

# Editorial

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*K L Sebastian, Associate Editor*

S K Rangarajan (fondly referred to as SKR by his friends, colleagues and students) passed away on 29th April, 2008. This issue of *Resonance* contains articles by Robert de Levie, his long time collaborator, and his former student, M V Sangaranarayanan. SKR was a genius, a man of many talents, and unique in that his ability in science was matched by his fineness as a human being.



Email:  
kls@ipc.iisc.ernet.in

The life and work of SKR outlined in the two articles should serve as an inspiration for those who aspire to be scientists. The highest degree that he ever had was a BSc (Hons) in Mathematics from Madras University. Yet, he was a world renowned theoretical electrochemist, who published more than 180 papers in the areas of theoretical electrochemistry, physical chemistry and mathematics, and was invited to be a Professor at one of the leading departments of chemistry (Department of Inorganic and Physical Chemistry, IISc) in the country. He made significant contributions to different areas in theoretical sciences, particularly theoretical electrochemistry.

SKR was a very capable scientist, with a deep insight into the workings of Nature and the mathematics that described her. At the same time, he was a very humble, charming person, who did not hesitate to express his opinion strongly if the situation required it. His impact on all who came into contact with him was enormous. Many have been very strongly influenced by his science, his attitude towards it, the eloquence and wisdom of his words, and the clarity and elegance of his thoughts. His interests were never confined to one particular branch of knowledge. He used to work in mathematics, theoretical chemistry, chemical physics, stochastic description of chemical phenomena, etc. At the same time, he had a deep interest in the arts too. He used to write poems, and had started his career as a film critic!

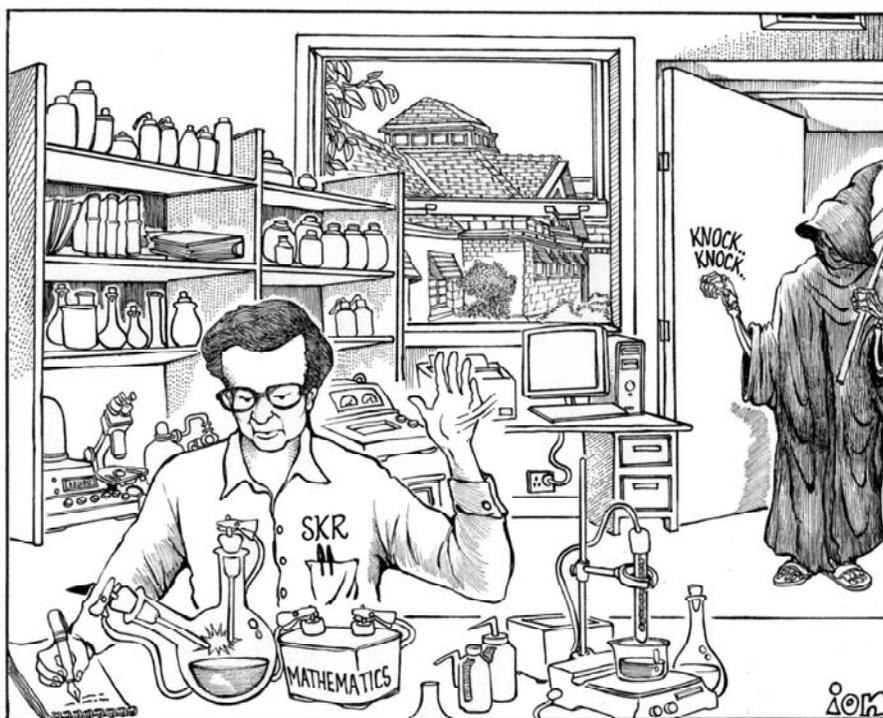
SKR was devoid of any thoughts of personal gain. A deeply cultural and religious person, he believed in doing science for the sake of understanding it, and he never desired any fame to come out of it. S Arunachalam, who knew SKR for a long time, describes him: "A truly great teacher, SKR was a selfless and self-effacing man. He gave away his knowledge to anyone who came to him without ever expecting any return. The very thought of returns never occurred to him. He was not a man of mere intellect. Indeed, it was just one small part of him. At a time when lesser mortals get easily tempted to fall prey to the ways of the world, he



remained steadfast in his values and principles, never once deviating from his chosen, or should I say preordained path”. In the weeks before his death, SKR was excitedly pursuing some of the formulae given in the *Notebook* of Ramanujan. He was also planning to give a series of lectures on stochastic modeling of chemical phenomena at the IISc. As the cartoon by Ayan Guha suggests, he was the kind of person who would not be impolite even to death.

In SKR, one had a unique combination of the best of Indian science and culture – “a great saint and a true scientist” would be the most fitting description of the person.

India has a very successful space program. It has put into orbit a satellite around the moon. In spite of such successes, the status of science education in the country is dismal and worries all the educators. This issue of *Resonance* also contains the full text of the position paper entitled ‘Restructuring Post-School Science Teaching Programmes’, brought out by the three science academies of the country. It should provide material for thought for all interested in improving the teaching of science in our universities.



*I have just done something very interesting on some formulae from Ramanujan’s Notebook. I was planning to lecture on ‘Stochastic problems in chemical sciences’. But to keep you waiting would be impolite, so let us go!*

