



Harish Chandra

Harish Chandra (1923-1983)

Harish Chandra was born on 11 October 1923 in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. He attended school in Kanpur and then the University of Allahabad, where he studied theoretical physics. After obtaining his master's degree in 1943 he joined the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore to work further with Homi Bhabha on theoretical physics. Dr. Bhabha arranged for Harish Chandra to go to Cambridge to work for his Ph.D. under the legendary Paul Dirac. In 1947 Dirac visited Princeton for one year and Harish Chandra worked as his assistant during this time. In Princeton he met and was greatly influenced by the great French mathematician Chevalley, giving up physics altogether and taking up mathematics. Harish moved to Columbia University after his year at Princeton.

In 1963, Harish Chandra was invited to become a permanent member of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton. He was appointed IBM-von Neumann Professor in 1968.

Harish Chandra received many awards in his career. He was a Fellow of both the Indian Academy of Sciences and the Indian National Science Academy. In 1974, he received the Ramanujan Medal from Indian National Science Academy. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and also won the Cole prize from the American Mathematical Society in 1954 for his papers on representations of semisimple Lie algebras and groups.

Harish Chandra is quoted as saying that he believed that his lack of background in mathematics was in a way responsible for the novelty of his work:-

"I have often pondered over the roles of knowledge or experience, on the one hand, and imagination or intuition, on the other, in the process of discovery. I believe that there is a certain fundamental conflict between the two, and knowledge, by advocating caution, tends to inhibit the flight of imagination. Therefore, a certain naivete, unburdened by conventional wisdom, can sometimes be a positive asset."

His profound contributions to the representation theory of Lie groups, harmonic analysis, and related areas left researchers a rich legacy that continues today.