



Facilitating the Establishment of the IIMA Computer Network

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Professor N. R. Sheth chose me to function as Dean while on extension as Director. He said he did not want to go through the process of selecting a regular Dean when he was on an extension. He felt it was the new Director's prerogative to choose the most suitable person as Dean, and requested me to shoulder the responsibility of deanship until the new Director took over. Dr Sheth then added that he might precipitate a controversy if he asked anyone else to take up this responsibility, and wanted me to accept his request in the best interests of the Institute. I accepted.

I think it was some time in 1990 that Anil (Professor Anil Gupta) who was the Chairman of the Research Committee wanted me to attend a committee meeting in which a research proposal submitted by a group of faculty members was to be discussed. I attended that meeting as an observer.

The Committee had to discuss the research budget, which included a significant amount for buying desktops. The budget for the proposal included buying three/four desktop computers, each of which at that time cost roughly Rs 350,000. I knew we could not easily access computers that would do complex computations. I felt that if any research project required a high-power computing facility, the institute should provide that facility to the researcher. My other thought was if every faculty member were to justify the need for a personal desktop, would the Institute have the money to buy desktops for everyone? I left the meeting, seeking some time to let them know what I would do if I were on the Committee.

I asked Nitin (Professor Nitin Patel) for advice on this issue. In my judgement, at the Institute he was the most knowledgeable on computers. In response to my query, Nitin said, "I would think it through if you promised to take my advice." He took a few days before coming back and said, "Don't buy desktops at that price--plan for a computer network which will connect all the faculty and staff members, and each would have a certain level of computing power. You add additional facilities to those who require higher power." He added, "Computer networks would be the future technology, and it would be better for the institute sooner you acquire it."

I thought the issue over for a few days. I accepted what Nitin had said. I went to the Director and explained everything to him. He said I would have his support for whatever I thought would be appropriate for the Institute. After this assurance from the Director, I decided to find out what I needed to do to set up a computer network. I learnt that IIT Kanpur already had one, and I think IIT Bombay was about to get one.

Next, I discussed this with Jajoo (Professor B H Jajoo), Chairman Computer Services Committee and Venkat (Professor Venkata Rao), Chairman of the Computer Group. I told them I needed their help to realize the idea of a Computer Network at IIMA. I requested Jajoo to work out how we could set it up. We formed a committee with Satiasaheb (Professor J K Satia)

as the Chairman, and Chairman, Computer Services Committee (Professor B H Jajoo) and the Chairman, Computer Group (Professor Venkata Rao) as members. The Committee designed the specifications for the network and negotiated a price of Rs 35,00,000 with WIPRO for setting up the network. The Committee members, Professor Jajoo in particular, worked hard to realize the proposal for an IIMA Network. I was to seek money for it.

I discussed the proposal with Director. We realized that seeking a government grant would delay the process. The Director said I could discuss it with Raghavan, the Finance and Accounts Officer. Raghavan was of great help. He said we could use some of the money in accounts with surplus budgets. He told me about a research project in Professor Nirmala Murthy's name, with a surplus of about Rs 20 lakhs. Professor Murthy had completed the project, but had also left the Institute. The Ford Foundation had given the dollar-grant to the Institute, and Professor Murthy could not take the project with her. We made enquiries and found out that if Professor Murthy agreed, the Institute could use the money to buy computer hardware. I asked her whether we could use the surplus money to develop a computer network at the Institute. She graciously agreed, and requested me to arrange for an office room and a terminal for her use for a period of three years. We agreed. I discussed with the Director how we could use funds from the various accounts that had unused surpluses. This is how we raised resources for the network. Wipro set up the IIMA Computer Network and we soon realized our dream.

Nitin often told me that if we had not got the network done at that time, we would not have got it for another ten years!

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