

OBITUARY NOTES ON PROF. K.R. GUNJIKAR  
AND PROF. N.R. TRIVEDI

By  
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Here I sit to write obituary notes on two of my teachers. Professors Gunjekar and Trivedi were my teachers in the B.Sc. final year class in 1937-38 at what is now called the Institute of Science, but what was then, the Royal Institute of Science, Bombay. Professor Kashinath Ramachandra Gunjekar died on Feb, 11, 1990 at Bombay. He was 96 at the time of his death. Professor Nandshanker Ramshanker Trivedi died on March 4, 1990 at Ahmedabad at the age of 84. Both were very distinguished teachers of mathematics.

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After a brilliant academic career in India Gunjekar proceeded to Cambridge where he secured a double first in Mathematics and Physics in the tripos examination. After spending three more years at the Cavandish Laboratory under Lord Rutherford, he returned to India.

On return he taught at the Banaras Hindu University for a short period. Like the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) the Foreign Service (IFS), the Police Service (IPS) of to-day there was an Indian Educational Service (IES) in those days. Prof. Gunjekar was inducted into the IES and was posted as the Professor of Mathematics at the Royal Institute of Science, Bombay. He taught there for twenty years.

I was a student at the institute from 1936 to 1940., and attended his classes all these four years. He was not a popular teacher in the usual sense. He never gave notes. As a matter of fact he used the black board rather sparingly. But he taught us how to read Mathematics books. Even in those days we had a paper on Real Analysis at the B.Sc. final year, and Prof. Gunjekar taught that paper. He would bring Hardy's 'Pure Mathematics' in the class and read it before the class. During the year, at the rate of 3 periods a week, he completed the reading of almost the whole book in the class. Many students could not appreciate this method of teaching, but a few discerning students brought their own copy of the book to follow his reading. I, for one, have benefitted a great deal, because a very good habit of reading masterly treatises to initiate studies in a new area, was formed at an impressionable age.

Prof. Gunjekar was the local secretary for the annual conference of

the IMS held at Bombay in 1932. After the conference was over, the reception committee found that they had a sizable balance left with them. Professor Gunjekar persuaded the committee to use the balance towards establishing an association of Mathematics Teachers of the city. Thus the Bombay Mathematical Colloquium was formed. The moving spirit behind it was Professor Gunjekar.

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Immediately after passing his B.Sc. examination, Trivedi was appointed as a lecturer in mathematics at Gujarat College Ahmedabad in 1927. He continued his own studies while teaching and got his M.A. in 1929. He was very popular among his students who used to say, 'Prof. Trivedi teaches mathematics like poetry'. The reputation of Trivedi as a teacher reached principal of the college (an English man named Shiraz) who suggested that he should go to Cambridge for mathematics tripos. With his active support Prof. Trivedi proceeded to Cambridge in 1934, passed tripos examination with flying colours in 1936 and returned to his job at Ahmedabad.

In 1937 he was transferred to the mathematics department of the Royal Institute of Science, Bombay where I was studying in the final B.Sc. class. Thus I had the opportunity to experience the thrill of attending his classes. He used to teach us Astronomy. His will be the last period from 2.00 p.m. to 3. p.m. but invariably the lecture will continue upto 4.00 p.m. or even 4.30 p.m. and the whole class will listen to him enjoying every minute of his lecture. The mathematics classes for B.A. at the Elphinston College and B.Sc. at the Institute of Science were common and so we used to shuttle between the College and the Institute. Now the passage between the two passed through the college canteen and so invariably a sizable group of students would not proceed beyond the canteen. But not so if the next lecture was by Prof. Trivedi.

Prof. Trivedi continued to teach mathematics upto 1949, after which he was transferred to an administrative post in the education department. His grip of both English and Gujarati languages was such that he was appointed the Director of Languages in the newly formed state of Gujarat. At a press conference the chief minister Dr. Jivraj Mehta was asked about the propriety of appointing a professor of mathematics to the language department, Pat came the reply from CM' if a medical doctor like me could become the Chief Minister why can't a professor of mathematics like Trivedi be a director of languages?

After retirement Prof. Trivedi continued his activities in the field of mathematics education in Gujarat. He worked as the chairman of the committee which drafted the new school syllabus incorporating the so called Modern Math. After the new syllabus was approved by the

Government he was put in charge of the State Text Book Board so that text books for the new syllabus may faithfully follow the spirit of the new syllabus.

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Professor S.N. Bose once described the principal characteristic of a mathematics teacher in the following words; "What does a teacher do. He presents himself as a model for his students to imitate". I was singularly lucky to have before me two distinct models of these two distinguished teachers to mould my teaching career.