

Rahul Balusu 1975-2020

Last week on Wed July 22<sup>nd</sup> we learnt of Rahul's death. Not enough time for the shock and sadness to wear off but perhaps enough time to collect our thoughts and come together to share who he was and what he meant to us.

Rahul was a man of many parts. As a linguist he defied easy categorization. His 2009 dissertation was on OCP Effects in Telugu, but also worked simultaneously on Telugu reduplication and distributivity. And in recent years he devoted himself to unraveling the mysteries of indefinites and polarity items in Telugu and other Dravidian languages. He was a scholar in the true sense of the word, reading everything with an open mind, not to prove a point but to understand how language works. His recent papers are a treasure trove of hidden gems.

Cross-linguistic work in semantics is relatively recent, compared to syntax and phonology, because semantics as a part of linguistic theory is relatively recent. His passing is a loss to the field, of course, but particularly for the field of South Asian semantics. There are so few of us, and now there is one less. But we have his work and we have the brilliant young scholars to whom he imparted his passion for semantics and we must look to them to keep it going.

I was asked to speak about Rahul's intellectual and professional contributions but we belong to a discipline that is also a community. This is true for linguistics as a field but it is even more so for South Asian linguistics.

It is impossible to talk of Rahul, our colleague, without talking of Rahul, our friend. And it is impossible to talk of his brilliance without talking of his generosity. It is impossible to talk about his love of lambda without talking about his love of chocolate.

And so we are left asking ourselves – why?

Did he not see the Rahul we saw?

Did we do enough to show him what he meant to us?

Did he know that he was at the peak of his career?

Could we have somehow prevented this tragedy?

These are all unanswerables and we will just have to accept the reality of his death, not right now, but eventually. Because we have no choice. But till then we must try to celebrate who he was, and we must always keep in mind that he lived life to the full and on his own terms.

Veneeta Dayal

(Statements from the following on slides: Anna Szabolcsi, Diti Bhadra, Miriam Butt, Ashwini Deo, Sandhya Sundaesan and Tom McFadden)

<https://sites.google.com/view/rahul-balusu-in-memorial/home>