

A giant of statistics C. R. Rao 1920–2023

Professor C. R. Rao, Calyampudi Radhakrishna Rao, died at the age of 102 on August 22, 2023, in Amherst, New York, USA. He was born in South India in the town of Huvvinna Hadagall in the province of Karnataka on September 10, 1920.

Encouraged by his father, C. R. Rao completed his master's degree in mathematics at Andhra University at the age of 19. In 1941, Rao transferred to the University of Calcutta, which had just started a master's program in statistics, the first of its kind in India. Rao graduated in 1943 with the highest honors; they have not been exceeded since then. In 1943, P. C. Mahalanobis, Director of ISI (Indian Statistical Institute) and “Father of Indian Statistics”, recruited Rao to ISI.



In 1946, the University of Cambridge in England needed a qualified researcher to analyze the anthropological observations collected in North Africa. Mahalanobis sent C. R. Rao for this task. Rao worked under the renowned R. A. Fisher, the developer of modern statistics, at Cambridge from 1946 to 1948 and received his doctorate in philosophy in 1948.

After returning to India in 1948, Mahalanobis offered the 28-year-old Rao a professorship at the ISI. This was the beginning of Rao's rapid advancement to the very top management of the ISI. In particular, Rao was Jawaharlal Nehru Professor 1976–84 and National Professor in India 1987–92.

In India, the retirement age was 60, and thus after 40 years in India, in 1979, Rao accepted a professorship at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States. From there he continued to Penn State University in 1988 and to the University of Buffalo in 2010.

Rao has left the most significant impact with his scientific research and textbooks. He is generally considered one of the greatest researchers in statistics. He was a pioneer in his field and the builder of the foundations of modern statistics. He published almost 500 scientific articles and wrote 14 books.

Rao held key management positions in international organizations in the field of statistics. He has received multiple prestigious international science awards. His last prize, the International Prize in Statistics, was announced on April 1, 2023. This prize is considered the Nobel Prize in statistics.

Professor Rao has received honorary doctorates from 38 universities, including the University of Tampere in 1985.

Rao visited the University of Tampere five times. Cooperation with the university began in 1983 when he was the main speaker at the first international statistics conference organized at the university. In the second international event in Tampere organized in 1987, which was larger than the 1983 conference, Rao was one of the main speakers. In the same year, Professor Rao visited Tampere for the second time as an opponent at the public examination of a doctoral dissertation in statistics. Rao visited the University of Tampere for the fifth time at a conference organized in 1990. The 1987 and 1990 Tampere conferences in statistics are available for viewing on [YouTube](#).

Rao's visits to Tampere led to significant cooperation between the University of Tampere and the University of Pittsburgh and, more broadly, with the international scientific community. One of the authors of this had the wonderful experience of serving as a visiting professor in Rao's department at the University of Pittsburgh during the academic year 1985–86. The highlights of the visit were joint publications with Professor Rao. Professor Rao was the opponent at the public examination of the second author's doctoral dissertation in 1987.

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