

***Chintan Manan (Contemplation):  
Remembering Rajendra Dev Acharya<sup>1</sup>***

I met Rajendra Dev Acharya in August 2004. He came to my office to tell me he had registered for my graduate seminar on international relations. It was the beginning of a long conversation about human security.

I was 40 years old and starting a new job as an assistant professor of political science. That summer, my husband and I had moved to Missoula. We had spent the previous five years in Baton Rouge, teaching at Louisiana State University and hoping to move back West. I was revising my dissertation on state survival and death for publication as a book. In the dissertation, I had assumed that it was better for people to live in a surviving state than in one that dies by conquest, union, revolution, disintegration, or collapse. I had never been completely comfortable with that assumption, though, and was beginning to explicitly consider and test the relationship between human and state security.

Raj had just arrived from Kathmandu. He was clearly older than me. From the obituaries, it seems he was about 46. With great deference and in halting English, Raj explained that he had come to Montana at the request of his mother and with the help of his brother, Dr. Upendra Dev Acharya, then an attorney for the Chippewa Cree Tribe on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. They were worried about his safety. Raj was a journalist, as his father had been. In fact, Raj was the news director of Nepal Television and hosted a political talk show. At UM's memorial service, Upendra likened Raj to Tom Brokaw and said his best-known show was Chintan Manan, which means "contemplation." According to an obituary, it was "a popular show among the Nepalese masses."<sup>2</sup> Reluctantly, Raj had left his wife, Salina, and children in Kathmandu. He was at UM during what turned out to be the last two years of a decade-long civil war between the monarchy and Maoist rebels. In 2006, he returned to Kathmandu to become Nepal TV's longest-serving news director and educate the next generation of Nepalese journalists.<sup>3</sup>

Since Raj had never taken a political science course, I suggested he take something easier. When he insisted, I emphasized how challenging it would be, with 250 pages of theoretical reading per week, several short papers and presentations, and a 20-25 page research paper applying international-relations theories to a contemporary issue. Finally I agreed to let him attend the

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<sup>1</sup> Published in Clem Work, ed., *These and That: Memories of Rajendra Dev Acharya*, December 2019, pp. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> "Senior and acclaimed journalist Acharya passes away," Reporters Nepal, 6 October 2019, <https://en.reportersnepal.com/senior-and-acclaimed-journalist-acharya-passes-away/>

<sup>3</sup> Alan Williams, "Top Nepalese journalist Rajendra Dev Acharya passes," Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, 11 October 2019, <https://www.abu.org.my/2019/10/11/top-nepalese-journalist-rajendra-dev-acharya-dies/>

first day, thinking that might dissuade him. But once Raj met the other students and participated in an interesting and far-reaching discussion, we were all hooked.

In retrospect, it seems obvious that the well-regarded host of a thoughtful political talk show would be a warm and insightful participant in an international relations seminar and perform increasingly well as his English improved and he learned more about social science writing and analysis. It wasn't easy. Raj didn't want to participate in campus tutoring programs, and he sought and received little help from fellow students. Raj just worked hard, reading and writing (he said with a smile) all day, late at night, and on weekends.

I have a vivid, early memory of Raj sitting in my office and gently but persistently critiquing “realist” theories about international anarchy and balance of power politics. It was a theme we returned to again and again. Later in the semester, we discussed his research paper on the effects of U.S. counter-terrorism assistance. The following year, we discussed the international politics of censorship. After he graduated, we emailed occasionally and met when he returned to Missoula. On his last visit, in 2016, Raj introduced me to his daughter Sanskriti, a budding journalist,<sup>4</sup> and we discussed China's rise to great power. Raj referred to such discussions as “academic fellowship” and “enlightening companionship.”

Raj was not naïve. He and his family knew how power politics worked. What he objected to was abstraction. As he explained to me in a 2011 email with the subject line, “This is rajendra, your student,”

Nepalese politics has become an example of political study with many theoretical illustrations. Sometimes, what I think is content of politics and the political game could be an abstract matter but could rarely be a game played by abstract players.

Rajendra Dev Acharya was a pragmatic, people-centered realist. He called attention to the human effects of state policies and the human choices behind policies. He challenged us to notice and discuss the results of our actions, and adjust our thinking and behavior.

Thank you, Raj, for your enlightening companionship.

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<sup>4</sup> Sanskriti Acharya, “38 journalists killed in 20 countries from January to June this year: report,” My Republica, 5 July 2019, <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/38-journalists-killed-in-20-countries-in-first-half-of-2019-pec/>