

Biography of Prof. Jayant Vishnu Narlikar

Jayant Narlikar was born on July 19, 1938 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra and received his early education in the campus of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), where his father Vishnu Vasudeva Narlikar was Professor and Head of the Mathematics Department. His mother Sumati Narlikar was a Sanskrit scholar. After a brilliant career in school and college, Narlikar got his B.Sc. degree in 1957. He went to Cambridge for higher studies, becoming a Wrangler and Tyson Medallist in the Mathematical Tripos. He got his Cambridge degrees in mathematics: B.A.(1960), Ph.D. (1963), M.A. (1964) and Sc.D. (1976), but specialized in astronomy and astrophysics. He distinguished himself at Cambridge with the Smith's Prize in 1962 and the Adams Prize in 1967. He later stayed on at Cambridge till 1972, as Fellow of King's College (1963-72) and Founder Staff Member of the Institute of Theoretical Astronomy (1966-72). During this period he laid the foundations of his research work in cosmology and astrophysics in collaboration with his mentor Fred Hoyle.

Narlikar returned to India to join the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (1972-1989) where under his charge the Theoretical Astrophysics Group acquired international standing. In 1988 he was invited by the University Grants Commission as Founder Director to set up the proposed Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA). He retired from this position in 2003. Under his direction IUCAA has acquired a world-wide reputation as a centre for excellence in teaching and research in astronomy and astrophysics.

In 1966, Narlikar married Mangala Rajwade, a Ph.D. in mathematics. They have three daughters, Geeta, Girija and Leelavati, all of whom have opted for careers in science.

Narlikar is internationally known for his work in cosmology, in championing models alternative to the popularly believed big bang model. He was President of the Cosmology Commission of the International Astronomical Union from 1994 to 1997. His work has been on the frontiers of gravity and Mach's Principle, quantum cosmology and action at a distance physics. He has received several national and international awards and honorary doctorates. He is a Bhatnagar awardee, as well as recipient of the M.P. Birla award, the Prix Janssen of the French Astronomical Society and an Associate of the Royal Astronomical Society of London. He is Fellow of the three national science academies as well as of the Third World Academy of Sciences. Apart from his scientific research, Narlikar has been well known as a science communicator through his books, articles, and radio/TV programmes. For these efforts, he was honoured by the UNESCO in 1996 with the Kalinga Award.

Narlikar broke new grounds in space research, when during 1999-2003 he headed an international team in a pioneering experiment designed to sample air for microorganisms in the atmosphere at heights of up to 41 km. Biological studies of the samples collected led to the findings of live cells and bacteria, thus opening out the intriguing possibility that the Earth is being bombarded by microorganisms some of which might have seeded life itself here.

Narlikar was decorated Padmabhushan in 1965, at the young age of 26. In 2004 he was awarded Padmavibhushan.
