

INSIGHT DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS



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**As Mission Prarambh's Vikram-S rocket soars into space,
recalling Vikram Sarabhai, the father Indian space science**

Subject: GS-I (Miscellaneous)

Why in the news?

- **Vikram-S**, the first of a set of launch vehicles developed by Hyderabad-based company Skyroot, soared into space on Friday (November 18), marking the entry of the Indian private sector into the space launch market. Mission Prarambh is successfully accomplished, the Indian Space research Organisation (ISRO) announced after the launch.
- **Skyroot's rocket** is named after Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme. Friday's launch affords an opportunity to recall the life and achievements of one of the stars of a remarkable generation of India's pioneering space scientists.



Vikram Sarabhai, the 'Mahatma Gandhi of science'

- The late President APJ Abdul Kalam had famously termed **Vikram Sarabhai as the "Mahatma Gandhi of Indian Science"**. By the time he was found tragically dead in a hotel room in Kovalam in Kerala in 1971 at the age of 52, Sarabhai had **founded 38 institutions** that are now leaders in space research, physics, management and performing arts. Almost all of India's space scientists who came after him owe a debt of knowledge, leadership and gratitude to Sarabhai.

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Committed to freedom of thinking

- Born to Ambalal and Sarla Devi, Ahmedabad's leading textile-mill owners, Vikram Sarabhai showed creative promise early. He was 15 when he built a working model of a train engine with the help of two engineers, which is now housed at the Community Science Centre (CSC) in Ahmedabad. The CSC was Vikram's way of providing other children the privileges he had, of experimental research.
- He was **essentially a researcher**, and believed that people, especially children, should be allowed to think freely and come up with solutions on their own.
- Vikram Sarabhai's daughter and **Indian classical dancer Mallika** recalled how, as children, they were at the centre of every family decision. This freedom helped "**garner convictions early in life** and to take a position. You were never too young to be able to be involved in what was going on or what affected you.

Personal life and educational background

- After studying from Gujarat University in Ahmedabad, Sarabhai went to **study physics and mathematics at Cambridge University**, with a reference from Rabindranath Tagore, but was forced to return when World War II broke out.
- He completed his post-graduation at the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru under Dr CV Raman, where he also met Dr Homi Bhabha, and returned later to Cambridge for a PhD in cosmic rays.
- When Sarabhai and Indian classical dancer Mrinalini Swaminathan married in 1942, the Quit India movement had broken out and his eldest sister Mridula had been arrested. None of the family could attend the wedding except Vikram's driver, Lala, Kartikeya recalled.

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- The PRL, ISRO's predecessor, the Indian National Committee for Space Research as well as the Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad are the cradle of India's space programme, and continue to be a critical part of the country's missions. Sarabhai's research-and applications-based approach singled him out as a scientist and entrepreneur who lived ahead of his time.

Space, nuclear science, broadcasting

- Giving flight to Sarabhai's **dream of probing the atmospheric regions for space research**, was the first sounding rocket that was launched from Thumba, in Kerala, in 1967.
- Sarabhai convinced **Parliament and the Planning Commission in 1969** on the **merits of "decade profile"**, as he envisioned the Indian nuclear programme. In 1966, when Sarabhai took over as Atomic Energy Commission chairman after Homi Bhabha's death in a plane crash, he started a dialogue with NASA that formed the base for Satellite Instructional Television Experiment.
- Launched in 1975 from village Pij in Gujarat's Kheda district, it would beam TV programmes to villages and was the first Indo-US space venture using technology for education. This was how the **Krishi Darshan programme** for farmers on Doordarshan was conceived.
- **Sarabhai** extended his **research emphasis even to business**, when he founded Sarabhai Chemicals in Vadodara in 1943, and subsequently the Sarabhai Research Centre and the Operations Research Group.

Source: Indian Express



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