

Full marks for Maths contest!



Essay competition to mark Ramanujan's birthday.

A significant event in the city that slipped by almost unnoticed was an essay contest organised by the Ramanujan School of Mathematics last Sunday. Maths enthusiasts from a number of schools and colleges set aside an hour to write an essay on Maths syllabi in schools and universities.

The Mathematics Monster has long haunted many a terrified and sweaty examinee, but here, at Anand Kumar's institution, everyone is encouraged to discover the wonder of the subject.

In his Hindi essay, Kumar Saurabh of St Michael's School writes that students are force fed mathematical formulae. They are told to memorize them and solve their maths problems on their basis. Nobody cares to tell kids where the formulae came from. The story behind the formula is told to senior students, but the student is already put off Maths in the lower class itself!

Pramod Kumar of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya writes that the syllabus till class ten seems to be made to turn kids into clerks. There should be a greater emphasis on practical mathematics so that high school kids can be able to tackle trade and business opportunities as well.

"Unfortunately, our school syllabus has no reference to the glorious history of mathematics. The students of mathematics are not informed about the various uses it can be put to. I wonder how many students know that mathematics can be used to guess crowd movements and to explain why weather cannot be predicted over long periods of time," says Abhinay Vikram, a Standard nine student of Don Bosco Academy, Digha.

"Is there anything wrong with this subject or is there something wrong in the way it is taught to us?" asks Amitabh Mishra, who recently passed from Std 12, Kendriya Vidyalaya. He writes, "Certainly the main cause of difference lies in the interest of the students. The syllabus has almost nothing to do with it." He contends that a lot depends upon the way a teacher presents the subject to the student. One doesn't like a subject because one is not given the proper guidance.

Ritesh Prasad of St Karen's commented that one of the reasons for the Indian's poor show in mathematics is the non-availability of cheap books on the subject.

These views are refreshing and there may be many people out there who sympathise with them. Mr Anand Kumar, once hailed by his *guru* the renowned Dr D P Verma, [former Head of the Department of Mathematics, Science College] as a mathematical genius, compelled young people to sit down and put their minds to an important issue. To fully understand how a syllabus works, or what in it doesn't work at all, feedback is necessary. What better feedback could the teaching community get than from those who use the system? Ergo, what better way to commemorate one of India's Great Mathematical minds?

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