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**Could you provide background on the company history for Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises (ASE)?**

Started by my grandfather Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, who was also head of India's space administration, ASE is one of the oldest pharmaceutical companies in India. Unfortunately, he passed away in 1971 at a time when the Sarabhai Companies were at their peak. His death, coupled with regulation issues regarding patenting in India, also brought the death of the entrepreneurial vision of the company. The company declined abruptly in the 1980s, to a point where its survival was put into question. Most of the sellable assets had to be divested to declutter the liabilities. Working in the United States as a mechanical engineer at the time, I had no intention of returning to India, but seeing how much my grandfather had built, how much of that had been lost and most importantly, how much still remained, my passion was ignited to revive the company and make it a significant player in the world market. Along with my father Mr. Kartikeya Sarabhai, who assumed the role of Chairman of ASE in the mid 1990s, we started the process of rebuilding this company through settlement of old liabilities whilst promoting newer companies.

### **Could you walk us through the growth of the different companies represented today?**

Because the company was under so much debt, it was not possible for ASE to receive any new capital into the parent company. We thus started Asence, a pharmaceutical trading company in the United States, as a strategic fresh company under the umbrella of ASE and as a "springboard" to allow other opportunities. Later, I identified a gap in effervescent products, which were in high demand in the United States and Europe. There were no Indian manufacturers to provide these at a good quality, so we saw an opportunity to utilize ASE's land and infrastructure to make effervescent products. This is how we started manufacturing with a company called Vovantis Pharmaceuticals in 2005. Once we earned the trust of our customers to continue manufacturing, we began to identify other products with high value. We restructured Synbiotics to produce an important product in the API space – Amphotericin B, one of the strongest antifungals in the world. This product is very toxic, with few competitors in the world making it. Putting to use the technology from our older business, we set up a new plant, and today the company is USFDA approved. We sell to Europe, Japan and other markets. Cosara Diagnostics is our most recent company and one of the first molecular diagnostics manufacturers in India. This technology allows for very accurate results for diseases like Dengue, Chikungunya and other mosquito borne illnesses that threaten up to 50% of the world's population.

### **How do you believe environmental regulation could be improved to better accommodate the needs of manufacturers?**

In terms of the API business, I do see a big challenge in environmental control. If I want to enhance my capacity or make additional products, it is now virtually impossible because of the zone my manufacturing area is in: Baroda. From a business perspective, it is stifling. The solution is to invest more and give greater ownership to the manufacturers for handling the waste. Somewhere, the government and the industry need to draw the line and allow for sustainable solutions with joint investments.

### **Investment in R&D is on the rise, but innovation still lags in India. How can more innovative products be brought to the market?**

India today has the most USFDA approved plants outside of the United States, but we are only producing "me too" products, instead of venturing further. I want to hear that India is discovering new drugs every year, but what is the missing link? The environment in India at the government

level needs to be conducive to R&D through better grants and incentives. On our part, we have some innovative products from Vovantis, such as a curcumin effervescent, which we would like to explore for its anti-tumor properties in oncology. The percentage of tumors in India is comparatively lower than in other countries, and one theory is that this difference is correlated to the higher intake of turmeric products. We have done a small amount of research with turmeric, but of course we will need more to make a claim. It shouldn't be the case that only large pharma company can do research using their many years of profit. There are many small companies with big ideas, which is why I see this aspect as both a challenge, as well as an opportunity.