

Science had a globally chequered past: Roddam

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Bengaluru: Echoing the current discourse surrounding science in the country, the International Centre for Theoretical Science (ICTS) on Sunday hosted professor Roddam Narasimha, a Royal Society fellow and alumnus of IISc and Caltech University. He delivered a lecture on the histories of Indic and European sciences titled "Great Triumphs and False Stories".

This was part of the Kaapi with Kuriosity lecture series, jointly organized by ICTS and the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium. The Kaapi public lecture series aims to take science to the people and provide an alternative to other cultural activities like movies, concerts or sports matches.

He said while almost the entire world today studied the same science and worshipped the same heroes, there was a difference in Indian and European conceptions. "There are two camps when it comes to considering India's contribution to science - one that believes we are responsible for many scientific discoveries and the other which thinks we haven't contributed anything. However, it's important to

remember that even scientists credited with important achievements have often been falsely glorified," he said, adding that even the famous Pythagoras theorem was not truly attributed to the mathematician.

Narasimha noted how Europeans have been consistently identifying the lacuna in Indian scientific studies. "During the British Raj, foreigners working for the East India Company here would send their findings and observations of Indian science to the Royal Society in London. One such person noted that there was a lack of theoretical framework in Indian studies. Joseph Needham, a British scientist, questioned India's lack of contribution to modern science despite being ahead by several centuries," he said.

Concluding that the history of science had a globally chequered past, he described the Western and Oriental conceptions of popular scientific ideas. "Indians had no problem conceptualizing an infinite series of numbers. But the Greeks believed the universe was finite and thus, the conception of math and scientific ideas was the source of philosophical problems for them," he said.