

**Srinivasa Ramanujan: A Mathematical Genius.** K. Srinivasa Rao. Eastwest Books, 62A, Ormes Road, Kilpauk, Chennai 600 010. 1998. pp. 231. Price: Rs 175.

Quite a number of authors have attempted to write a complete biography of Ramanujan. However, almost all these efforts suffer from a major deficiency, viz. they all seem to be derivatives of statements expressed by G. H. Hardy, R. Ramachandra Rao, and P. V. Seshu Iyer. Naturally, one as a British subject and the others as loyal servants of the occupation government, had an interest in suppressing information detrimental to British interests and enhancing those, which had the opposite effect. Consequently what is presented as life history of Ramanujan in these works is a distorted one.

These biographical works fail to regard Ramanujan as a mathematical genius in his own right on the basis of his work alone. They convey the impression expressed through extensive, repeated quoting from Hardy's statements, that Ramanujan is a genius because Hardy said so. This is a great disservice to Ramanujan, because he was a far greater mathematician than Hardy, as his work amply demonstrates. Hardy, or for that matter, some obscure Carr, had little impact on the work of Ramanujan. It is absurd to believe that Carr's Synopsis is responsible for Ramanujan's style of doing mathematics. Ramanujan possessed sufficient intellectual power to invent his own style. There is also no need to give undue credit to Hardy and other British citizens and servants of British occupation government for the apparently selfless act of securing some financial support for Ramanujan after the latter's repeated requests, and getting him to Cambridge, because at that time England stood to gain more from the advances in mathematics than India. Precisely these apparent benefactors, such as the collector Ramachandra Rao, were responsible for the creation of conditions, under which they themselves could thrive and people like Ramanujan would go half-hungry. Certainly one need not give them credit for removing the obstacles they themselves have placed in the first place. Furthermore, they removed them because it was in their interest to do so. By inviting Ramanujan, Hardy and his

colleagues gained the opportunity to collaborate with him. Thus Hardy acted in the best of his national and personal interest. Besides, Ramanujan was not exactly yearning to visit Cambridge anyway. Had he stayed in India, he would have produced more notebooks.

All these works also do not answer the question why the notebooks were sent to Hardy in the first place after Ramanujan's death. Ramanujan left only his first notebook with Hardy. Obviously he did not want to give him the other books. According to Ramanujan's wife, he always feared that the English mathematicians would steal his results. Consequently in the last days of his life he must have left some instructions with his wife regarding the notebooks. It is also conceivable that there were other notebooks besides those now available to the public. The removal of Ramanujan's notebooks on the day of his death by Ramachandra Rao's son-in-law, with no respect to the deceased, and the subsequent locking up of the so-called lost notebook from the public until 1965, cast serious doubts on the much praised fair-play and intellectual honesty of the British. Why had the lost notebook become a private property of G. N. Watson? In the light of these facts one could conclude that at least some of the results belonging to Ramanujan had been stolen by those, who got hold of the notebooks first, just as Ramanujan had feared. An impartial biography of Ramanujan probing these issues in detail is yet to be written.

The book under review is not an exception to this general trend. According to the author, this is a book on Ramanujan written with the purpose of arousing 'the interest of teachers and students of mathematics in schools and colleges and to point to the original sources of study'. Actually this book is a poorly edited collation of different essays, book reviews, quotations, etc., some of them very remotely associated with Ramanujan. As such the book contains extensive repetitions, often verbatim, of passages, which do not serve the declared purpose, and tax the patience of the reader. Thematically the book consists of two parts. The first five chapters form the first part, in which the author attempts to establish Ramanujan as a mathematical genius by quoting various individuals including Hardy. These individuals seem to have

been chosen by the author according to the degree of admiration he has for them. Even in the second chapter on Ramanujan's mathematics, Hardy speaks more often than the author. Consequently the book contains very little which is new. The second part of the book consisting of the rest of the chapters, is more tiresome than the first part because it contains much more irrelevant information. For example, John F. Kennedy, V. I. Lenin, Morarji Desai (p. 155), an appraisal of the cricket player Donald Bradman by Hardy (p. 98) and even Winnie the Pooh (p. 167) find their place in the book. Although the author claims that the book could serve as a reference, it has no index section.

This book would have served the declared purpose and been more interesting, if the author had addressed issues that have not been addressed earlier.

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**Biodiversity of Jammu and Kashmir: A Profile.** M. Ahmedullah (ed.). World Wide Fund for Nature – India, 172-3, Lodi Estate, Max Muller Marg, New Delhi 110 003. 1997. 195 pp. Price not stated.

One hundred and seventy four nations are signatories of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As stated in Articles 6 and 7 of CBD, it is mandatory that each member country (Contracting Party) 'develop national strategies, plans or programmes for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity (biodiversity) and as far as possible and appropriate identify components of biodiversity important for conservation and sustainable use and monitor through sampling and other techniques, such components of biodiversity'.

India is a signatory of CBD and the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, is the nodal agency that implements CBD in the country. On