SJSU remembers beloved philosophy professor

By Alina Ta
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

After spending two decades inspiring students to explore the field of philosophy, Professor Anand Jayprakash Vaidya died at 48 in October, leaving behind his wife, brother and many beloved colleagues in the Philosophy Department.

His wife and his colleagues held a memorial service for him at the Spartan Rose Garden on April 15 during the afternoon and evening.

Noah Friedman-Biglin, an assistant professor in philosophy at San José State, was one of Vaidya's former students who attended the service.

"He was my teacher, a mentor, a role model, and most of all, he was my friend. I will always miss him," Friedman-Biglin wrote in a speech for his colleague and former professor.

Friedman-Biglin said he remembered meeting Vaidya for the first time when he was a student.

Vaidya taught logical theory, ethical theory, philosophy of economics and justice, early and late modern philosophy, and asian philosophy, according to his SJSU biography.

"He talked so fast. Every sentence had 15 ideas that we'd never heard before," Friedman-Biglin said. "It was just like a fire hose of a philosophy when you talk to him. But again, it was something that we (students) desperately wanted. And it was like, 'Oh, this is why we're here. This is why we came.'"

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Vaidya was born in Chicago, but spent most of his childhood years in Saudi Arabia, according to his webpage.

He lived in a gated community with his older brother and his parents during the First Intifada and during the Gulf War.

Between the 1980s and the 2000s, there were two intifadas, also known as "uprisings" in Arabic, according to a March 22 PBS article.

In 1990, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein started the Gulf War over a conflict on whether or not Iraq owed multiple countries known as the "Gulf states" $37 billion in loans related to previous war efforts, according to a webpage from the U.S. Office of the Historian.

Tony Vaidya, who was older than Anand Jayprakash Vaidya by two and a half years, had a close relationship with his brother.

"He's my best friend. I used to talk to him all the time," Tony Vaidya said.

During Anand Jayprakash Vaidya's teenage years, his interest in discipline almost led him to consider joining the military before his uncle reminded him that there is more than one type of structure in life.

"He was convinced by (our) uncle, that, 'Hey, there's more than one type of structure and discipline. You can have structure and discipline of the mind.' And got him involved in thinking about higher education," Tony Vaidya said.

Tony Vaidya said he has fond memories of his brother playing guitar for his 10-year-old daughter.

Andrew Delunas, a senior lecturer in philosophy, has an office located down the hall from Anand Jayprakash Vaidya's empty office.

On the second floor of the Faculty Office Building, Anand Jayprakash Vaidya's office still has his name plate attached to the door.

"He would always show me pictures of his guitar, and (he'd say), 'We need to get together and jam,' because I play bass," Delunas said. "One of my big regrets is that we never got to play music together."

Delunas said Anand Jayprakash Vaidya was recently preparing to become the new department chair.

Janet Stemwedel, the current interim chair of the philosophy department, was preparing to pass down her position to him for the Spring 2025 semester before he died.

"Last year was supposed to be me just keeping the seat warm for him, with the plan that he was going to start being chair this year," Stemwedel said.

Anand Jayprakash Vaidya studied both philosophy and Asian philosophy, according to his SJSU biography.

Karin Brown, a philosophy professor, sits in the office across the hall from Anand Jayprakash Vaidya's office.

"I used to call him 'problem solver,'" Brown said. "He loved that because that's part of the reason people love to have a conversation with him and talk to him. We'd always like to find solutions."

She said he continued to work for months before his death even though he had peripheral neuropathy in his fingers, which made typing painful for him.

Peripheral neuropathy is when the nerve located outside of the brain and spinal cord are damaged. Common symptoms from this condition include numbness, weakness and pain in a person's hands or feet, according to a Mayo Clinic webpage.

"He worked till he was in the ICU, until the very end, even though he was in pain," Brown said. "Now his wife is making sure that the last pieces (articles) that he wrote are going to be published."

Tony Vaidya said he wasn't expecting his brother to pass so soon.

"(His death) was a huge hole in our family," Tony Vaidya said.

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Anand Jayprakash Vaidya (1976-2024) died on October 11th, 2024. He was 48. I stare at these sentences for a couple of hours. On paper, they are just statements of fact. Anand was here and now he's not. I can't get myself to really, truly, accept that he's gone.

I haven't been to the office since his passing, so I don't know how I'm going to feel when I walk by his door, with his name-plate still on it, and see it empty—*truly empty*, not just without him inside, but without even the possibility that he will ever be inside. Well, I do know how I will feel. I'll be heartbroken.

The further I move from those two first sentences, the clearer I see Anand, a guy whose brain was always "on," who loved to talk philosophy and would not speak on *any philosophical idea* without first *really* thinking about it. The thought fills with sadness and nostalgia.

The last time we spoke we talked about a failed attempt at podcast we wanted to start. It was his idea. He imagined a much more inclusive and multicultural, "much better," he said, version of *Philosophy Bites*. "It will kick ass," he said. The APA didn't fund our project, but that didn't stop him from trying to figure out how we could get it off the ground. And this because he truly cared about, what we may call, "world philosophies." He cared about inclusion. He cared about every point of view that could focus on a thing.

Anand was a brilliant analytic philosopher, but he also thought deeply about Indian philosophy, continental philosophy, Latin American philosophy. These are, of course, the things *we* talked about; I'm sure others can testify to all the other areas of philosophy that Anand thought about…deeply and carefully and lovingly. So our podcast was going to rock! But it was going to rock because Anand was going to make sure it did. It would have "friction." He talked about this in a autobiographical piece he wrote in 2020, where he writes about getting "reacquainted" with Indian philosophy and making it "relevant to a "cross-traditional conversation in philosophy." For some reason, he predicted he would never get the chance to fully do this, to "synthesize an understanding…that cuts through these different traditions and get people to talk to one another." He called this talking-to-one-another across silos, "friction." He says: "I've come to appreciate that friction is not always bad. Cross-cultural methods improve analytical and experimental methods by providing a kind of *epistemic friction* that takes one outside of one's philosophical echo chamber in an epistemically responsible way." He loved talking to people and loved it more when people talked to one another.

Anand was my colleague at San Jose State for eighteen years—my entire career thus far. He was on the committee that hired me. In eighteen years we had hundreds if not thousands of conversations ranging from Husserl's theory of intuition to the best place to get burritos. In all of our talks, he never spoke ill about a single human being. It's just who he was. He was kind. He was generous with his time and his attention. He was also intense. If he was interested in something, nothing would get him off of it. He was one of a kind. Yet as brilliant as he was, I never heard him say, "no, that's wrong," or "that's not quite right," or "the truth is…" That wasn't him. He was not there to correct you. He was there to teach you. He would think *with* you. And I think that's what really hurts me, personally: Anand will not think *with* me again.

I am glad Anand existed, and I am grateful I got to know him as I did. He gave me a model for being a human being for which I will always be thankful: a way to be joyful, open, generous, kind, intense about philosophy, but without being arrogant or mean. I'll miss him terribly.

Carlos Alberto Sánchez

We lost my colleague and mentor Anand on Friday, and I simply cannot get my head around it. I would not be the person I am without him. I first met him in 2007, as a beginning MA student at SJSU. He was a relatively young assistant professor then, and full of energy, brilliant ideas, and philosophical passion. All of this drew us MA students to him. But more than his obvious philosophical prowess was how he treated us: like colleagues in the discipline already. He talked to us as if we had already mastered ideas we had never heard before, and seriously considered everything we said. We used to joke that we'd go to his office to ask a question, he would talk *at* us for an hour, and then we would have to go away and read for a week to understand what he had said. But, we always meant this in the best way – that is that he was always giving us the fullest possible answer. We loved the reading we would have to do after talking with him, and it taught us so much. He gave us the confidence we needed to see that we could be philosophers too.

I went away to a PhD program, and we lost touch for a while. But Anand wasn't that sort of person – he didn't forget you, even if you hadn't spoken for a long time. When I came back to the States, as an unemployed recent PhD, he remembered me. SJSU needed some emergency coverage for logic teaching (due, sadly, to the illness and later passing of another mentor of mine, Rick Tieszen), and it was Anand that got in touch. He asked if I had a logic syllabus. I told him that I did – of course, I did not. He asked me to send it to him, and I spent a panicked hour writing one before sending it off. He then asked me to come down to San Jose to meet with Janet. Without that, I would not have a job in philosophy. Our friendship then resumed at SJSU, almost as if no time had passed at all. I would still come to his office to ask questions, but this time I felt that I was able to contribute at least *something* to those conversations.

Later, when I was about to be hired onto the tenure track at SJSU, he invited me over to the City for coffee. When I got to the Philz by his house, he handed me a bottle of extremely nice Scottish whisky – I'd one my degree in Scotland, and we shared a love of their whisky. He said "I can't tell you what

this is for yet, but if you get any calls from San Jose in the near future, you should probably answer them." Of course, I was overjoyed, and so excited to get to continue to be his colleague. We spent the rest of that afternoon planning a conference that we were co-organizing; sadly it was cancelled because of the pandemic that started in earnest in the USA a few weeks later.

Once the pandemic was over, we continued to talk philosophy, or gossiping about the discipline, but now we would walk around downtown San Jose as we did it. He would take me to various restaurants he liked. As we talked over food – mostly at the Tandoori Oven, but later at Tofoo Com Chay – we realized that we were thinking about some very similar things, though coming from slightly different angles. This became the basis of the paper we wrote together about logical pluralism, and the contributions that Indian philosophy could make to that debate. Writing together with Anand has been one of the highlights of my scholarly career. He had such a talent for saying complicated things so directly and plainly that I really admired.

Anand was a connector – of ideas, of traditions, of people. He was always introducing me to people, and he seemed to know everyone. He delighted in passing on opportunities, especially to junior people. He invited me to join the organizing committee for the Pacific APA when he was running it in 2022, and invited me to join him guest-editing a special issue of a journal just a few months before he passed. The issue is still in progress, and will feature papers by some of Anand's other philosophical friends and interlocutors.

He was my teacher, a mentor, a role model, and most of all, he was my friend. I will always miss him.

Noah Friedman-Biglin

In appreciation: Janet Giddings

In 2005, I met Anand for the first time. He was in his office and I stopped in to introduce myself. He seemed to already know about me and was most interested in my theological studies. He began asking me pointed and serious theological questions that I could not answer. It wasn't that I hadn't pursued those questions or that I wasn't willing to discuss them, but Anand wanted a definitive answer! I finally apologized and said that I didn't know "anything about anything." He smiled and walked to his file cabinet where I stood, opened it and pointed to a large file on Thomas Aquinas. That's when I knew he understood my position.

When I was bald from cancer treatments, Anand didn't offer sympathy or make silly comments to make me feel better. Rather, he told me stories of his mother's health challenges letting me know he understood suffering. It was heartwarming and offered me consolation.

When my mother was dying, Anand didn't directly address the pain and sadness I was experiencing. Rather he told me stories about his parents aging. He counseled me without letting me feel he was giving a lecture. He was kind and caring.

Anand and I talked a lot about logic. I don't like the P's and Q's and logic tree and would rather 'do' logic through literature and life questions. I discussed with Anand the Andrea Nye book that talks about logic and gender bias. Anand wasn't on board with that and shared with me the many women he has worked with in logic. It made me feel better and worse at the same time since the P's and Q's thing didn't work for the way I learn. I think he never quite understood me on that, or maybe he was just disappointed. He never made me feel badly about it, though.

The one regret I have carried for years is not buying him a sweater. One day as I came to the top of the stairs to the department, Anand greeted me with a 'hello' and I was shocked! He wore a yellow or mustard colored cashmere sweater with moth holes all over it. I felt so sorry for him and was committed to buying him a new cashmere sweater the upcoming weekend. Then, I forgot. While I never saw him wear the sweater again, and have thought maybe he wore it to

give a lecture on chaos theory or something (!) I have held my regret since that day. I did find out at the Philosophy department memorial when Karin Brown explained why there were holes in the sweater and that calmed my regret!

During COVID my family and I moved up North. Anand said at some point he and Manju would come to the North State and visit me. He knew some of the rural areas as he was a hiker and visited up here in the past. Both Anand and Manju love nature and hiking and it would have been a pleasure to hike with them.

On that note, I remember when something changed with Anand. He seemed confident in a different way and I wondered what it was. It was that he was in love. He met Manjula (Manju) and although I rarely say things like this: the love made him complete. He was 'fully' in body and spirit, I thought. When I met Manju in Seattle at a philosophy conference and was introduced, I saw it all at once. It was so special to see him 'with'.

Anand's death is still unreal to me. I feel badly I was not able to see him the last few years of his life here, and did not get to say goodbye. That has lent me an unknowing. Epistemic anxiety. Or, I just don't want to believe it.

Etienne Brown

I lost my colleague Anand yesterday. It's hard to explain how important he was to the department of philosophy at SJSU. I met him in 2019 during my job talk. We walked to dinner together afterward, and he grilled me on virtue epistemology. Anand never missed an opportunity to talk about philosophy. He was the real deal—pure philosophical curiosity. He was a remarkable philosopher, but so much more than that. One of the things I loved most about him was his willingness to show people around. He was the perfect tour guide: you could feel his love for the places he brought you to, but he also catered his tours to your interests. It seems that he wandered the world trying to find the best place to show each of his friends. His passion for San Francisco was contagious, and I don't think I would have moved there without him. It was hard not to feel his presence while driving around the city with my family this morning. I saw him last near his home in the Mission District this summer. We met at a coffee shop he loved, where I often work on Fridays when the fog is too thick in my neighborhood. We discussed his views on AI and the nature of intelligence. He was sick, but he was still the Anand I had known for six years. Brilliant. Kind. Irreplaceable.

Anand worked hard to make space for Indian philosophy in North America and elsewhere, for instance, by serving as program chair of the recent Pacific APA meeting held in San Francisco. Those who wish to pay homage to him can continue working toward that goal.