

## Ramanujan and National Mathematics Day

By [Editor English](#) | Dec 21, 2015

India celebrates Srinivasa Ramanujan's birthday (22 December) as National Mathematics Day. Teachers of India salutes the genius and shares the following tributes. A magic square for your math activity, a book review to add more depth in knowing more about his genius & a documentary that captures the tragic tale of losing such a giant talent at an unforgivable age of just 32.

### A MAGIC SQUARE

The November issue of *At Right Angles* spoke about a magic square in Ramanujan's honour. The square uses Ramanujan's birthday (December 22, 1887) to fill the cells in the top row. This fourth order square is magical indeed.

Revisit the magic [here!](#)

### A BOOK REVIEW

Most of us know the legendary tale: of how, in 1913, a 25-year-old Indian with no formal qualifications wrote a letter filled with startlingly original theorems to the Cambridge don, G H Hardy. Dimly, we are aware of how Ramanujan turned Mathematics upside down in the next five years.

But we (at least most of us) know little else.



The Man Who Knew Infinity,  
Little, Brown Book Group

Here is a book about an uncommon and individual mind: whose tragic tale still haunts his countrymen, in more ways than one. While

Hardy was avuncular, he was still aloof – the British stiff upper lip - and this young man, who “grew up praying to stone deities; who for most of his life took counsel from a family goddess, declaring it was she to whom his Mathematical insights were owed” returned to India in 1919, depressed, sullen and quarrelsome. He died a year later.

If ever there was an unsung hero, this was one!

In a short life span of 33 years, he accomplished so much that Mathematicians the world over are still trying to fathom some of it. And yet, his twenty year old widow eked out a humble and anonymous existence for most of the next half century, probably not the only one to be unaware of her husband's intellectual prowess.

This is a biography with a difference, for as the author says: “Biographies as do exist either ignore the Mathematics, or banish it to the back of the book. Similarly, scholarly papers devoted to Ramanujan's Mathematics normally limit to a few paragraphs their attention to his life. And yet, can we understand Ramanujan's life without some appreciation for the Mathematics that he lived for and loved? Which is to say, can we understand an artist without gaining a feel for his art? A philosopher without some glimpse into what he believed?”

The book is true to the above intent, in that it takes the reader into some of the problems that he applied number theory to, without dwelling too much on the subtle and powerful Mathematical tools that he used. For, as the writer confesses, Ramanujan's Mathematics is more accessible than some other fields; much of it comes under the heading of number theory, which seeks out properties of, and patterns among, the ordinary numbers with which we deal every day.

Interesting tidbits like the following whet the appetite of a reader (especially if the reader is a teacher) to know more about the curious child Ramanujan: “Quiet and contemplative, Ramanujan was fond of asking questions like, Who was the first man in the world? Or, How far is it between clouds?”

The book reports ironic tidbits like the following: At the time of Ramanujan's death in April 1920, the editor of the Journal of the Indian Mathematical Society had fallen so far behind their publication schedule that the issue bearing the news was dated December 1919. Into copies of that issue, small olive green slips of paper, bordered in black, were inserted:

#### THE LATE MR. S. RAMANUJAN

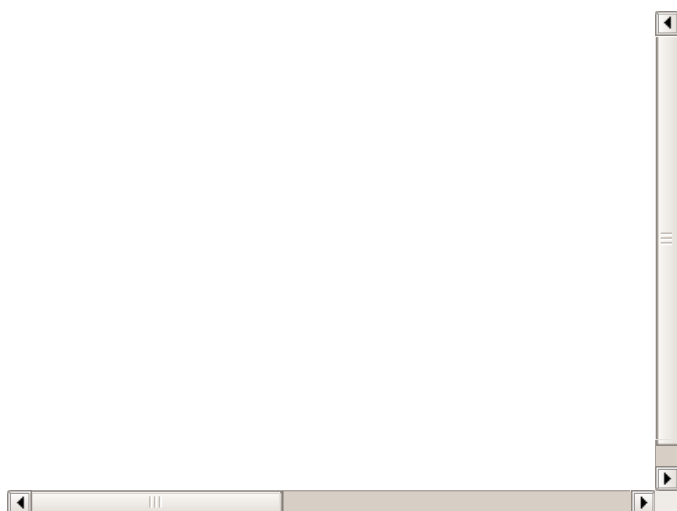
*We deeply regret to announce the untimely death of Mr. S. th Ramanujan, B.A., F.R. S., on Monday, the 26 of April 1920, at his residence in Chetpet, Madras. An account of his life and works will appear in a subsequent issue of this journal. Seven months later, the journal carried two obituary notices.*

The book brings out many (Mathematical as well as real life) paradoxes, not the least of which is the strange alliance between a confirmed atheist (Hardy) and a staunch devotee of the goddess Namagiri of Namakkal. “An equation for me has no meaning,” Ramanujan once said, “unless it expresses a thought of God.” While working on this book, Robert Kanigel spent five weeks in the South, traveling to places that had figured in Ramanujan's life. “I rode trains and buses, toured temples, ate with my hands off banana leaves. I was butted in the behind by a cow on the streets of Kumbakonam, shared a room with a lizard in Kodumudi.” Not surprisingly, therefore, this book is conspicuous also in the lack of condescension - which often (maybe even unwittingly?) creeps into the writings of many a Westerner about India/Indians.

(Neeraja Raghavan did this review in the special issue on school mathematics in the [Learning Curve](#))

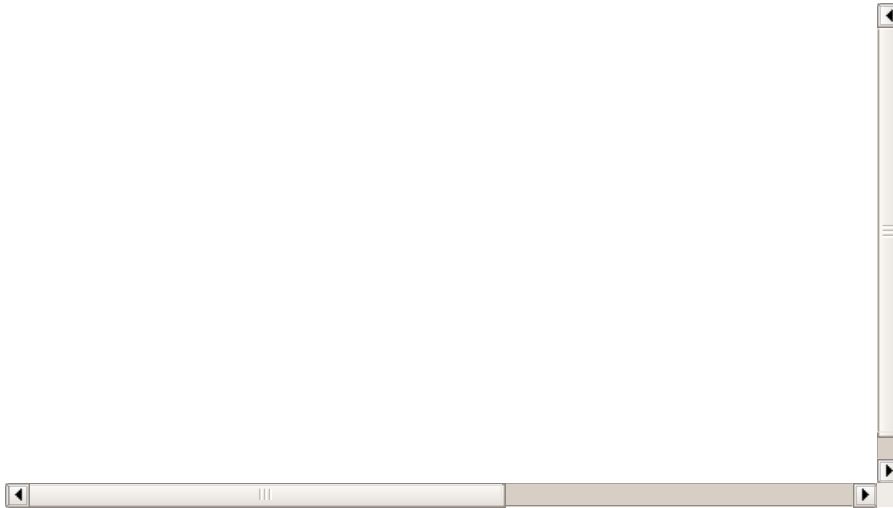
## A DOCUMENTARY

The extraordinary story of how in 1914 the self-taught maths genius SRINIVASA RAMANUJAN was brought from Madras to Trinity College, Cambridge, by the great English pure mathematician GH Hardy, who called their relationship 'the one truly romantic episode of my life'. A 1987 documentary for the Channel 4 'Equinox' science series. Watch this brilliant documentary by Christopher Sykes.

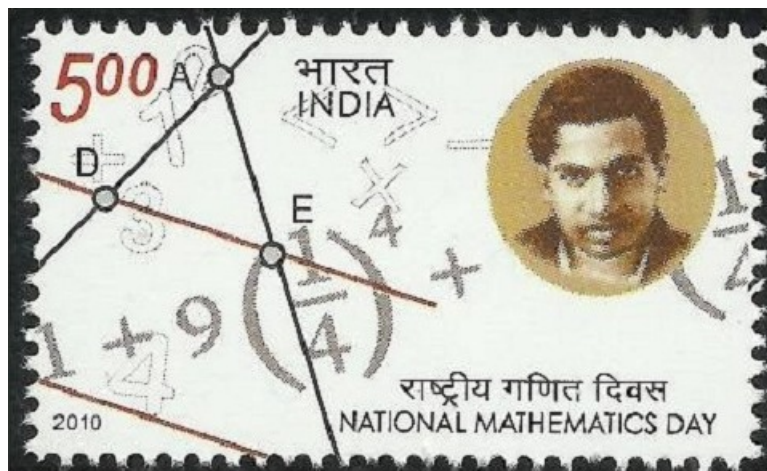
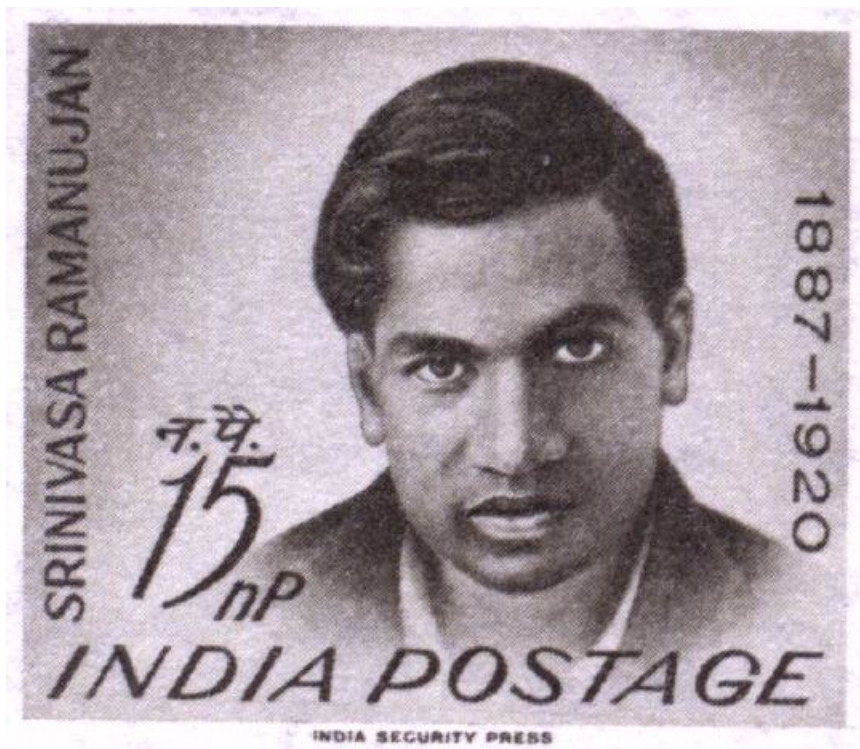


And some more

Ramanujan & the story of 1729 is worth resharing again. Here is a Numberphile's video on it.



and 3 commemorative stamps by India Post.





Happy National Mathematics Day!

**Category:** Teacher Development

**Subject:** Mathematics  
Views and Reflections

**Board:** All boards

**Grade/Standard:** Class 6-8  
Class 9-10  
Class 11-12

**License:** CC BY-NC-SA

---

**Source URL:** <http://teachersofindia.org/en/article/ramanujan-and-national-mathematics-day>