Srinivasa Ramanujan

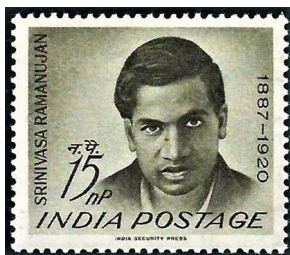*Firdous Ahmad Mala and Robin Wilson*

Srinivasa Ramanujan (December 22, 1887–April 26, 1920) was one of the most intuitive mathematicians who ever lived. With little formal training in the subject, he learned mathematics from books while working in a clerk's office in Madras (now Chennai). In 1913, he sent many of his groundbreaking results in number theory and infinite series to G. H. Hardy, in England, who was dumbfounded, saying that they must be true because no one would have had the imagination to make them up. As a result, Ramanujan spent five years in Cambridge working with Hardy and producing a number of spectacular papers that earned him a Fellowship of the Royal Society. Sadly, he fell ill and returned to India, dying at the early age of 32.
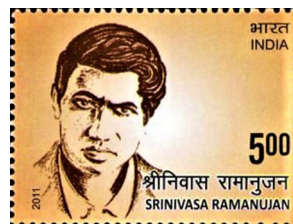
Ramanujan's results still create excitement among mathematicians, and Hardy proposed an informal scale of natural mathematical ability. To himself he assigned the value 25, to his long-term collaborator J. E. Littlewood he gave 30, for David Hilbert, the most eminent mathematician of the day, he suggested 80, and to Ramanujan he awarded 100.
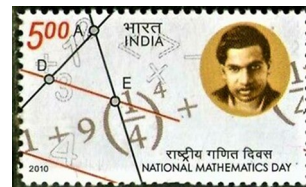
There are four stamps, all from India, that feature Ramanujan. The first of these was issued in 1962 to commemorate his 75th birthday on December 22. A second stamp was issued in December 2011. In 2010, Dr. Manmohan Singh, at that time the prime minister of India, declared that 2012 (the year of Ramanujan's 125th anniversary) should become India's National Year of Mathematics, and that from that year Ramanujan's birthday should be National Mathematics Day. A third Ramanujan stamp (actually dated 2010) was issued for that anniversary, and a fourth was issued four years later in a series entitled "Creators of India."

Ramanujan 1962

Ramanujan 2011

National Mathematics Day 2012

Ramanujan 2016

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