



Dr. Lokenath Debnath

SEP 30, 1935 - MAR 2, 2023



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Dr. Lokenath Debnath

SEP 30, 1935 - MAR 2, 2023

Professor Lokenath Debnath was an internationally renowned mathematician, dedicated university academic leader, and a devoted husband and father. He was born in India in 1935 into a large family in a part of East Bengal that ultimately became Bangladesh during the independence and partition of India in 1947. As a result of the political upheaval during partition, he and his family were displaced, essentially becoming refugees, forced a restart their lives in West Bengal with little in the way of resources.

Despite these immense challenges, Dr. Debnath excelled academically at a young age and his talent afforded him a path to pursue a university education, where he triple majored in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry at the University of Calcutta. Thereafter, he received a both Master's and a PhD from University of Calcutta in Pure Mathematics in 1965. Due to his immense success, he received a highly prestigious Commonwealth fellowship allowing him the opportunity to pursue further graduate work in the UK. There he studied at Imperial College in London, considered by many as the "MIT of the UK" and received a second PhD in Applied Mathematics in 1967.

Upon finishing his PhD, Dr. Debnath was recruited to the US as an Associate Professor in both the Departments of Mathematics and Physic at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. Within a year, he became a Full Professor; such a rapid rise through the academic ranks is extraordinarily rare. At ECU, Dr. Debnath published prolifically in the areas of nonlinear waves, the physics of fluids, and plasma physics. In addition to his scholarly pursuits, Dr. Debnath contributed to the internationalization of the Department at the very highest levels. In 1978, he founded a highly successful journal, the International Journal of Mathematics and



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Mathematical Sciences, and he served faithfully as its Editor-in-Chief from 1978 to 2007. While in North Carolina, he married Dr. Sadhana Debnath, an accomplished chemist, and his loving wife for 54 years, before she passed away in 2022. In 1971, the couple had their only son, Dr. Jayanta (Jay) Debnath, who would later receive his MD from Harvard Medical School and currently serves on the faculty at the University of California, San Francisco.

In 1983, Dr. Debnath was recruited as the Chair of Mathematics to the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, where he greatly expanded the scope and number of faculty in the Department, while continuing to be prolific in his research and teaching. In 2001, Dr. Debnath transitioned again and became the Chair of Mathematics at University of Texas Pan American, now called University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). Once again, he brought boundless energy and enthusiasm to UTRGV and transformed the Department into one of the best in the state of Texas, significantly growing the number and reputation of the faculty and expanding the degree offerings. Dr. Debnath received many honors but perhaps most notable in his later career was the University Faculty Excellence in Service Award from UTRGV in 2013 for his transformation of the Department of Mathematics while serving as its Chair. Dr. Debnath ultimately retired from UTRGV in 2018 at the age of 83 and moved from McAllen to Weslaco, Texas in 2019.

Throughout his decades-long career, Dr. Debnath was regarded world-wide for his passion for mathematics, his high standards, his infectious optimism, but probably most of all, his unmatched output as a scholarly writer. Dr. Debnath authored hundreds of research papers and articles and wrote countless textbooks across a wide spectrum of topics in mathematics.

Dr. Debnath will not only be remembered for his immense success as a mathematician, scholar, and academic leader, but most importantly, for his incredible generosity of spirit. At ECU, UCF, UTRGV, and throughout the world, he



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not just helped, but literally transformed the careers and lives of countless mathematicians, scientists, and students. For a myriad of reasons, he will be remembered as one of the greats in the mathematical world as well as at the institutions he served, especially UTRGV. But probably what mattered to him most was his ability to simply "to do good", to help his colleagues and students to the greatest extent possible.

Dr. Debnath is survived by two sisters and his brother, Dr. Narayan Debnath, Dean of Computing at Eastern International University in Vietnam, as well as his son, Dr. Jay Debnath, Distinguished Professor and Chair of Pathology at University of California San Francisco, his daughter-in-law Dr. Runi Chattopadhyay, and his grandchildren Maya and Kirin Debnath, all of whom live in California.



Tribute Wall

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HM

Hmb posted:

I was saddened to hear of the passing of Dr. Lokenath Debnath. He is the great Mathematician and Physicist who inspired me to become a Mathematician. I started out a Physics major and I asked him, why as a Physic Major, did I had to take so much math? He told me "Math is the Mother of all the Sciences" and that Physics was just another branch of Math. He was my mentor and the greatest Math Professor I ever had. He brought math to life as if it were a living and breathing creature. He was passionate about his students and his work. When necessary, he would often remind students of color that 'skin color had absolutely nothing to do with our ability to do Math and Science'. I won't call the Institution by name, but I did go on to become the first African American to graduate from that University with a "Master's Degree" in Mathematics. I ended up working with him for about 2 years before leaving to pursue further studies. Thanks for your inspiration and Rest in Heavenly Peace Dr. Debnath.

May 1 at 6:56 PM

PK

Professor Don Kulasiri posted:

I am a professor in a university in New Zealand. I never met Professor Debnath nor knew him. But I have enormous appreciation for his books, especially the book on Hilbert spaces. I learnt a lot from his books on functional analysis as well. I only got to know about his death today (I am writing on 2 May 2025) when I wanted to refer to his book on Hilbert spaces, and I thought I would check on him on the web. Some time back I read his bio, and was greatly inspired by him, especially his dedication to mathematics and his written contributions. I thought that if anybody wants to be a professor he was an exemplar to emulate if you have that genius, which is rare to see. I am really saddened to see him pass away.

May 1 at 6:56 PM



EG

Eleftherios Gkioulekas posted:

The first time that I ever talked with Dr. Debnath was when he called me up on the phone for a prearranged phone job interview, while I was visiting assistant professor at the University of Central Florida. He began by introducing himself and then he went over his own bio explaining how he used to be the department chair at University of Central Florida and that he was the one that hired several of the faculty there, and then went down the list one by one naming and talking about several of my UCF colleagues. It took a while to go through all that. When he was done then he asks: "So, have you gotten to know Dr. A?" and goes through the list all over again asking me questions like: "what's the news about Dr. B?", "how is Dr. C doing?" etc. Because I had gotten to know most of my UCF colleagues, I had detailed responses for each question and as a result it took forever to go once again through the whole list, and in the meantime I was wondering in the back of my head when is he going to start interviewing me? In any case, towards the end, I think we talked about the position and about research but the part that I still remember vividly is how he went through asking me questions about every single one of my UCF colleagues that he recruited and hired when he was the chair there. In hindsight, I think he must have seen an opportunity to find out how his former colleagues are doing, about whom he obviously cared very much, but also to figure out what kind of colleague I would be, if he were to offer me a position, by getting a read on how I managed to relate with all these other people that he knew so well and for so long. Dr. Debnath helped me throughout my stay at UTPA. We had many conversations and he shared many stories. I remember when he saw that I published a paper in Journal of Fluid Mechanics, he came by my office to tell me, "You know Elef, George Batchelor created that journal, and although Dr. Lighthill was my Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Batchelor was the one signing off my grad student stipends". He told me many other stories like that. Like with so many others, Dr. Debnath always had a lot of good advice and was an excellent mentor, and helped me put together my tenure and promotion file, as well as make suggestions for possible external reviewers. The most impactful advice however that I ever got from him was when he told me to go run for the Faculty Senate. I would have never done that on my own, but he told me that I should do it, without explaining why, and when I mumbled that nah! I'm too busy and have too many things to do, he said: "look! all you have to do is go to a meeting once a month, sit in the back of the room, and take a nap!" That convinced me, and of course I ended up doing the exact opposite of that, sitting at the front of the room and running my mouth off. I suspect that he knew all along that this was exactly what was going to happen, and he only said what needed to be said and nothing more. But simply following that small piece of advice made a tremendous impact in my own professional development. Dr. Debnath was an old-school academic that was committed to the fundamental mission of academic institutions to create and disseminate knowledge, and that was his primary focus which he did with his own work but also through identifying and helping so many of us to start our careers. His vision stands in stark contrast to the inverted corporate university vision of research being just a means to the end of acquiring external funds. He recruited and helped a broad range of research mathematicians that did interesting work rather than follow "trends" and go for what was "fashionable". I noticed that he was strategic about team building and thoughtful about recruiting a wide portfolio of faculty that together would make for a strong Department. He was also a fighter and was willing to do everything that could possibly be done to help the faculty that he recruited when facing difficulties with their tenure and promotion



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EG

from the upper level administration. He told me several stories about how he helped other faculty including faculty from UCF to get tenure. In one case he went to the UCF President's office to convince him (and did convince him) to overturn a negative Provost recommendation for a UCF tenure-track faculty, who in the end did get tenure and then had an outstanding long career. I learned a lot from him and admired and respected his way of looking at these issues, and his unyielding tenacity. I still remember vividly a conversation that I had with him after getting tenure in front of his office in the hallway where he told me: "all these other things are temporary but a research publication is a permanent contribution to humanity". This idea of academic legacy was very important to him. When you read some of his books, you can close your eyes and imagine hearing the text in his voice, him being there in your office, sitting next to you, and talking to you. He loved telling stories and you can see him in his writing telling many interesting stories and anecdotes in between the presentation of mathematical concepts. For some reason, all of that was very meaningful to him, and he wanted all those other people, some that he knew personally, but also historical figures from long ago, well known for their mathematical accomplishments, to be known and remembered, not only for what they did, but also for who they were. And perhaps, in a way this is a lesson for us, that we should also be willing to tell stories and make sure that people like him and many others that cross our lives are also remembered for who they are and not only for what they accomplished.

March 3 at 8:49 PM

DC

Dr. Xin Li (Department Chair) posted:

Dr. Xin Li (Department Chair) has purchased Splendid Life Spray for Dr. Lokenath Debnath

March 7 at 1:02 AM

DY

Dr. Galstyan, Dr. Yagdjian posted:

Dr. Galstyan, Dr. Yagdjian has purchased Eco-Friendly Memorial Trees for Dr. Lokenath Debnath

March 6 at 11:45 AM

SC

Santanu Chakraborty posted:

Santanu Chakraborty has purchased Eco-Friendly Memorial Trees for Dr. Lokenath Debnath

March 5 at 1:58 PM



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SC

Santanu Chakraborty posted:

When I joined UTPA, there was no official mentor assigned to a new faculty. Dr. Debnath himself served as my mentor. Being new to the US, I did not have enough idea about this country. Often he provided guidance to me on several things. When my mother fell sick in February 2009, he gave me special permission to go and visit her in the middle of a busy semester. Dr. Debnath was always willing to ensure that the faculty whom he hired should get tenure. When I got my tenure, I called him and he said that he was relieved. Even after he left his chair position, he would always care to see that our math department is properly taken care of. He was always very energetic and did not let the age to affect his health. I never thought that he would leave us so early. I still have his last memo that he wrote as a chair.

March 5 at 10:17 AM

CG

Chandana Ganguli shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Dr. Debnath was the epitome of grace and cared for people. He helped so many people with their careers. He always called to check on my dad. Both Drs. Debnath will remain in my memory. Praying for peace for their family during this difficult time.



March 5 at 8:58 AM



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PR

Partha Ray shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.



Dr. Lokenath Debnathin remembrance 30 September 1935 - 2 March 2023. The photo was taken on 23 November 2022 at the John Knox Nursing Home in Weslaco, TX, surrounded by his only son, grandson and granddaughter and a friend and math faculty from UTRGV, and their daughter. Last Thursday, March 2nd, 2023, little before noon, accompanied with my wife, we started from Mission, via Edinburg to John Knox Nursing Home at Weslaco, after hearing that Dr. Debnath is critical and may not have much time to prolong. We reached the nursing home, quarter to noon and together with a nurse holding a small syringe in her right hand entered the room number 489 where Dr. Debnath was housed in. At the first look we three of us looked at him, lying down on the bed, eyes closed, mouth half open, face covered with peace and IV tube attached to the left hand and oxygen placed in his noses. The nurse was responsible to inject him morphine every two hours and last time it was at 10:00 AM. The nurse was about to inject and touched his hand, and almost instantly suspected that Dr. Debnath is no more. It was exactly seven minutes to noon, March 2nd. It seems the same nurse came to see Dr. Debnath at 11:38 AM when he was breathing. The exact time of death was sometime between 1138 to 1153 AM. As per the nursing home protocol, we had to wait for the hospice nurse to declare his death. To realize that the soul had exited someone's body, it takes some time. We do not know when exactly we will realize that Professor Dr. Debnath is no longer among us. According to the oriental religions, which believe in reincarnation, one of the most famous books from India, The Gita, in English the celestial song, or the words of the Lord, it says, in Sanskrit, "Ātasya hi dhruvo mā'ityur dhruvaā' janma mā'itasya cha" meaning in English, Death is certain for one who has been born, and rebirth is inevitable for one who has died. To quote from the writings: The Joy of Old Age (No Kidding.), by Oliver Sacks, July 6, 2013, who was by profession a physician, wrote, "I feel I should be trying to complete my life, whatever completing a life means. Some of my patients in their 90s or 100s say nunc dimittis "I have had a full life, and now I am ready to go." For some of them, this means going to heaven "it is always heaven rather than hell" I totally agree that Dr. Debnath had a complete life. He lived together with his beloved wife Dr. Sadhana Debnath for over 54 years. Dr. Mrs. Debnath who left her mortal body in the same nursing home on 23rd June 2022, a Thursday. Eight months and a few days later, on another Thursday, her beloved husband left his body and probably joined together his wife in the heaven. We all pray for Eternal peace for their immortal souls who after a gap of a few days joined together in their celestial abode.

March 3 at 8:49 PM

DB

Dr. Andras Balogh shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.



Dr. Andras Balogh has purchased Eco-Friendly Memorial Trees for Dr. Lokenath Debnath

March 4 at 9:01 PM



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TF

The Gary Richardson Family posted:

The Gary Richardson family has purchased Blooming Sympathy Garden for Dr. Lokenath Debnath

March 4 at 4:21 PM

KS

Kamal & Jhuma Sarkar posted:

Dr. Debnath, our beloved Debnath da & his wife late Dr. Sadhana di were our family friends. Yes, Debnath da, in particular, transformed many lives in many ways. I happen to be one of them. We lost Sadhana di several months back. Now we lost Debnath da too. It is a huge irrespirable personal loss for us. May God keep showering eternal peace in them in their heavenly abode.

March 4 at 1:43 PM

TB

Treena Basu posted:

Forever my professor, mentor and guide. Learned so much from him that it's impossible to mention here in a short post. I first met Dr. Debnath in 2004 years while pursuing a master's degree during his chairship at UTPA. I went on to complete my PhD and pursue the life of an academic. Even now, as I serve as Chair of the Department of Mathematics at Occidental College, he has been a mentor! I am privileged to have known him. He will always hold a significant place in my life and all future endeavors and serve as a source of inspiration.

March 4 at 9:30 AM

PL

Pravendra Lohiya posted:

What an amazing soul Dr. Debnath is! The reason I am saying, "is" is because Dr. Debnath has left his body but the soul never dies. Dr. Debnath must be very proud of all the great work he has done for all of us. Dr. Debnath was my Department Chair when I came to UTPA in 2002 to pursue Masters Degree in Mathematics. When I met Dr. Debnath first time, I found him as a very energetic person, and he bore an innocent, infectious smile. Dr. Debnath used to understand challenges that international students face while coming from another part of the world and to welcome them, he used to arrange someone to pick them up from the airport. He also booked an apartment for his students so that they have a place to stay. As a teaching assistance our stipend used to be only \$9000 for 9 months. To help Teaching Assistants financially, Dr. Debnath made sure that the students get 2 courses to teach in summer so that they can make some money. These are just a few examples of the generosity of Dr. Debnath. I am not sure how many people are there like Dr. Debnath on this earth. I wish Dr. Debnath lives happily wherever he is and God bless his soul.

March 4 at 6:35 AM



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Pravendra Lohiya posted:

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March 3 at 8:49 PM



Chandana Ganguli shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

March 5 at 8:58 AM





Partha Ray shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

March 4 at 11:48 PM





Dr. Andras Balogh shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

March 4 at 9:01 PM





Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Dr. Lokenath by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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