



P K SRINIVASAN

THE LEGENDARY MATHEMATICS TEACHER

HIS LIFE IN A NUTSHELL

1924 - 2005

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PERSONAL TRAITS & ATTRIBUTES

- ❖ Had a liking for traditional south Indian food.
- ❖ Did not have a sharp ear for music, but saw to it that he brought 2 women Nadaswara players to play the traditional music for the marriage of one of his daughters.
- ❖ Was an early riser and late to bed.
- ❖ Didn't have a taste for Cinema or TV Entertainment.
- ❖ His eyes were never away from reading or writing even for 1 full hour when he was awake.
- ❖ Was a keen observer of local national and global politics, but never had any political affiliation. Nevertheless, he admired the political leadership of many.
- ❖ His usual dress consisted of White dhoti, White jubba and a White cap. He seldom discussed about his dress preferences to anybody.
- ❖ For a long time, when he was a school teacher in Muthialpet High School, (Located in the harbour area) he was not wearing even any footwear and felt ashamed to buy a pair, as he felt anguished by the sight of hundreds of cart – pullers on the roads, around the harbour area, doing their work without wearing any footwear.

MONEY AND ATTITUDE ON MATERIALS

- ❖ He never equated earning money and acquiring material possessions with achieving success. Money and materials were a few things for which he never planned his life.
- ❖ He never struggled for earning money and never worked, keeping money earning prospects in mind.
- ❖ Constructed his house at Nanganallur, which happened to be the only immovable property he acquired in his lifetime.
- ❖ Never got even a phone in his name.
- ❖ Never learnt driving a car, and didn't even practice cycling.
- ❖ Never depended on his children for any material needs and never encouraged them to depend on him for getting any material help, when they became adults.
- ❖ Most of his home economics were juggled by his wife, Alamelu Srinivasan.

AS A TEACHER

- ❖ Was a non-conventional Teacher throughout. Encouraged questioning in the class and pushed the students to challenge themselves in problem solving, mostly in non-curriculum and non-routine areas.
- ❖ Nurtured creativity in students.
- ❖ Didn't practice giving notes in the class and discouraged the students buy Bazaar notes.
- ❖ Conducting Maths Expos and Maths clubs were the ways how he tapped the hidden talent of his students.
- ❖ Never believed in silent classroom and he never equated class discipline with silence.
- ❖ His unconventional teaching methods didn't make him a good companion to may fellow-teachers. Many a time, he had to brush aside the carping criticism of his teacher colleagues and continue his mission of bringing out the hidden creativity in his students.
- ❖ Organized out-of schedule classes for weak students and found exemplary success in making them get good marks in academic examinations.
- ❖ Never conducted out-of-school fee-based tuitions for his students.

READING HABITS

- ❖ Voracious reader.
- ❖ Not limited himself to reading books on Maths or Maths Education alone, but developed incredible habits covering a wide range of subjects.
- ❖ Every flavour of Psychology was a never-ending subject of fascination for him.
- ❖ He read almost 2 – 3 dailies and many periodicals everyday, published in Tamil and English Languages.
- ❖ His life-time personal collection of books, mostly on history and literature of Maths, traditional and contemporary techniques in teaching of Mathematics was unique and unparalleled.

SENSE OF NATIONALISM

- ❖ Was a nationalist to the letter and the spirit.
- ❖ Was a critic, taking a stand that Indian Nationalism was not able to instill a sense of pride in the people on India's contribution to Mathematics, Science and Engineering.
- ❖ Truly believed that identifying and nurturing math creativity was a national mission and did his best to make things happen.
- ❖ His Gandhi cap and his traditional dress remained with him almost throughout his life. He wore his Gandhi cap, wherever he went.
- ❖ The pursuit of his profession – Mathematics Education – hardly gave him anytime to take part in nationalist movements. Had his professional interest not occupied his full mind, the nationalist in him would have fully surfaced.

SANSKRIT

- ❖ Love of Sanskrit language equaled his love of Mathematics.
- ❖ Played a lead role, in a drama, when he was in school, based on Kalidasa's works in Sanskrit language.
- ❖ Quiet a few of his school friends used to ask him, much later if he became a Sanskrit teacher, when they lost touch with him long after, remembering his affinity towards the language.
- ❖ His love of Sanskrit made him appreciate the sweep and depth of Vedic Mathematics.

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ANTHROPOLOGY

- ❖ His multi-faceted interests made him go to different places and quench his thirst for knowledge on human civilization and its progress.
- ❖ When he worked in the USA between 1965 – 66, he undertook a journey to visit the Dutch Amish people and got a first hand idea about their habits, culture, way of life, etc.
- ❖ He was an admirer of Philo Iruthayanath, the Anthropologist. Philo Iruthayanath visited Muthialpet High School, where PKS worked as a Mathematics teacher and delivered a lecture demo, on invitation by PKS.
- ❖ Anthropology was yet another subject of fascination for PKS.

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LOVE OF NATURE

- ❖ Love of nature was part of his life. From childhood till his end, he continued to nurture his interest in planting trees, garden-plant and creeper saplings and tended them carefully.
- ❖ He didn't care much for most of the modern comforts of life. But he was stoic about living with nature.
- ❖ Fauna & Flora fascinated him a lot, even though he spent most of his time only in Chennai city
- ❖ Early mornings used to be very pleasant and satisfying for him, in the company of sounds of nature.

EXPERIMENTATION NATURE

- ❖ Had a spirit of scientific temper throughout his life that made him experiment whatever he thought he should do.
- ❖ Believed in alternate systems of medicine and developed a great respect for them
- ❖ His experimentation bent of mind made him spend a lot of time and even money, regardless of what was the outcome. The elaborate Rain Water Harvesting pipeline that he got installed in his house is a testimony to his experimentation nature.
- ❖ He trained his eyes to see geometrical shapes in objects around him, wherever he went.
- ❖ Believed that nature was filled with Mathematics

UNREALIZED DREAMS

- ❖ Single most unrealized dream was creating a Ramanujan Museum in Chennai with state-of-art facilities that could help identify and nurture creativity in children and adults alike.
- ❖ Publishing his last book on Recreation Matheatics meant for senior citizens
- ❖ That he would get discharged from the hospital and would get back to his usual routine surrounded by books.

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VISION & MISSION

- ❖ Grand vision was creating a “Ramanujan Museum” in Chennai at the cost of Rs.10 crores in 10 acres of land in 10 years time. he developed this vision around 1968-69, when he released his grand contributions – the 2 volume Editions, Viz., 1) Ramanujan – Letters and Reminiscences 2) Ramanujan – An Inspiration.
- ❖ Founded Ramanujan Memorial Foundation in the year 1968, but couldn't succeed in giving a shape to his plans through this Foundation.
- ❖ The missionary zeal with which he ran the club – “Muthialpet High School Number Friends Society Old Boys Committee” (MHSNFSOBC) – was instrumental in bringing out 2 volume editions on Ramanujan.
- ❖ Accomplished establishing a “Ramanujan Museum” in Avvai Kalai Kazhagam, the first of its kind in India, which he thought would propagate the need for a larger Museum set-up

LAST DAYS

- ❖ Was ailing due to acute gastric disorders for more than a year before his death.
- ❖ Never allowed his ailments to keep his attention away from his writing assignments reading exercises.
- ❖ Stopped going to Ramunujan Museum during his last more than 2 years, as he could not muster physical strength to go over there, a distance of more than 25 kilometers. But he took meticulous care in planning Ramanujan's Birthday and Remembrance Day events (December 22nd & April 26th) held in the Museum during the last few years of his life.

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