

A mirage that transcends generations : A personal anecdote

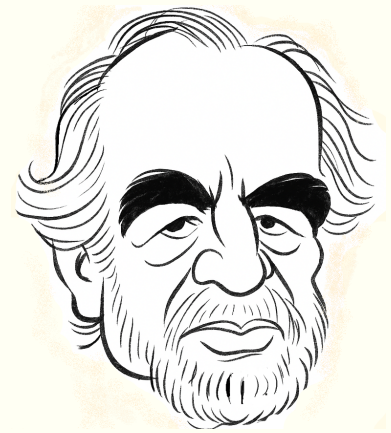
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"Traveller, there is no path, Paths are made by walking"

"As he always said, a mirage is more real in the desert than elsewhere."



My journey with him began during a precarious time. I was struggling to find a supervisor for my Master's thesis. Dr. Sajad from AEI Potsdam—a mentor who significantly shaped my abilities and a long term collaborator—had agreed to supervise me. However, funding issues prevented me from visiting him in Germany. I proposed a co-supervision arrangement where Dr. Sajad would supervise remotely, but I needed a local academic environment. Through connections established during Dr. Sajad's visits to the AEI Geometry and Gravitation group (formerly headed by Prof. Lars Andersson), we reached out to Prof. Naresh Dadhich at IUCAA.

His response was swift and generous. He agreed to host me and asked to meet the very next day. I was thrilled. From that first meeting, he was incredibly supportive, helping navigate the paperwork required by my home institute. Although administrative hurdles prevented me from getting an official co-working space at IUCAA, this actually became a blessing in disguise. I spent my days in the IUCAA library—a unique sanctuary filled with rare, old books not easily found elsewhere.

I remember my first task: helping him typeset a manuscript for the Gravity Research Foundation essay competition on the relativistic virial theorem and the Buchdahl bound. I felt a surge of worthiness and dedication working on it. Later, as I began my thesis, our discussions evolved into fascinating territories, such as the concept of Electromagnetic Duality in General Relativity. This eventually grew into a project of its own, built drop by drop through our conversations.

It was remarkable that, even in his 80s, he came to the office every alternate day. His dedication to research and his pursuit of understanding gravity were contagious. He taught me that whatever happens, one must never stop thinking. It was under his mentorship that I realized how pen, paper, a computer, and human creativity can lift our understanding of the universe to another level.

He was a man who thrived on discussion. I recall one instance when our talk turned to generalizations of Einstein's field equations. I mentioned a Soviet-era paper by E.O. Gliner regarding the algebraic classification of the stress-energy tensor. Prof. Dadhich immediately recalled the era, around 1965, and pulled out an old, cyclostyled book

titled Open Problems in General Relativity. He turned the pages to show me Gliner's work, explaining the generalizations with great enthusiasm.

We often shared coffee, sometimes chatting, sometimes walking quietly in the Sierpinski courtyard. I looked forward to every moment, eager to absorb his wisdom. While I was often focused on the mathematical juggling of equations, he insisted they make physical sense; otherwise, he would simply not agree.

The last time I saw him was just a month before his planned visit to BIMSA, Beijing. We had both just returned from a conference, yet he asked me to meet him at IUCAA that same morning. I was baffled by his energy. He was excited about his upcoming lectures. I was left with many questions to work on, never imagining he would not return.

Now, looking at his empty chair, the books that surrounded him, and the whiteboard in his office, everything seems to have lost its purpose. He knew the great relativists who built this field; he was a vital historical connection, a keystone that held stories together.

He was truly an inspirational mentor for the short time I knew him. He shaped not just my views on physics, but on life itself. He showed me that physics is ultimately about understanding nature, regardless of the path chosen. As we attempt to stitch together our understanding of the universe, like blind men feeling an elephant part by part, I am proud to carry a part of his legacy within me.

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