

How a Kanpur-born Indian-origin CEO is a chip off the old block

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In the technology (tech) world, especially storage, Sanjay Mehrotra is a well-known name. Co-founder of SanDisk, a flash memory storage company in 1988, it was eventually acquired by Western Digital in 2016 for a whopping \$19 billion.

For a boy from Kanpur, who went on to pursue higher studies in the US, becoming the chief executive officer of Micron Technology, Inc — one of America's largest memory chip makers — and now setting up the company's first plant in

India, it has been quite a ride.

Micron, the world's fifth-largest semiconductor firm, could soon set up its first assembly, testing, marking, and packaging facility in the country, involving an investment of about \$1 billion.

Mehrotra studied in BITS Pilani until the age of 18 and then attended the University of California, Berkeley, and completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering and computer science. He is also a graduate of the Stanford Graduate School of Business Executive Programme.

He is among the early Indians to have made a mark in the US tech industry. He holds over 70 patents and published several papers in the area of non-volatile memory design and flash memory systems. Before co-founding SanDisk, Mehrotra worked with Integrated Device Technology, SEEQ Technology, and Intel

as design engineer.

In an interview with the Computer History Museum in 2019, Mehrotra shared that it was his father's dream to send him to the US for his undergraduate studies. He shares that despite getting admission to IIT Kharagpur, his father decided to send him to BITS Pilani since the institute had a tie-up with Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ford Foundation. Mehrotra also shared how he was influenced by Greek-American computer scientist George Perlegos, who he met at Intel and his concepts on designing a chip.

"...that you don't just design the chip, you focus on the product and product engineering tests. So these are the things I focused on from Day One: design, product, test engineering, and over time, I

got increasing responsibility in terms of device design, as well as process tech and all system engineering," he said.

"I thought starting a company from scratch and taking it to a \$6 billion company and then having an exit with a sale at the time of the announcement of the deal at \$19 billion is a hugely rewarding journey, a very fulfilling one. But I said, how many have done that after such a journey, such as SanDisk's journey, go to another large company, take on the challenge of taking that company three times bigger than SanDisk and not only having

flash but having great Dynamic Random Access Memory tech and being a powerhouse to take that company to the next level."

Micron, which has 11 manufacturing sites spread across the US, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and China, has been scouting the globe for

more than a year for a place to set up a semiconductor packaging facility.

Getting a global major to start operating in India will raise the country's standing in the global semiconductor sweepstakes. The space has already attracted large business groups, such as the Tatas.

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