



Srinivasa S. R.
Varadhan

Srinivasa S. R. Varadhan was born January 2, 1940 in Madras (Chennai), India. He is currently Professor of Mathematics and Frank J. Gould Professor of Science at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, New York University.

Varadhan received his B.Sc. honours degree in 1959 and his M.A. the following year, both from Madras University. In 1963 he received his Ph.D. from the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, with the distinguished Indian statistician C.R. Rao as his thesis advisor. It is reported that during his thesis defence Varadhan noticed a visitor in the room whom he did not know and who asked many penetrating questions. After the exam he discovered that it was the famous Russian mathematician and probabilist A. N. Kolmogorov. Apparently Professor Rao arranged the date of the exam knowing that Kolmogorov would be visiting India then in order to show off his star student, and Kolmogorov was not disappointed.

Srinivasa Varadhan began his academic career at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences as a postdoctoral fellow (1963–66), strongly recommended by Monroe Donsker. Here he met Daniel Stroock, who became a close colleague and co-author.

In an article in the Notices of the American Mathematical Society Stroock recalls these early years: “Varadhan, whom everyone calls Raghu, came to these shores from his native India in the fall of 1963. He arrived by plane at Idlewild Airport and proceeded to Manhattan by bus. His destination was that famous institution with the modest name, The Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, where he had been given a postdoctoral fellowship.” Varadhan was assigned to one of the many windowless offices in the Courant building, which used to be a hat factory. Yet despite the somewhat humble surroundings, as Stroock puts it: “from these offices flowed a remarkably large fraction of the post-war mathematics of which America is justly proud.”

Srinivasa Varadhan has stayed loyal to Courant, where he served as assistant professor (1966–68), associate professor (1968–72), and became a full professor in 1972. When he and Stroock were awarded the American Mathematical Society's Steele Prize in 1996, Varadhan did not fail to mention that "The Courant Institute provided us with an ideal intellectual environment, active encouragement and the support of our senior colleagues, particularly Louis Nirenberg and Monroe Donsker."

Varadhan must have lived up to the high expectations he was met with as a postdoctoral fellow. In 1965 Louis Nirenberg wrote to Monroe Donsker recommending Varadhan for a faculty appointment at Courant: "I think very highly indeed of Varadhan and predict a great future for him. He is very young, and I think in many ways he might be the best appointment as assistant professor in probability we could make."

15 years later Srinivasa Varadhan was appointed Director of Courant (1980-84), following Peter Lax. In a letter of recommendation addressed to the President of New York University, Lax wrote, "We feel that now, when the Courant Institute is full of renewed vigour and is facing the future with confidence, is the time to pass on the leadership to a new generation." Thus, Srinivasa S. R. Varadhan followed Peter Lax both as Director of Courant and now also as an Abel Laureate. Varadhan came back to serve a second period as Director of Courant (1992-94).

Varadhan has held visiting positions at Stanford University (1976–77), the Mittag-Leffler Institute (1972), and the Institute for Advanced Study (1991–92).

Varadhan was an Alfred P. Sloan Fellow (1970–72) and a Guggenheim Fellow (1984–85).

His awards and honours include the Birkhoff Prize (1994), the Margaret and Herman Sokol Award of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, New York University (1995), and the Leroy Steele Prize (1996). He also has two honorary degrees from Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris (2003) and from Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata, India (2004).

Varadhan was invited speaker at the International Congress of Mathematicians (ICM) in 1978 and 1994 (plenary).

Srinivasa Varadhan has been elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1988), the Third World Academy of Sciences (1988), and the National Academy of Sciences (1995). He was elected a Fellow of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (1991), the Royal Society (1998) and the Indian Academy of Sciences (2004).

Srinivasa Varadhan is married to Vasundra Varadhan, who is a professor at New York University. They have one son, Ashok. Their eldest son, Gopal, was one of the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers.