

Dr. M. R. Srinivasan

A visionary engineer who steadfastly honed home-grown capabilities in nuclear energy

By SIRD Newsletter Editorial Team



Dr. M.R. Srinivasan addressing at the India Power Awards 2011 ceremony, in New Delhi on November 24, 2011.

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Dr. Malur Ramasamy Srinivasan, one of the key architects of India's civil nuclear energy programme, passed away on May 20, 2025 in Udhagamandalam (Ooty), Tamil Nadu, at the age of 95. His passing away marks the end of a historic era spanning five decades of illustrious career in India's nuclear journey and leaves behind a towering legacy.

Born on January 5, 1930, in Bangalore, Dr. Srinivasan was educated at Intermediate College, Mysore (now Mysuru), and later at the College of Engineering, Bangalore (now University of Visvesvaraya College of Engineering), where he earned his B.Tech. in Mechanical Engineering. He pursued advanced education abroad, completed his Master's in 1952 and Ph.D. in 1954 in gas turbine technology at McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Life and Career

Dr. Srinivasan joined the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) in September 1955, at a time when India was taking its very first steps in nuclear research. He began his career under the mentorship of Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, where working alongside other prominent individuals helped build Apsara, India's first nuclear research reactor, which became operational in 1956. From the outset, he was entrusted with leadership in pivotal projects in DAE.

Under his leadership, 18 nuclear power reactors were developed (seven operational, seven under construction, and four at planning stage), laying the foundation of India's indigenous nuclear program.

Dr. Srinivasan's expertise in Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) made them the backbone of India's nuclear reactor fleet, and he spearheaded projects at Tarapur, Kalpakkam, Rawatbhata, Narora, Kakrapar, and Kaiga, making India self-reliant in nuclear power technology despite global headwinds.

Institution Builder

Beyond engineering marvels, Dr. Srinivasan was an extraordinary institution builder and policy advisor. His expertise and services were roped in by varied organizations both in India and abroad, including the IAEA and India's Planning Commission.

Personality and Legacy

Fondly remembered as a "walking encyclopedia" by colleagues, Dr. Srinivasan combined technical brilliance with humility, warmth, and a deep commitment to the nation. Whether addressing international conferences, mentoring young engineers, or defending the role of nuclear energy in public debates, he remained a steadfast advocate for science-driven development. As his contemporaries noted during a condolence gathering held in BARC Trombay soon after his passing, he was "firm but gentle", possessing an extraordinary ability to build consensus, "inspire confidence", and uphold scientific excellence. He played a constructive role during the period 2003-2008 when India and the US were engaged in serious negotiations for building a new nuclear energy partnership.

Awards and Honors

For his lifetime of contributions, Dr. Srinivasan was honored with India's highest civilian decorations. Padma Shri in 1984, Padma Bhushan in 1990 and Padma Vibhushan in 2015.

Family

Dr. Srinivasan is survived by his wife, Geetha Srinivasan, daughter Sharada Srinivasan, and son Raghuvir Srinivasan- along with a vast community of colleagues, students, and admirers who view him as one of the towering visionaries of India's nuclear energy programme.

An everlasting legacy

Dr. M.R. Srinivasan's contributions are etched into the very framework of India's nuclear energy programme. He not only helped shape the country's energy security but also ensured it was achieved with indigenous capability and global vision. His life serves as a testament to the power of determination, scientific curiosity, and service to the nation. As India continues its nuclear journey, his legacy will endure as both foundation and inspiration for generations to come.

Key positions held in DAE

1959: Principal Project Engineer of India's first atomic power station at Tarapur, Maharashtra.

1967: Chief Project Engineer of the Madras Atomic Power Station (MAPS), a landmark project in India's journey toward nuclear self-reliance.

1974: Director of Power Projects Engineering Division, responsible for planning and implementation of nuclear power stations.

1984: Chairman of the Nuclear Power Board (NPB).

1987: Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and Secretary, DAE, while also serving as the founding Chairman of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited.

Key positions held outside DAE

Senior Adviser, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Vienna (1990–1992).

Member, Planning Commission (1996–98), handling the Energy and Science & Technology portfolios.

Member, National Security Advisory Board (2002–04; 2006–08).

Chairman, Karnataka Task Force on Higher Education (2002–04).

Founder-member of the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO).

Fellow of the Indian National Academy of Engineering (INAE).