

Former President of India, Late Pranab Mukherjee (left), presenting the LakshmiPat Singhania-IIM Lucknow National Leadership Award to Dr Jayant Vishnu Narlikar (right) in 2017

REMEMBERING PROF JAYANT VISHNU NARLIKAR (1938-2025)

A Pathfinder

Prof Narlikar not just pushed boundaries with pioneering work in theoretical cosmology, he was equally committed to science education and public outreach



■ Dr Main Pal and Prof Hemwati Nandan

The growth of modern astronomy and cosmology in India owes much to Prof Jayant Vishnu Narlikar, one of the country's foremost astrophysicists. Internationally acclaimed for his pioneering work in theoretical cosmology, he combined scientific excellence with a lifelong commitment to science education and public outreach. Over six decades, he advanced cosmological research, built world-class institutions, mentored generations of scientists, and inspired the public through his books and lectures.

At a time of revolutionary advances in cosmology, Narlikar distinguished himself by challenging prevailing theories and developing alternative models of the universe. His long collaboration with Sir Fred Hoyle brought him international recognition, while his vision led to the establishment of IUCAA in Pune, now one of India's leading centres for astronomy research and education. His career exemplifies the integration of scientific excellence, institution building, education, and public service.

FORMATIVE YEARS AND AWARDS

Jayant Vishnu Narlikar was born on 19 July 1938 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, into a family deeply devoted to scholarship and learning. His father, Prof Vishnu Vasudev Narlikar, was a distinguished mathematician and theoretical physicist at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), while his mother, Sumati Narlikar, was a renowned Sanskrit scholar.

Growing up in such an intellectually stimulating household naturally nurtured his curiosity, discipline, and love for knowledge. Much of his childhood was spent on the BHU campus, where his father's residence frequently hosted eminent scholars, scientists, philosophers, and educationists. Distinguished visitors included Nobel laureate Sir C V Raman, physicist Meghnad Saha, mathematician D D Kosambi, educationist Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Sir C D Deshmukh, Pandit Narendra Vyas, and BHU founder Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Listening to discussions on mathematics, physics, philosophy, education, and national development gave the young Narlikar an invaluable intellectual foundation and fostered a lifelong passion for scientific inquiry.

An exceptionally gifted student, he completed his undergraduate studies in mathematics at BHU before moving to Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, for higher education. At Cambridge, he graduated as a Senior Wrangler, one of the highest distinctions in the Mathematical Tripos examinations, reflecting his extraordinary mathematical ability. In 1963, he completed his doctoral research under the supervision of Sir Fred Hoyle, marking the beginning of one of the most influential collaborations in twentieth-century cosmology. Throughout his career, Narlikar received numerous honours recognizing both his scientific achievements and his contributions to science education. These included the Padma Bhushan (1965) at the age of just 26, Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award (1978), Indira Gandhi Award (Indian National Science Academy) (1990), UNESCO Kalinga Prize (1996), Padma Vibhushan (2004), Prix Janssen of the French Astronomical Society (2004), Maharashtra Bhushan Award (2010), the Smith's Prize, Tyson Medal, Adams Prize, and several honorary doctorates from universities in India and abroad. Besides research, he was an accomplished writer whose science fiction, popular science books, essays, and autobiography introduced scientific ideas to readers across generations. His autobiography, *A Tale of Four Cities* (Chaar