



Dr. Muhammed Majeed

Founder & Chairman, Sami-Sabinsa Group

A pharma scientist-turned-entrepreneur, Dr. Muhammed Majeed effectively used innovation and strategy to create a niche segment, backed by the goodness of Indian herbs and spices. A crusader against the violations of patents, he is an icon of business intelligence and marketing excellence for aspiring entrepreneurs



PIONEER PAR EXCELLENCE

For entrepreneurs, especially for those who pursue the Great American Dream, his story is indeed a guide to success. The youngster who reached the US for higher studies in Pharmacy with only eight dollars in his pockets is now at the helm of a conglomerate that touches millions of lives through innovations in health science. The Group is a key player in the food, nutrition, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics segments with over 200 patents and presence in 15 countries

It is all about roots.

Roots that made Dr Muhammed Majeed turn to his homeland for his business venture idea. Roots that told him about the mystique in herbs and plants, some still undiscovered, the treasure-trove of ancient medicine which holds secrets for the daring to find them hidden in texts and scrolls.

And they led him to this pasture of opportunities.

Dr Majeed belongs to the ilk of visionary entrepreneurs who looked beyond the obvious and found new definitions for a traditional system. This founder and chairman of Sami-Sabinsa Group of Companies is credited with popularizing the goodness of Indian herbs and spices in western countries with the support of research and technology.

What he has achieved is the transformation of Ayurveda from a complementary medicine to an integrated medicine in western countries.

A scientist by profession, Dr Majeed is instrumental in building the group to be a key player in the food, nutrition, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics segments in India and abroad with



Dr Majeed with son Shaheen

The right assessment of market opportunities, the right solution for healthy living and the right combination of modern methodologies and traditional treatment modalities led to the success of Sami-Sabinsa Group



a widespread presence and strategic alliances in US, Europe, Japan, Australia, Middle East, South Africa, China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea and Indonesia. It now has a turnover of Rs 1000 crore, and a manpower of 1,000, of which 800 plus are in India. A host of prominent ventures like American Formulatory Incorporated and ClinWorld Pvt Ltd also come under the umbrella of this Group.

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He holds the highest number of patents in this segment and his portfolio of Intellectual Property is quite thick. The group has over 200 patents, cementing the position of Sami-Sabinsa Group in the categories of food, nutrition, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

So, what was the motivation to launch a venture in the health sector in the US which is stringent with its rules and regulations?

"My capital was my belief in Ayurveda. The late 80s was the beginning of the wellness concept

in America. Everyone was after 'Look Good, Feel Good' products, and I felt the Indian traditional system of medicine was the answer to their requirements. But I wanted the advantages of modern research too. So, I presented Ayurveda in America with products that were manufactured in the modern way with dosages that suited the demands of the times. And that is how it started."

Of course, it has not been an easy journey.

From scientist to entrepreneur

Growing up in Kollam, Dr Majeed was exposed to the harsh realities of life, but instead of taking them for granted he strove to think big and do big. His mother's faith in him and her constant support encouraged him to study further rather than dropping out of school and carrying on the family's trade.

He selected Pharmacy Science for his higher studies and graduated from the Medical College in Thiruvananthapuram in 1973. While the Gulf countries were the most preferred job



State-of-the-art equipment and machinery in the unit in Bangalore guarantees quality and international standards at each and every step of the production



destination in those days, this youngster decided to travel to another land - the US. And this proved to be the turning point in his life. America was waiting for him with a business idea and umpteen opportunities.

Again, the door to a business world was not so easy to open. But the following years proved that he was destined to be an entrepreneur and the global brand ambassador of Ayurveda. And in due course he would turn out to be a role model for thousands of youngsters aspiring to be entrepreneurs.

His maiden trip to the US had its share of surprises, some unpleasant. Much to his dismay he realized that the degree that he considered an asset of life turned out to be of little value in this country. And that his research dream might have to wait.

First came the job in a mid-level pharmaceutical company in Chicago. His first practical lessons came from this job. And it prepared him for his future venture as he gained hands-on experience in all aspects of the field, right from maintenance to production.



“In the beginning, my job was to take care of the pharmacy. That was not what I wanted to do but I gave it my hundred per cent. In three years, I was in a position to manage the total production sector there. That is what hard work brings you.”

Soon, he joined the global pharma major Pfizer in their Research & Development department. This new job in New Jersey offered him the chance to pursue his first dream of arriving in the US - higher studies. The School of Pharmacy of Long Island University was what he chose for the Post Graduate degree in Industrial Pharmacy. And it turned out to test his resilience. Because, both the university and the office were 80 miles away, on opposite directions, from where he stayed. His work-in-the-day- and-study-in-the-night routine meant long drives and heavy work load. But it didn't discourage him in any way. And the degree came to him in 1980.

His career graph rose to include special projects in Carter-Wallace, and in 1984 the company handed him the complete responsibility of product development. A first in the history of



Active molecules are researched with the most modern methodologies to find their unique advantages and turned into herbal extracts, phytonutrients and fine chemicals which are available as a multitude of products

Carter-Wallace to have someone without a PhD to be in-charge of this important division. An acknowledgment of this Malayalee's skills and deep knowledge of the sector.

And it only motivated him to pursue studies, and two years later St John's University awarded him with the PhD. Another achievement, and another opportunity to rise in career. But, instead of aiming for yet another corporate designation he decided to do something that has always been on his mind - become an entrepreneur in healthcare sector.

That was how Sabinsa Corporation was born. The office was the basement of his house, and from there he started what has now grown to be a global business group. He started Sami Labs in Bangalore for the research and development activities. A drug for de-addiction and a vitamin were the first products he wanted Sabinsa to launch, but after two years he found a totally different segment.

“My first plan was to enter generic drugs, but I felt I was way ahead of my times. Then it dawned on me, why not Ayurveda? America was getting into that 'all natural' phase, and

India has it in plenty. So, I started marketing Ayurveda in the US as what it is - mother of all medical sciences! Because it has been here even before Sanskrit language was perfected.”

But the medicines had to be tested and standardized as per the modern scientific classifications, and the dosage was to be compatible with the American lifestyle. Dr Majeed as a scientist provided the fundamentals in bringing out a natural product backed by modern science while Dr Majeed as an entrepreneur devised the marketing strategy to make it a pharma favourite.

Gugulipid, a standardized extract used for cholesterol management, was the first product he marketed under Sabinsa Corporation. It was not easy convincing pharma companies to buy it, and Dr Majeed used to travel across America, meeting people and presenting the age-old goodness of Ayurveda. He also offered to write labels for the products made with Gugulipid as the clinical documentation was integral for all medicines and health supplements.

“The basic dictum of medicine is that even if it doesn't do any good it shouldn't do any harm. I





tried to convince the companies that this medicine would not do any harm, but on a bonus side it would reduce cholesterol."

His efforts paid off and one company made the decision to make nutritional products using Gugulipid. The moment the agreement was signed, he got an offer from another company, and Dr Majeed spotted success instantly and realized that people would buy it, that people were interested in it.

At that time the health sector had conventional medicines for problems like cholesterol, but natural, herb-based supplements were an altogether new segment. And, Dr Majeed struck gold as he followed the same route to



With daughter Sami



Dr Majeed and daughter Anju

bring out the extract of Garcinia Cambogia or our own tamarind. Out of it came Citrin, the first commercially-produced extract from Sabinsa Corporation. An instant hit and a money-spinner for the company. Its effectiveness for weight loss made it a sought-after product in a country where body weight is a grave concern. In 1998, it gained an American patent too.

Slowly, Dr Majeed expanded his operations, and invested more in the business. Sami Labs in Bangalore was grown to become a multi-disciplinary enterprise with 120 scientists in its R&D section creating new extracts and products. It was only in 1993 that he moved Sabinsa Corporation out of his basement and added full-fledged departments. The Group crossed boundaries and made its presence felt in other countries and markets, cementing its role as a key player in the wellness segment.

Dr Majeed and his team were quick to identify the opportunities in the health and nutrition sector, and use cutting-edge technology to turn herbs into modern drugs. The active molecules were researched with state-of-the-art methodologies to find their unique advantages and turned into herbal extracts, phytonutrients and fine chemicals which are available as a multitude of products in pharma, nutrition and cosmetics sectors.

Sornip, extracted from Kunthirikkam, an incense, Forslean, used for weight management, BioPerine, made from black pepper, Curcuminoid, extracted from turmeric and used as an antioxidant and also as a cosmetic product, and Ocufores that treats Glaucoma are some of the products that established Sami-Sabinsa Group as the market leader.

“The transition from a scientist to an entrepre-

HOW HE DID IT!

- ❑ Identified the opportunity for scientifically-proven natural products in the wellness sector in the West, and started their manufacturing and marketing
- ❑ Utilized his knowledge in the ancient system of medicine to make products that offered solutions to various health and cosmetic problems
- ❑ Effectively used modern science to find new information about herbs, their efficiency and safety
- ❑ Ensured the quality of ingredients through the latest technological methodologies
- ❑ Invested heavily on research and development to bring out different products that matched international requirements and standards
- ❑ Patented his products and safeguarded them to ensure quality and standards
- ❑ Made innovation his strategy, and created a niche segment that was sure of stupendous growth
- ❑ Introduced contract farming to ensure a steady inflow of high-quality raw materials
- ❑ Expanded the business identifying opportunities in new segments like nutraceuticals

neur was difficult, but I knew one thing. Whatever I do I should focus on it. In the first two years I was traveling nonstop, then I decided to concentrate on US market, and for almost two years I did not move out of America. Such focus pays off ultimately.”

What many miss to see is the value addition that this scientist has brought to India’s spices trade. From turmeric to black pepper and tamarind, many spices, herbs and fruits now bring in more revenue to the farmer community.

“High quality, clinically-proven, worth the money...that is my motto for the products I manufacture and market. I want to educate people and help them prevent diseases.”

Research on two major health concerns in India - cancer and cardiovascular diseases - is currently on. According to Dr Majeed, Indians should focus more on prevention than cure, and give the natural way of living its due respect.

“My theory is this. Many new medicines and vaccines will come out of America and other countries, but they will not be affordable for the majority of Indians. So we should look into Ayurveda and find out what our sages have been doing in ancient times and create innovative products that prevent health problems and also meet the needs of the time.”

Dr Majeed makes no compromise on safeguarding the patents he has acquired over the years. He defends the patents and is ready to go to any length to protect them, and always gets a favourable verdict too. And these legal battles have undoubtedly strengthened Sami Labs’ supremacy in these segments.

With over 5,000 acres of contract farming and commitment to sustainable development across



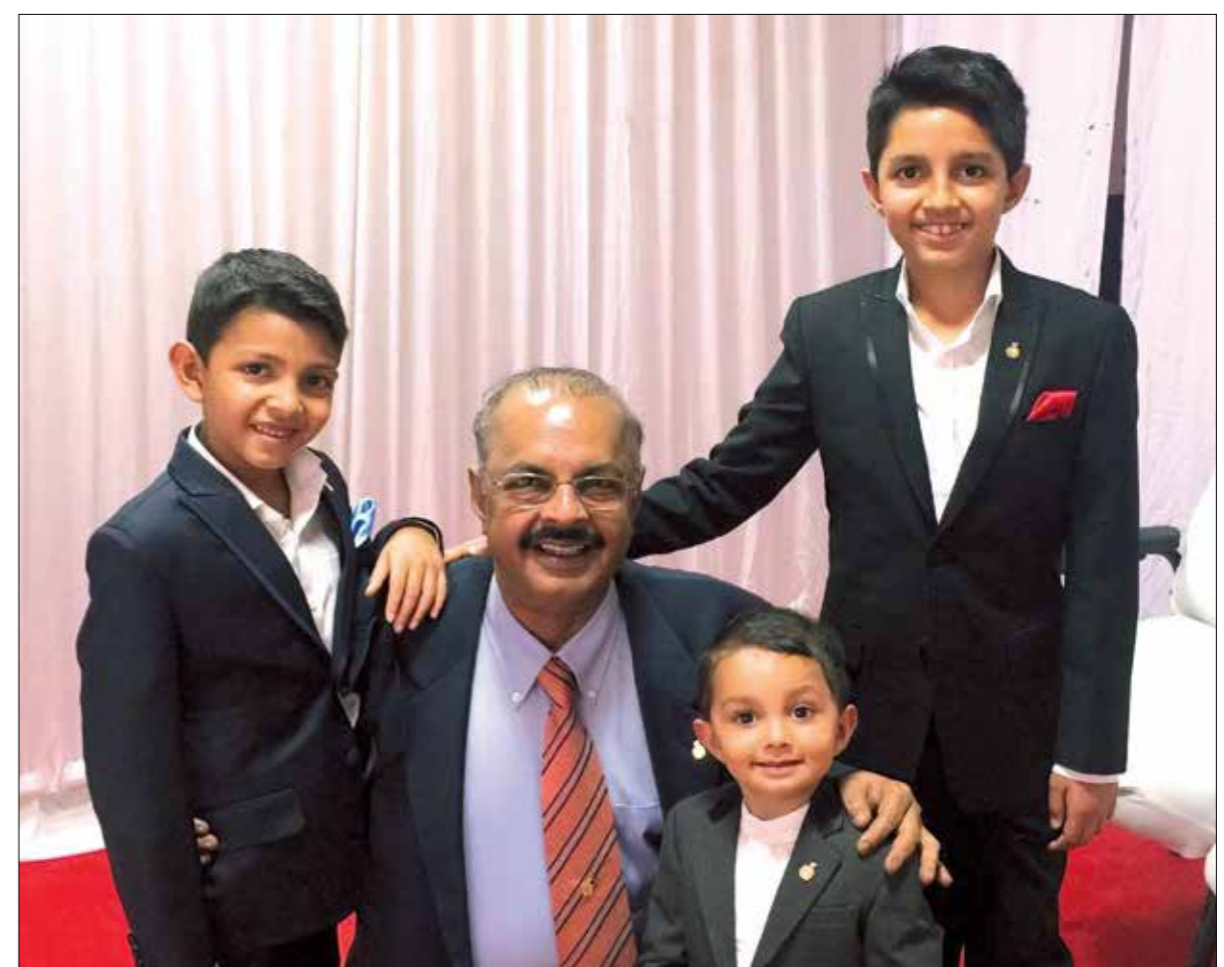
I have invested everything in this field, and Sami-Sabinsa Group is here to lead. I am not a flash in the pan

the country Sami ensures an adequate supply of raw materials. High-tech equipment and machinery in the manufacturing units in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Utah guarantee quality and international standards at each stage of the production. Sami also partners with Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala for conducting clinical studies and standardization of their Ayurvedic products.

With the launch of Sami Direct, the products reach customers through a multi-level marketing network. As the global focus shifts towards the natural way of living, the demand for products based on natural ingredients is on the rise.

“The future looks bright,” is how Dr Majeed puts it. And to make use of opportunities lying ahead, he has equipped the next generation quite well. His son Shaheen Majeed is leading the overseas operations of the Group while daughter Anju is a senior scientist and director.

With a well-trained team in place, Dr Majeed is actively involved in new ventures, patents and also with a slew of activities related to the Group’s social responsibility. Reforestation is one such project he has taken up, and has signed agreements with the forest departments of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka to cultivate medicinal plants. This will ensure a steady supply of raw materials while proving the green



canopy essential for the earth.

A number of educational projects are currently on under the Dr Majeed Foundation as this scientist-entrepreneur believes strongly in the power of studies that can make any dream come true.

Over the years, there has been a steady flow of awards as this entrepreneur and the enterprise he built gained worldwide attention through their extraordinary achievements. Right from the National Award for Quality Products in 1994, accolades have come from far and wide to felicitate Dr Majeed and Sami-Sabinsa Group. In 2004, he was awarded with the Ellis Island Medal of Honour, one of the highest recognitions in America, constituted by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations, in recognition of his contributions to the American society.

Laurels aside, Dr Majeed is actively planning

new milestones for the group as it surges ahead incorporating the latest technology but staying true to its roots - Ayurveda. To be the market leader in all segments that the Group is involved in is his target.

“Our fundamentals are solid, and I will not allow anyone to copy my efforts. Whatever I did, I took science a step further, brought Ayurveda to modern science, and created an industry for the US. I have invested everything in this field, and Sami-Sabinsa group is here to lead. I am not a flash in the pan.”

So, what is the secret formula that created this business group from the molecule of an idea?

“Hard work plus commitment. Nothing else.”