

Ray Tomlinson's 'story' about inventing email is the biggest propaganda lie of modern tech history: Shiva Ayyadurai

By Rashmi Menon, ET Bureau | Mar 10, 2016, 08.35 AM IST



Shiva Ayyadurai (Left) and Ray Tomlinson (Right).

The death of Ray Tomlinson, credited as the inventor of email, has rekindled the controversy over VA Shiva Ayyadurai's place in history. Here, he gives his version of how he invented the email.

Ray Tomlinson is universally credited as the creator of email as part of a program for ARPANET in 1971. Meanwhile in 1978, a 14-year-old boy, Shiva Ayyadurai began his work on an email system for the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. His task was to emulate the paper-based interoffice mail system electronically and in 1982, he copyrighted his software, called "EMAIL".



Ayyadurai as a 14-year-old.

Ayyadurai's contention has been that while Tomlinson created a rudimentary system to send text messages, he is the one who built the email used in its present form today, and thus, should be credited as the inventor of email.

Here's the full text of his version of events as told in an email exchange:

'Propaganda lie promoted by defense contractor Raytheon'

My deepest condolences to the Tomlinson family for the loss of their loved one. But Ray Tomlinson did not invent email. His 'story' is the biggest propaganda lie of modern technology history, promoted deliberately by the PR machine of defense contractor Raytheon. Even minimal research makes this clear. His own contemporaries have made clear, citing his false claims, and others perpetuated by Raytheon. What's deplorable is how -when the facts of my inventing email in 1978 finally came out in February 16, 2012 -following acceptance of artefacts by the Smithsonian, Raytheon and industry insiders, unleashed racist vitriol to deny the black and white facts. Not ONE of them, however, exposed the lies of Tomlinson. They strong-armed and pressured any journalist at organisations such as Washington Post, Huffington Post, and others, to issue retractions and corrections, with the aim of confusing the public by equating electronic text messaging with email.

For example, in their 'correction', Washington Post, in 2012, shortly after the Smithsonian honouring, stated that I was not the creator of 'electronic messaging' -but I never claimed that I was. This was best analysed recently by a reporter at YourStory, who exposed how Washington Post's 'correction' played into this confusion, allowing Raytheon and Tomlinson to get credit for inventing email.

'Part of well-orchestrated multi-million dollar brand building effort'

What we are witnessing now, in real time, is the continuation of this deliberate campaign on the occasion of Tomlinson's death. Raytheon's lies are part of a well-orchestrated multi-million dollar brand-building effort to fossilise a false narrative that Raytheon staff were the 'inventors of email', which is far from the truth.

What Tomlinson and the ARPANET (a predecessor of the Internet designed for the military) folks invented was a rudimentary form of text messaging at best. But I created EMAIL, the entire system replicating all the functions of the interoffice mail system (Inbox, Outbox, Folders, Attachments, Memo, etc.) -the email, we all know and experience today. Never did I use any component of the ARPANET to create this system.

'Intend to co-opt true origin of email'

The campaign of Raytheon and the ARPANET industry insiders to claim they are the 'inventors of email' is a relatively recent effort, but intended to co-opt the true origin of email. One simply needs to find a copy of the ARPANET brochure, dated as late as 1986, and one will see NO reference to the word 'EMAIL' or 'email', or 'electronic mail' in the index of their or 'electronic mail' in the index of their brochure. However, I had received the official copyright recognising me as the official inventor of email on August 30, 1982 for my 1978 invention. 'Silence of Indian tech leaders demonstrates slavery'

Sundar Pichai's Google -which claims to 'do no evil' -simply tweeted out the same racist history. Pichai, himself an Indian, lacks the courage to share the facts, as his masters in Silicon Valley would not take kindly to it. I know it sounds harsh, but it is what it is. In fact, the silence of Indian 'tech leaders' demonstrates their own slavery to the White elites in the military-industrial-academic complex, part of a long historical lineage of Indian indentured servitude.

Shortly after my documents were accepted by the Smithsonian, I was maligned in major media and blogs. This was perpetrated and facilitated by Tomlinson's employer and sponsor, Raytheon, through their cabal of industry insiders.

'Perpetuates the notion that all great innovations must come from war'

Now, with Tomlinson's death, Raytheon disgustingly continues to exploit the demise of their front man to perpetuate their lie so as to solidify their false brand as a warmongering bastion of innovation. This serves Raytheon's war machine in the lucrative cyber-security market and perpetuates a colonialist, racist, imperialist narrative that only Whites can innovate great things, and a deeper lie that all great innovations must come from war. After all, war protects us, weapons keep us powerful, and the holy triangle of military-industrial-academic complex, makes our lives modern. Who would ever question such a force of positivity?

A force, by the way, which keeps us funding wars to dominate, maim, and kill 'our enemies', mainly the poor, people of colour, and the disenfranchised -the same people, by the way, who are my people, and whom I represent. It's time the world knows that it was a darkskinned, low-caste Indian immigrant who invented email. It's time we end, once and for all, the whitewashing of great innovations by people of colour, to serve the machine of war and profit.

But regardless of the multiple aspects of Raytheon's behaviour, an elementary and simple truth remains: email was invented in Newark, New Jersey, in UMDNJ, in 1978



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