

# PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG ARMENIAN SCIENTIST

*Posted on April 3, 2014 by Keghart*



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By **Arsine Arakelians**, 25 March 2014

*The Cosmic Ray Division of the Yerevan Physics Institute, founded by the famous Armenian  scientist Artem Alikhanyan, is a world-renowned scientific research institute. Along with its important scientific research and discoveries, it is a teaching and research magnate for young scientists. Graduate students, eager to advance their knowledge and gain valuable experience are recruited to study and work with practicing scientists. They are encouraged and expected to participate in CRD projects. One such graduate student is young Hripsime Mkrtchyan. Below is a Q & A, via email.*

**ARSINE ARAKELIANS:** Where were you born? Did you attend the primary and secondary schools of your birth place?

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**ARSINE ARAKELIANS:** Where were you born? Did you attend the primary and secondary schools of your birth place?

**HRIPSIME MKRTCHYAN:** I was born in Yerevan in 1990. I attended Henrik Khachatryan School in Yerevan.

**A.A:** How large is your family?

**H.M:** My immediate family consists of my parents, younger brother and me. It is relatively small, but my extended family is large.

**A.A:** Were there scientists in your immediate or extended family?

**H.M:** There is no scientist in my immediate family, but in the extended family I have relatives who majored in sciences. My grandfather is a retired chemist who was a lecturer in what is today the

Armenian National Agrarian University. He later became a school administrator and taught chemistry. He influenced me a great deal with his enthusiasm for science. My uncle is a physicist working on X-ray related experiments.

**A.A:** Did anyone in your immediate surroundings take a special interest in your education or in you as a budding scientist?

**H.M:** My parents took special interest in my education. They gave me freedom and support to choose the profession I was interested in. I hope I have justified my parents' expectations. I was an honor student and was granted a government-sponsored scholarship. In addition, I would like to emphasize my uncle's role in my education. He was and still is ready and willing to explain the mysteries of physics and answer my questions regarding science. His continuing assistance has been very helpful and rewarding for me.

**A.A:** At what age and why did you choose physics as your field of study?

**H.M:** I chose physics when I was 17. Back then I did not know what was the real meaning of the word "scientist" and what it took to be a scientist. I strived to become a good specialist in a field where I could discover answers to questions about life and existence. I'm very interested in inventing and creating new things. Studying physics has given me this great opportunity. I remember when I met my advisor, Prof. Ashot Chilingarian, for the first time, and told him about my ideas and plans. He advised me to work very hard, experiment, calculate, demonstrate, try out my ideas first, not jump to conclusions. I know this is the field where I can try out my ideas and achieve success by working hard.

**A.A:** Which university did you attend?

**H.M:** After secondary school, I entered Yerevan State University's department of physics (2007-2013). I received a B.A in applied physics and mathematics and an M.A in nuclear physics" in the same department. Last year I enrolled as a PhD student at Cosmic Ray Division of A. Alikhanyan National Laboratory (Yerevan Physics Institute). I have been affiliated with CRD since receiving my M.A.

**A.A:** Did you have a special mentor? Who was the main influence in your life and studies while in school?

**H.M:** My father is irreplaceable as a mentor in my life. He has had a great influence on me. He is always ready to motivate me, encourages me to follow my dreams, and teaches me to be patient and never give up, no matter how hard things may get. It was upon my father's encouragement that I pursued higher education and became a scientist, without worrying too much about future earning possibilities.

**A.A:** How did you become affiliated with CRD?

**H.M:** When I was a 3rd-year student, we had special lectures at the CRD headquarters as part of our university curriculum. After I met Prof. Chilingarian and became acquainted with his scientific work, I realized that the new and exciting field of atmospheric physics is where I wanted to specialize. After I earned my B.A., Prof. Chilingarian gave me the opportunity to join the CRD team.

**A.A:** How long have you been involved with them? How do you like being a part of CRD?

**H.M:** I have been involved with CRD as researcher for three years. Now I cannot imagine my life without science and without my work.

**A.A:** What particular project are you working on? As a young scientist, do you have opportunities to be creative, to introduce new ideas?

**H.M:** My topic of research is related to atmospheric physics. Particularly, I study the thunderstorm and lightning initiation, particle enhancement, and the behavior of meteorological parameters during thunderstorm. Atmospheric physics is a field where many questions still remain unanswered. My advisor always inspires me to "dive" into the world of science, never be afraid of new approaches, taking risks, experimenting, trying to prove my ideas. He does everything possible to facilitate my study and work. I always share my ideas with him. He is ready and forthcoming with valuable advice. As a young scientist, working in this environment, I am encouraged to invent new approaches to research.

**A.A:** Are you given the chance to interact with foreign scientists or to travel abroad and meet others like you, participate in scientific conferences, symposia? 

**H.M:** With my advisor, Prof. Chilingarian, we organize international symposia and meetings in Armenia. These allow me the opportunity to interact and communicate with foreign leading scientists. Last year I helped Prof. Chilingarian organize Thunderstorms and Elementary Particle Acceleration (TEPA-2013) symposium in Armenia. The year before that it was in Moscow and I presented my work there. This year we are planning to organize TEPA-2014, as well as an international summer school in Armenia. I am planning to participate in various conferences abroad. In May I will attend an International Summer School in Collieune, France, dedicated to thunderstorm effects on the atmosphere-ionosphere system.

**A.A:** As a scientist, what are your long term goals?

**H.M:** Our team and I are going to explain and enhance the understanding of the electrical structure of thunderclouds and conditions that support lightning initiation. My dream is to become an excellent scientist and contribute to Armenia. There are many very smart people who leave Armenia, chasing better salaries abroad, due to lack of opportunities here. Other countries offer far higher standards of living and lure many of our highly-educated people away. We are suffering from a "brain drain". Therefore, one of my life long goals is to do everything possible within, or even beyond my powers to persuade our scientists and specialists to stay, work and create in Armenia.



