



The Man Who Knew Infinity: A Life of the Genius Ramanujan

By Robert Kanigel

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In 1913, a young unschooled Indian clerk wrote a letter to G H Hardy, begging the preeminent English mathematician's opinion on several ideas he had about numbers. Realizing the letter was the work of a genius, Hardy arranged for Srinivasa Ramanujan to come to England. Thus began one of the most improbable and productive collaborations ever chronicled. With a passion for rich and evocative detail, Robert Kanigel takes us from the temples and slums of Madras to the courts and chapels of Cambridge University, where the devout Hindu Ramanujan, 'the Prince of Intuition,' tested his brilliant theories alongside the sophisticated and eccentric Hardy, 'the Apostle of Proof.' In time, Ramanujan's creative intensity took its toll: he died at the age of thirty-two and left behind a magical and inspired legacy that is still being plumbed for its secrets today.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This moving and astonishing biography tells the improbable story of India-born Srinavasa Ramanujan Iyengar, self-taught mathematical prodigy. In 1913 Ramanujan, a 25-year-old clerk who had flunked out of two colleges, wrote a letter filled with startlingly original theorems to eminent English mathematician G. H. Hardy. Struck by the Indian's genius, Hardy, member of the Cambridge Apostles and an obsessive cricket aficionado, brought Ramanujan to England. Over the next five years, the vegetarian Brahmin who claimed his discoveries were revealed to him by a Hindu goddess turned out influential mathematical propositions. Cut off from his young Indian wife left at home and emotionally neglected by fatherly yet aloof Hardy, Ramanujan returned to India in 1919, depressed, sullen and quarrelsome; he died one year later of tuberculosis. Kanigel (*Apprentice to Genius*) gives nontechnical readers the flavor of how Ramanujan arrived at his mathematical ideas, which are used today in cosmology and computer science. BOMC featured alternate; QPB alternate.

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From Library Journal

This biography traces the life of one of the greatest geniuses of the 20th century, Ramanujan. This incredibly brilliant Indian mathematician, working alone in relative obscurity and lacking the usual academic credentials, could easily have passed unnoticed. However, with the help of a handful of friends and the ultimate support of renowned English mathematician G.H. Hardy, his work was brought to the attention of the world. When he died in 1920 at 32 he had become a folk-hero in his own country. He left a rich lode of original mathematics, which is still being mined today. This extremely well-researched and well-written biography is a "must" addition to any library collection.

- *Harold D. Shane, Baruch Coll., CUNY*

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Review

An exquisite portrait...the rarest of literary achievements...Ramanujan's tale is the stuff of fable LOS ANGELES TIMES an exciting and thoughtful book... should catch the imagination of any reader- even the reader with little mathematical background. INDEPENDENT This is a fine example of a work of popularising mathematics, and deserves a wide readership. NEW SCIENTIST Enthralling... one of the best scientific biographies I've ever seen. John Gribbin

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