montessori lines. This atmosphere injected into the young boy the seeds of scientific curiosity, ingenuity and creativity. With a natural inclination towards physics and mathematics, Vikram Sarabhai did not get into his family business. After school and college in Gujarat, he went to England and obtained his tripos at St. John's College in 1939. He returned to India for a while and worked alongside Sir C.V. Raman in the field of cosmic rays, at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, after which he returned to Cambridge, England for further research in the area and completed his Ph.D. in 1947.

He established the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad in 1948, in a few rooms at the M.G. Science Institute with Professor K.K. Ramanathan as Director. In April 1954, PRL moved into a new building and Dr. Sarabhai made it the cradle of the Indian Space Programme. At the young age of 28, he was asked to organise and create the ATIRA, the Ahmedabad Textile Industry's Research Association and was its Honorary Director during 1949-56. He also helped build and direct the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad from 1962-1965.

Sarabhai pioneered India's space age by expanding the Indian Space Research Organization. India's first satellite Aryabhata launched in 1975, was one of the many projects planned by him. Like Bhabha, Sarabhai wanted the practical application of science to reach the common man. Thus he saw a golden opportunity to harness space science to the development of the country in the fields of communication, meteorology, remote sensing and education. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) launched in 1975-76, brought education to five million people in 2,400 Indian villages. In 1965, he established the Community Science Centre in Ahmedabad with a view to popularise science among children. His deep cultural interests led him, along with his wife Mrinalini Sarabhai, to establish Darpana Academy, an institution devoted to performing arts and propagation of ancient culture of India.

He was the recipient of the Bhatnagar Memorial Award for Physics in 1962, the Padma Bhushan in 1966, and was posthumously awarded the Padma Vibhushan. He was the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission in 1966, Vice-President and Chairman of the UN Conference on peaceful uses of outer space in 1968, and President of the 14th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The International Astronomical Union named a crater in the moon (in the Sea of Serenity) after him, in honour of his contributions to science.