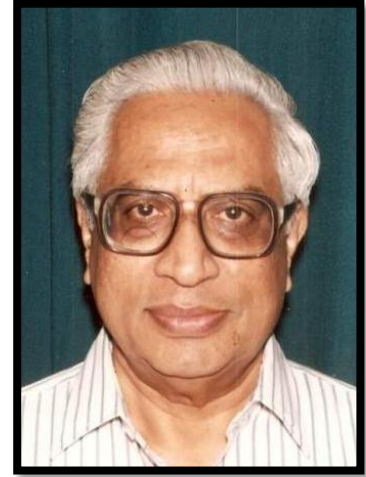
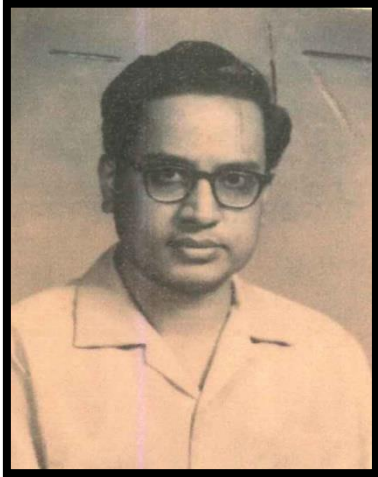


# Prof. G. R. Kulkarni

[1927-2021]



## Prof. G. R. Kulkarni Retires...

Prof. G. R. Kulkarni joined the Institute as early as 1965 and retired after twenty-two years of service on July 31, 1987. Prof. Kulkarni, who was the Dean for two terms, has had a valuable association with the Institute. At a warm send-off given to him on the 29th July, Prof. N. R. Sheth eulogised Prof. Kulkarni's services to the Institute, both as a scholar and as an administrator. He said that the placement activity, which was quite uncertain in the initial stages, developed into a successful Programme due to the pioneering efforts of Prof. Kulkarni. Wishing Prof. Kulkarni and his family all the best, Prof. Sheth hoped that he would continue his links with the Institute.

Looking back, Prof. Kulkarni recalled that though he was holding a responsible position in the Government, he came to the Institute by choice, and the fact that he did not regret this decision ever shows how the Institute has treated him, He said that he has had happy association not only with his colleagues but also with students in the PGP, MDPs, and FPM. He has also had the satisfaction of being a part of the institution building process at the Institute, which was an excellent experience and has helped him in his later assignments elsewhere. He placed on record his deep gratitude and appreciation and thanked everyone for the love, indulgence, regard and cooperation given to him.

The Alumnus joins the IIMA community in wishing Prof. Kulkarni success in whatever be his future endeavours.

**Source:** The Alumnus, 1987, Vol. 19, No. 3.

**Source:** Sambrani, Shreekant (2021, October 14). Professor G R Kulkarni: The silent mentor of IIM, Ahmedabad.

[https://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/professor-g-r-kulkarni-the-silent-mentor-of-iim-ahmedabad-121101400734\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/professor-g-r-kulkarni-the-silent-mentor-of-iim-ahmedabad-121101400734_1.html)

## Professor G R Kulkarni: The silent mentor of IIM, Ahmedabad

Individuals like Professor Kulkarni, who passed away yesterday, do not beat their own drum. They go on happily with their lives, but we are the losers

### Topics

Obituary | IIM Ahmedabad | Harvard University



G R Kulkarni

Professor Gajanan Raghunath Kulkarni, who passed away in Bengaluru on October 13 at the age of 94, was among the pioneers of professional management education in India. He came to the then just starting Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA), being directly recruited by its first honorary director, Dr Vikram Sarabhai, along with a select few: Dr Kamala Chowdhry, Dr Samuel Paul, Professor Bharat Dalal, Professor Hrishikesh Pathak, among others. Ahmedabad was then not quite prominent on the academic map of India. Dr Sarabhai made it his mission to rectify that situation and succeeded spectacularly by founding or nurturing institutions such as IIMA, the Physical Research Laboratory and the Ahmedabad Textile Industry Research Association, with the munificent backing of the owners of industries.

Professor Kulkarni came to IIMA from the Ministry of Finance, Revenue Department, which included the income tax wing. He spent a short period at the Harvard Business School in the United States, which was assisting the new institute. He became a staunch believer and proponent of the case method of instruction. Much credit for its subsequent adoption and popularity in India must rightly belong to him.

By the time I joined the IIMA faculty in 1971, he was already among the seniors at the young Institute. He was a Wise One, one of the two or three who assisted the Director Ravi Matthai in faculty evaluation for promotion and other rewards (or the lack thereof). His sober appearance, with intelligent eyes shining through horn-rimmed glasses and silver-grey hair combed back, went perfectly with the role. He headed the business policy area and taught the policy courses in the second year. I had no notion then what business policy meant and had extremely little contact with him.

He was also the co-ordinator of the top tier of the three-tier executive training programme (as it was then called). The 3-TP was a IIMA hallmark programme, which encouraged companies to nominate executives to all three tiers: middle management, senior management and top decision-makers with

the belief that such programmes will not be fully effective unless its awareness percolated throughout the corporate hierarchy.

Professor Kulkarni brought to the IIMA senior faculty the Bombay ethos, since some of the others—Matthai, Chowdhry, Ishwar Dayal, to wit—had no experience of the business capital of India. The 3-TP co-ordinatorship gave him personal access to many leading corporate executives, as I was to find out on many occasions later. That served the institute well. He also had an extensive network of colleagues and allies in the government, which certainly helped. His eminence grise was thus very well earned and he carried it with becoming dignity.

I used to occasionally pass him in the institute corridors (my office was then located in a rented premises just off the campus, so this was not very often). He smiled and uttered a word in greeting, but there was no conversation of substance. The first time that happened was two years after I had joined the Institute. The normal pattern until then was that assistant professors were promoted to full professorship after two years. That did not happen in my case (and others who had joined at the same time). Director Matthai said something about a policy change, which I did not fully follow, but was not prepared to ask him about it. Instead, I made bold to seek an appointment with Professor Kulkarni and asked him whether I should look for another position since I had not been promoted. He patiently explained the new policy, which made the promotion possible only after four years as advised by the government. He also showed me that there was no difference in the salary and other privileges. He then kindly took me through the evaluation process, highlighting my strengths, but also not being shy about my weaknesses. He took me over to Professor Ishwar Dayal, the other Wise One, who fully concurred with him and advised me not to do anything rash as seeking another position.

From then on, Professor Kulkarni became my mentor. Soon I got to know his wife, Sumitra Gandhi Kulkarni, the Mahatma's granddaughter, who was about to quit her job in the Indian Administrative Service and take a plunge in politics (Indira Gandhi nominated her to the Rajya Sabha, but they soon fell apart, Sumitra having grave doubts about the Emergency). The Kulkarnis adopted my wife and I as their younger siblings, a relationship we both cherished.

Thereafter, Professor Kulkarni accepted a United Nations assignment in Afghanistan. Although the country was in turmoil with clashes between the Soviet troops and the mujahideen/Taliban, he said later that he had a fruitful time and instituted many reforms. I have no doubt he did so, but most likely they are in the dustbin of history of that God-forsaken land.

On his return, he spent a short period as Dean of the new Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, where he started a post-graduate programme, much like the one at IIMA. He returned to IIMA, most likely because of the daily government interference in affairs of the new institute which was located in Delhi. He moved to Bangalore post retirement and stayed there until the end. Even there, he played a key role in helping run the Xavier Institute of Management Education. We kept in close touch throughout. Sumitra would make it a point to cook a meal herself whenever I visited them.

In retrospect, I feel that the country made very little use of his exceptional abilities and experiences, mainly because of his reticence. He seldom spoke about himself. The 'out-of-sight-out-of-mind' syndrome is very strong in India. We soon forget gifted individuals like Professor Kulkarni because they do not beat their own drum. They go on happily with their lives, but we are the losers.

Shreekant Sambrani