

TIFR Formation in 1961. 4 August 2016. T.K. Menon's message to W.M. Goss concerning the role of Vainu Bappu at the Berkeley IAU of 1961 with the interactions with Homi J. Bhabha of TIFR¹

Menon: I am giving below the sequence of events at Berkeley meeting where all of us met in my room in the dormitory. The first version of the proposal, which was my handwritten version, had no mention of TIFR or Bhabha. On the last day in Berkeley I was walking back to the dormitory rooms with M.K. Vainu Bappu (1927-1982, the co-discoverer of the Wilson-Bappu effect in stellar spectroscopy), an old friend who had been at Harvard and Cal Tech before my time at Harvard and who was at that time the Director of Kodaikanal Observatory (which later became the Indian Institute of Astrophysics in Bangalore). I mentioned to him our plans for the radio astronomy project in India and the names of the people we were sending the proposal. When he heard the names he was shocked that we had not included Bhabha's name in our list. He said that if you want to get anything done in science in India we should just send it to Bhabha. Next morning before we dispersed to our home institutions I mentioned to those members of the group I could see that I was planning to include Bhabha's name also. Nobody objected. My first version of our proposal which was hand written was typed by Beaty Sheets, Dave's [Heeschen] secretary at that time where there was no mention of TIFR or Bhabha's name. In the second version I had written in pencil some additions in Green Bank and it was the one which was sent to Bhabha, Thacker and Kothari. Only after the receipt of that letter TIFR and others became aware of our existence. Our letters were sent on Sept 23, 1961. It reached Bhabha on Oct 24th in Geneva and his reply to me was dated Oct 31. I met Bhabha in Washington on Nov 10th. His acceptance of our proposal was dated Jan 19, 1962. Really fast by any standards ...

My walking back to the dormitory in Berkeley that night with Vainu Bappu was by pure chance and since we were not planning to be in touch with anyone else [other than the CSIR, University Grants Commission and the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad] in India we would not have pursued the matter [with Bhabha].

¹ Email on 4 August 2016. Menon and Goss had just met at the end of July in Penticton, BC, close to Menon's home in Vancouver. The occasion had been **A Workshop on the History of Canadian Radio Astronomy** organised by Tim Robishaw (see NRAO ONLINE 26). Goss and Menon had discussed in detail the early days of TIFR radio astronomy, in particular the Berkeley IAU events of 1961. Menon had also been interviewed by Indira Chowdhury on 11 January 2005 with details of the role played by Bappu (see Chowdhury, Indira, *Growing the Tree of Science. Homi Bhabha and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research*. Oxford University Press India, 2016, pages 183-192.)