

## A maths prodigy in the making

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PATNA, October 21 : HE has uncanny resemblance to that other mathematical wizard from the state, Vashisht Narayan Singh. Bearded and with deep-set eyes, Anand Kumar has also shown an early promise of turning into a prodigy. Even as an undergraduate student at the B.N. College here, he got his articles published in international journals on mathematics and has been virtually flooded with offers of admission into various courses run by colleges in the United Kingdom.

He has just graduated with honours in mathematics from Patna University but cannot afford to spend six lakh rupees which will be necessary for him to complete a one-year course abroad.

A few weeks ago he was taken to the state's education minister who promised him help. But given the state of finances of the state government, Anand is clearly not very hopeful. Can others sponsor him?

Mathematics has been the boy's passion since he was in class ten in a city school. What fascinates him is the theory of numbers, a field which obsessed Ramanujan as well. "Every natural number", he says earnestly, "has certain properties" and he goes on to elaborate on them. While much of it sounds like Greek to us, the photo copies, the testimonials and the letters from abroad that he clutches are fairly impressive.

Patna University library does not have a single journal on mathematics, he informs. "The library has not even bought a single book for the last ten years", he quips. Where then did he brush up his theories on Pure Mathematics, we asked him. The son of an accounts officer in postal audit, Anand has been fortunate in having his younger brother study at the Benares Hindu University.

"It is at the BHU that I go for three or four times every year and study there." In fact, he says, "nobody there has ever questioned me about my identity. I just go to the library

there, study and come back".

Individuals have been helpful though. And Anand reverentially takes the names of Professor Devi



Anand Kumar

Prasad Verma, head of the department of mathematics at Science College and Professor Bal Gangadhar Prasad of B.N. College, who have encouraged him.

Teaching of mathematics, he feels, leaves much to be desired. The syllabi and teaching both are geared to clear the examinations, he finds. Unless the text books explain the 'why' of mathematics, he feels, learning remains incomplete. Moreover mathematics should be realistic and relate to things students are familiar with. "The standard of mathematics is going down", he says firmly. And he should know because even at this tender age he not only tutors students who prepare for combined entrance tests for IITs, but he has also launched a mathematical centre named 'Ramanujan School of Mathematics' for free education in higher mathematics for poor students.

Would it not be better for him to have his post-graduation here first before he ventures for higher studies abroad? He demurs and says that ideally he would like to concentrate on pure maths right from now because other subjects do not interest him much.

This is perhaps one reason why Anand has not fared as well in the

examination as one would have expected. He has got a first class degree under his belt but in subjects other than mathematics he has not fared all that well.

Another person who has helped him out is Kaushal Ajitabh, also from Patna, who is now a research scholar at the famed Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. Kaushal, a senior student also from the B.N. College, was waiting for finance and clearance which eventually took him to the USA, when Anand approached him with certain mathematical problems in 1989. The association has lasted and Kaushal continues to send back copies of important articles which are of interest to Anand in his chosen field.

The heart-warming story of Anand Kumar will have a happy ending if the state helps him to continue higher studies abroad. Whatever happens, the story does indicate that all is not lost in academics. Not yet, at least, in the state.