

Professor V. Rajaraman: Icon of Indian Computer Science Education

The discipline of Computer Science and Engineering was ushered into our country through the pioneering efforts and determination of Professor V. Rajaraman.

In 1962, Prof. V. Rajaraman returned to India as Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering, after completing Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. 1963, an IBM 1620 computer system was welcomed into the IIT Kanpur campus. A 10-day intensive course, designed by Prof. Rajaraman, was offered soon after the arrival of IBM 1620 to a large number of enthusiastic, potential users.

By 1965, IIT Kanpur had introduced its compulsory programming course, TA 306, for students of all branches. "TA" stood for Technical Arts. At that time, computing was regarded more as a vocational discipline and not as a science. It was placed in the same category as carpentry and workshop trades. In fact, the Education Ministry was initially reluctant to establish a separate Department of Computer Science on this count.

It was because of the passionate efforts of Prof. V. Rajaraman that Computer Science emerged as a discipline of importance. In 1978, he inspired bright students and assembled a batch of 20 students to pursue Computer Science. This was the first batch of B.Tech. Students in Computer Science and Engineering. He taught them using textbooks that he had prepared with a dedicated effort. That pioneering batch of 20 brilliant students closed at JEE Rank 40, demonstrating the extraordinary demand for Computer Science education and inspiring other IITs to establish similar programmes. One student in that cohort was Rajeev Motwani, who later went to Stanford and mentored Larry Page and Sergey Brin as they famously co-founded Google.

Prof. Rajaraman was a member of the Electronics Commission, Government of India, from 1979-1982. During his tenure as Chair of a Human Resources Committee, Prof Rajaraman initiated a plan to increase the human resources available in IT by proposing a Master of Computer Applications (MCA) programme, which emerged as a unique programme in India.

A solid foundation for India's IT industry (which is worth more than 200 Billion Dollars) has been built on the pioneering vision, dedication, and initiative of distinguished and dedicated academics such as Prof. V. Rajaraman, who laid important foundations for Computer Science education in the country. We must salute the pioneering efforts of a stellar icon of computer science education in India.

For more information, please take a look at:

- Itihaasa.com video feature on Professor V. Rajaraman: <https://itihaasa.com/listing/artefacts/Multimedia+File?interviewe=Prof.+V.+Rajaraman>
- Special Issue of "The Spark" featuring the Life and Times of Professor V. Rajaraman: <https://iitk.ac.in/dora/spark/issue-15/>