The Origin of Algebra

Classical algebra was first developed by the ancient Babylonians. By using symbols to represent unknown quantities, they could form equations in those quantities and solve them. Before the use of algebra, such problems were solved geometrically, which restricted the type of problems that could be solved to problems that could be thought of as volumes of length, area or volume, or curves. Now algebra can be used to solve a wide range of problems, often by computer. The use of algebra spread throughout the world. It was known to Diophantus of Alexandria, a Greek mathematician, in the third century AD and the Chinese began to publish their own algebra writings around 100 BC. IN Europe it was not used widely until the sixteenth century.

Over the past two hundred years, the definition of algebra has widened substantially. We now have matrix algebra, abstract algebra, Boolean algebra (the Allegra of binary code or logic).

The word "algebra" is derived from the Arabic word 'al-jabr', which translates as 'the reunion of broken parts' which was first used around 800AD by Arabic scholars. The laws and practice of basic algebra are taught to every secondary school student and even primary school students in some countries.