

# ‘He encouraged us to think freely and without fear’: Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics bids farewell to J V Narlikar

Prof Jayant Vishnu Narlikar, the veteran astrophysicist who believed in an alternative model to the Big Bang theory, died in Pune on Tuesday at age 87.

A solemn hush settled over the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) on Wednesday as it mourned the loss of its founder and guiding light, Prof Jayant Vishnu Narlikar. The Bhaskara foyer, which usually echoes scientific discussions and footsteps of young scholars, stood draped in silence and reverence as his mortal remains were placed for the public to pay their final respects.

Friends, colleagues, admirers, and students gathered to bid farewell to the legendary astrophysicist whose work bridged Indian science with the global cosmos. His influence was felt in every tearful gaze and bowed head.

The ‘salami shastra’ (general salute) followed by ‘shok satra salami’ and two minutes of silence also marked the solemn occasion.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar paid floral tributes to Narlikar.

“We have lost a great scientist and an equally great writer. I pay my heartfelt tribute to him,” Fadnavis wrote on X.

Savitribai Phule Pune University Vice-Chancellor Dr Suresh Gosavi said, “Prof Narlikar was not just a scientist, but an academic visionary who helped shape the culture of research in Pune. His presence will always remain in the very spirit of IUCAA,” he said.

Kiran Mehta, who has admired Narlikar’s journey for more than 40 years, recalled, “He had an option to settle there when he was in Cambridge, but he chose to come back to India and light up here. He simplified the universe for us and showed us how to ask questions.”

Also among the diverse crowd was Akhila, a PhD scholar who worked under Narlikar’s guidance. “He had a great time in his life and he made sure others had a great time. IUCAA is a hub for all universities to work together,” she said.

Another student, Priya, said, “He made science human. He encouraged us to think freely and without fear.”

Prakash Bhosale, “I was his friend and a student too. We used chit-chat after classes. Everything I am today is because of him. He was my idol in this world,” he said, eyes welling up. “He will stay forever with us.”

As the final rites began, the sun rose higher, casting a golden light over the Bhaskara foyer—a fitting tribute to the man who brought the stars closer to us all.

Narlikar passed away in Pune on Tuesday at age 87. The veteran astrophysicist is known for his seminal work in cosmology and, most importantly, for believing in an alternative model to the popular Big Bang theory about the origin of the universe.

