

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space for All: Decolonial Practices in Space (2)

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MEMORY MONOLOGUES: ARCHIVING INDIAN SPACE HISTORY

Abstract

Launched in the fall of 2021, Spaceport SARABHAI (S2) is India's first space think tank working to accelerate the production of ideas related to outer space, amplify non-traditional space perspectives, and inform space policy making through writings, events and conversations. To further its mission of shaping a new space narrative with a global hemispherical balance, S2 began the Indian Space History Memory Monologues project to capture anecdotes of people who have contributed to the development of India's space program.

By recording personal anecdotes and experiences, S2 sought to capture the complex and irregular history of India's space odyssey and document the lesser-known non-Western narrative of the space ecosystem's evolution. Moreover, by sharing these stories of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) pioneers, the project aspires to inspire future generations and underscore the significance of audacity, innovation, and perseverance in advancing space exploration.

S2 leveraged its network of Indian founders, entrepreneurs, and legal experts in the space community to establish connections with retired ISRO personnel and arranged one-on-one meetings for interviews. To ensure authenticity, the approach eschewed detailed interview scripts, opting instead for a few guiding questions, allowing speakers to recount their experiences naturally. Notably, one speaker even referenced a diary from their tenure at ISRO, exemplifying the project's commitment to capturing genuine recollections.

Till date, S2 has recorded eleven Memory Monologues. Pioneers interviewed include Sudharshan P, Chairman of the Technology Transfer and Industry Cooperation Committee at ISRO and helped direct ISRO's budget economic analysis, Dr. V S Hedge, the Scientific Secretary of ISRO, and Nilamani Mohanty, the deputy Director of the Space Applications Center, to name a few. The Memory Monologues, especially that of Arup Dasgupta and Dr. V S Hedge, underscores how from its very inception, the Indian space program was focused on the 'user' — not just in cities, but in the remotest parts of the country. The anecdotes capture the influence of social development on India's space doctrine aside from hyper capitalistic or geo-political goals.

The Memory Monologues are an ongoing project and published videos can be viewed on YouTube by following this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciNkHC9rUT0list=PLe7sU8yiNcX8_rEMh6Mn4aKHMS6SzyQXdindex=