

Editorial

Priti Shankar and Vidyanand Nanjundiah
Guest Editors

Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi was a remarkably versatile personality of the twentieth century. The range of disciplines spanned by his scholarly work is indeed impressive, covering as it does, applied mathematics, statistics, history, archaeology, numismatics and cultural studies. He was equally at home engaging in creative mathematics, analysing ancient Sanskrit manuscripts and carrying out field work in archaeology. As much as anything else, for students in the idealistic years of post-independence India, his commitment to rational thought and an anti-establishment image made him a romantic figure.

Damodar was the son of Acharya Dharmananda Kosambi, an eminent scholar of Pali and Buddhism who led an extraordinary life himself. D D Kosambi's academic life spanned the turbulent decades preceding and following the independence of India. He underwent no further formal academic training after obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University in 1929. While at Harvard, in the course of getting a first rate, broad-based education, he mastered several European languages including Greek, Latin, French and German. He worked at several places after his return to India. One of them was the mathematics department of Aligarh Muslim University; he was invited there by the French mathematician André Weil, who had been requested by the university to set up the department by bringing together creative mathematical minds. He also worked at Fergusson College, Pune, and at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, which had just then been founded by Homi Bhabha. He had published extensively all along and wrote papers in several languages including French, German and Chinese.



priti@csa.iisc.ernet.in



vidya@ces.iisc.ernet.in

Damodar
Dharmananda
Kosambi was a
remarkably versatile
personality of the
twentieth century.



Kosambi was no
ivory tower
scientist and
involved himself in
several
movements
including the
World Peace
Council.

In 1944 Kosambi carried out a mathematical analysis of the relationship of the physical distance between genes on the chromosome and the probability that they could be separated during transmission, that remains in use to this day. That he enjoyed a very good reputation in the international mathematics community is evident from his being chosen – along with mathematical stalwarts like Harald Bohr and A N Kolmogorov – as a member of the Fields Medal committee in 1950. His pioneering work in numismatics is an indication of the breadth of his intellect. This led him to a critical study of ancient Sanskrit documents. Kosambi's training under his father and his natural talent for languages were no doubt instrumental in his taking up this venture. He then moved on to the study of ancient Indian history. He came to the subject as a mathematician and brought to the study a vision that only someone with his excellent scientific training and breadth of interests could provide.

A fiercely independent spirit, Marxist leanings and a refusal to compromise on important issues pitched him against the establishment on several occasions. The well-known disagreement with Bhabha on the issue of nuclear energy for India strikes a particularly contemporary note. He was no ivory tower scientist and involved himself in several movements including the World Peace Council. *Resonance* is fortunate in getting contributions from authors who were either acquainted with Kosambi or are familiar with his work in the areas mentioned above. We are grateful to all of them for their help in bringing out this issue.

