

The dining Philosophers problem

The dining Philosophers problem states that there are 5 philosophers sharing a circular table and they eat and think alternatively. There is a bowl of rice for each of the philosophers and 5 chopsticks. A philosopher needs both their right and left chopstick to eat. A hungry philosopher may only eat if there are both chopsticks available. Otherwise a philosopher puts down their chopstick and begin thinking again.

The dining philosopher is a classic synchronization problem as it demonstrates a large class of concurrency control problems.

Solution of Dining Philosophers Problem

A solution of the Dining Philosophers Problem is to use a semaphore to represent a chopstick. A chopstick can be picked up by executing a wait operation on the semaphore and released by executing a signal semaphore.

The structure of the chopstick is shown below:

```
semaphore chopstick [5];
```

Initially the elements of the chopstick are initialized to 1 as the chopsticks are on the table and not picked up by a philosopher.

The structure of a random philosopher i is given as follows:

```
do {  
    wait( chopstick[i] );  
    wait( chopstick[ (i+1) % 5] );  
    .  
    .  
    . EATING THE RICE  
    .  
    signal( chopstick[i] );  
    signal( chopstick[ (i+1) % 5] );  
    .  
    . THINKING  
    .
```

```
} while(1);
```

In the above structure, first wait operation is performed on chopstick[i] and chopstick[(i+1) % 5]. This means that the philosopher i has picked up the chopsticks on his sides. Then the eating function is performed.

After that, signal operation is performed on chopstick[i] and chopstick[(i+1) % 5]. This means that the philosopher i has eaten and put down the chopsticks on his sides. Then the philosopher goes back to thinking.

Difficulty with the solution

The above solution makes sure that no two neighboring philosophers can eat at the same time. But this solution can lead to a deadlock. This may happen if all the philosophers pick their left chopstick simultaneously. Then none of them can eat and deadlock occurs.

Some of the ways to avoid deadlock are as follows:

- There should be at most four philosophers on the table.
- An even philosopher should pick the right chopstick and then the left chopstick while an odd philosopher should pick the left chopstick and then the right chopstick.
- A philosopher should only be allowed to pick their chopstick if both are available at the same time.