



## SRINIVASA RAMANUJAN AND NIELS HENRIK ABEL

Abel and Ramanujan were born 85 years apart in time and a world apart in space: Abel in 1802 in Frindø (near Stavanger), Norway, and Ramanujan in 1887 in Erode, Tamil Nadu, India. Both died young—Abel at 27 and Ramanujan at 32. They both grew up in poverty and hardship. The lives of these two mathematicians are at once romantic, tragic, and heroic. Of the two, perhaps Ramanujan may have been the more fortunate. He found a sympathetic mentor in G.H. Hardy, a mathematician of towering stature at Cambridge, who was responsible for making Ramanujan's work known to the world during the latter's own lifetime. Abel had the misfortune that his best work was mislaid at the Paris Academy, and was recognized only posthumously.

Abel was a pioneer in the development of several branches of modern mathematics, especially group theory and elliptic functions. He showed, while still 19 years old, that there exist no general algebraic solutions for the roots of polynomials with degree equal to or greater than 5, thus resolving a problem that had intrigued mathematicians for centuries. Ramanujan was a genius in pure mathematics and made spectacular contributions to elliptic functions, continued fractions, infinite series, and analytical theory of numbers. He was essentially self-taught from a single textbook that was available to him. They both possessed extraordinary mathematical power and inspiration.



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