

Transcript for Oral History Interview
Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST 428M – Spring 2015
Instructor: Dr. Anne S. Rush

Interviewer's (Student's) name: Nik Manohar

Interviewee's name: Dr. Manu Manohar

Interviewee's Country of Origin: India

Interviewee's Current Residence: Maryland, U.S.A

Date of Interview: March 22, 2015

Place of Interview: University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, U.S.A.

N is Nik, M is Manu.

N: Hello, my name is Nikhil Manohar, the date is March 22, 2015. We are in the Susquehanna building on the University of Maryland campus and I'm here with my father, Dr. Manu Muniraj Manohar. How are you doing today?

M: I'm doing good. How are you?

N: I'm good. Uh, how was your morning?

M: Morning is good. Today is Sunday, so I accomplished lot of things. I finished my weekly jogging and went for Chinmaya...did a little bit of Indian grocery shopping and then came for this event.

N: Great, yeah, I'm so happy that you were able to come out here and...It's a big favor to me...

M: Sure, anytime.

N: It'll be really great that it'll be put in the archives

M: Sure that is the whole reason I came down

N: [laughter] So, um, the purpose of my class is... it's about oral history, and uh specifically about recent immigrants to the DC Metro area

M: Mhm

N: Uh and you of course have immigrated to America from India, and you've moved around a good amount, but you've been in the DC area for quite some time now

M: Mhm

N: And I kinda wanted to just, in a chronological fashion go through how that all sort of came down...let's start at the beginning-

M: Mhm

N: -if you're okay with that. Um, so, I first wanted to ask how much you knew about America when you were growing up, when you were just a kid.

M: I don't know much about America except I was reading in Indian local newspaper. I heard about a little bit when I was growing up I know something about John F Kennedy and um those kind of thing. One thing I am aware is when we are in school they used to give us a free lunch for some of the people, supposed to be low income, but I also sometime go with my friends and have food...and they have this wheat product and kind of thing. They said it came from America, so I said oh geez America producing lots of sweet kind of thing

N: [laughter]

M: That is one of the thing I know. And my father was educated, he's not illiterate, he's a news junkie. He used to watch all the...listen to all the radio, read all the newspapers so...I know little bit better than my contemporary kids about Western countries but I don't know much in detail...of course I don't know the difference between Britain and America or uh Norway or Sweden or Germany, everything is a foreign to me

N: Mhm

M: In fact I was thinking foreign country means that is one of the country, that is what my understanding was

N: Mhm

M: But in general I had a very high opinion, highly sophisticated country, that is what I thought when I was growing up.

N: Mhm

M: But at the time I didn't have a clue or a... I never thought about it and I never imagined I would come and live in this country for a while.

N: So you...it never crossed your mind, leaving India, when you were in primary school or high school-

M: No, not at all. There are some other kids who just aim their life to just go to other country but for my case I never thought about it...I was going with the flow. What do they call it? The happy kid, whatever you have you are satisfied or something

N: Mhm

M: So...that was the fact.

N: Right, so when you were younger you really hadn't considered moving to the Western world or coming to America-

M: No, not at all, not at all.

N: But when you progressed through your education, uh, you eventually got your Ph. D in Biochemistry.

M: Mhm

N: Um...was it... Was it when you entered graduate school that the idea of moving to America became more of a reality? Or maybe only then it became something...something at all?

M: No I need to take a one step back off your question... I need to go a little back. When I was growing up I used to, of course everybody...elementary school, middle school, and kind of thing...the early part of in my life, in early middle school, I kind of figured it out. I kind of leaning towards the science and maths more than other studies...and Indian educational system, even now it is a fact, it is a, you are like a memory box, you need to memorize things and put it in an exam. That exam also not throughout the year, this a year end exam...three hour exam for each subject...and quarterly, they have a quarterly exam and a half yearly exam. In three hours, you need to excel...which I found it extremely difficult, especially in social studies and English...memorizing whole year study in a small question...but somehow I found the science and mathematics I can do really excel well, even though one year study...then, that's that was it started, I was leaning towards science and maths, nothing else. I kind of didn't study well with other subject, I saw progress through my education in the high school, then I chose to go pursue science. Then I selected physics as one of the...my... what do they call, elective in that...so as a special subject, one of the special subject...and I studied there and I went to college...and they were...originally I was like uh going to medical school, and I was studying for all the biology, chemistry, and physics and everything...and uh, getting into medical school was very competitive at that time and you need to come up with uh... unless you were a top 1% of the whole state, you need to come up with a reason amount of money as a donation or whatever fee to get into medical school. At the time, my father being a government employee, he could not afford to do it, so I thought the next best thing is go for science subject and I chose chemistry... and then I, even though I was studying chemistry, I was more leaning towards the medical field or biological field. Chemistry is like organic chemistry, inorganic chemistry, all kinds. I was interested but still I am not very happy with that, or, there must be something where I should study, like uh biology, chemistry. At that time, in our college I am lucky enough, they started the new subject called biochemistry, nobody knows about that, what was biochemistry. And I thought, what is it about. They said it was the chemistry of life. You can study the chemistry about the living organisms, how the things are working. I thought, oh it is a great, I should go and study that. And then I applied for it, and most my father, "What is that biochemistry?" I said, "I don't know, it is some kind of studying biology. Next question he was "Okay, after studying, what kind of job will you get?" I said, "I don't know."

N: [laughter]

M: Then my father, "You don't know what you are studying, you don't know what kind of job you are getting, so what are you studying for?" Somehow I was very adamant: "Let me study for two years and let me find out what it is". Then I kind of convinced him, "Oh I work in the hospital, in the laboratory, analyzing the samples, estimating cholesterol, glucose, and all kind of thing. Oh he said "Oh, looks like something interesting, then I went for uh a biochemistry, a masters in biochemistry

N: Mhm

M: But, at that time there was not much job opportunity for biochemist, a whole hospital need one analyst, they don't a masters in biochemistry, they can hire some HLC, I mean some high school kid, and train them to do it, so I'm kind of stuck there, except I got some teaching job in a local college, I started doing some teaching. But I thought that life is not just teaching, there must be more than that. Then I decide, then I looked around and they said "Oh you can do a Ph. D in biochemistry and you can do research and you can invent things and all those things." I said okay let me do that. Then I asked, "What do you do after that"? "Oh, you can be employed in a government laboratory and kind of thing." Ok, then I took, went for graduate school...and uh it was little struggle, like a struggle in the sense I don't know what I'm doing and I don't know whether to apply for it...and at that time, luckily, one of the best college in India, southern part, it is called Christian Medical College, Vellore.

N: Mhm

M: Still it have a very high reputation for turning out uh medical graduates. If you are a product, alumnae of CMC, they really look up on it. So, I applied there...I don't know how it worked out, I mean it is right place and right time, whatever it is. Even though it's highly competitive, they called me for an interview. And they went for an interview, they interviewed like three or four candidate. Fortunately, I know somebody, in the, who is working there who is the classmate of one of my professor. Then I went and when I went for an interview I met him, I talked to him...No, before interview I went a couple of days earlier and I talked to him. He kind of gave me really good pointers, these are the things you need to know.

N: Mhm

M: Then I prepared, in fact I stayed in his room, but he told me it is a conflict of interest, don't tell anybody kind of thing. Then I thought, fine, and I went for an interview and it worked out okay, then they kind of uh admitted me to do the graduate school. Then I went to graduate school, then I realized if you finished your biochemistry, there is a high demand in western countries, like Australia, British, and uh... so all the people who ever finished biochemistry, they took what they call post-doctoral fellowship in one of the universities in one of the uh American university or Canadian university, London, all those things. Then I said okay, I was in back of my mind, even I was little nervous, how do I leave this country and go somewhere else? My English is so poor, I don't what the culture is, I heard all kind of things, pizza and all, I'm little bit worried about that. But...fortunately our laboratory was funded by one of the leading research agency called Wellcome Research Foundation...actually in fact my fellowship was coming from London from that money and my project was going okay, but I got kind of stuck in uh 3rd year of my project. I could not pursue it further. The reason is we don't have enough equipment or facility to do some kind of a sample analysis. At that time, and our department

head, he said uh why don't we collaborate with UK laboratory and then do the research, get up the research project. Then they decided they got some research funding for that...my mentor my supervisor he first went and spent like one, one and a half year, and then he tried to do the research project, but unfortunately he's not a bench person, he's more administrative and guiding the research project and he went there and he missed a very minute point in the experiments I think. He could not succeed, the project didn't go anywhere, he came back empty handed, oh the analyzing sample is very difficult, we could not do anything, we kind of stuck. Then our head of the division turn around, why don't we take us, why don't we send Manu to few months and see anything if he get out of it, that's good, if he don't get out, he can come back and finish up some other experiment and submit for PhD thesis.

N: Mhm

M: Then they arranged me a fellowship and then at that time we have like an STD kind of telephone thing and I called my parents, my dad, Daddy guess what? They are arranging to go for London [laughs] my father almost got a kind of heart attack, "Ah! You are going to London? When are you coming back?"

[N&M laugh]

M: I understand his dilemma because I'm the eldest son and that financially I will help him a little bit.

N: Mhm

M: But even though whatever fellowship I was getting, I was helping...but by the meantime he was transferred to Bombay he was working for a telephone company, I mean not a telephone company, telephone company owned by the federal government in India, central government, he's working as the accounts officer for the telephone, so he was in Bombay at that time...and then finally, eventually, fall into places, they arranged me a fellowship and then I went to London. That was my first exposure to Western country, everything was brand new to me. I was so scared and so nervous, but fortunately there was one person from Christian Medical College went there and he was living there. He came to the airport, tried to settle me down and uh... then I worked in a Geist hospital and Welcome Research Laboratory.

N: Mhm

M: And the my colleagues and my professor was really good, really with open arm they welcomed me, they arranged me to settle down everywhere and uh...then that was where it started. Even though initially I was scared, within a matter of 3 or 4 weeks, except I get used to that, that uh except the food wise, I was suffering, I could not eat there...just without salt or without any spices.

[N laughs]

M: At that time, again lot of place in this place I think.

N: Mhm

M: There was a one Indian woman working in our department as a laboratory dietitian, her name is Kokilla Patel, and she, they're settled down for long time ago. Then she, one day she asked me, so are you, how are you managing? I said oh okay, I don't know what I'm eating, I'm just eating bread and jelly and burger bread. They said, oh okay, we have relatives, they are living in London, they have one house here, they want to rent out one room, you need to take care of the house, do you willing to do it? I said okay that's fine, but I don't have a car or anything...No don't worry about it, it is not far away from the train station, so you can live there, Then I moved to their house and I got little bit foredom, freedom. Then I started exploring the story...to cut the story short, that is where I am first learning my cooking and my before that, I didn't even know how to make coffee.

[N chuckles]

M: I learned cooking, and though I explored London, it developed a lot of confidence in me

N: Mhm

M: Not only that, I was managed to successfully complete the research project, everybody was so happy there. Then we are at the end of the research project, we could not finish, they extended my period another 6 months

N: Mhm

M: So I stayed like one year there and finished up the project and went back...and then, after that, it is kind of a regular thing, I finished the rest of the experiment, I finished my thesis

N: Mhm

M: And they asked me whether the division asked me, do you like to go to the same laboratory again as a post-doctoral, I said that's fine.

N: Mhm

M: Then they kind of, something happened, some bureaucratic thing happened, the project grant was not approved, it was delayed or something.

N: Mhm

M: By the meantime, one of my friend, one of my classmate who did similar biochemical research in another institution called Central Food Technological Research Institute in Mysore

N: Mhm

M: He came for post-doctoral fellowship in Cleveland, Ohio. He said, oh we have a lot of research funding here, do you like to come here? Then I send my resume and what they call CV, and my letter telling I finishing my Ph. D in India, I'm like to do explore the possibility of doing some research in um biochemical area, biochemistry. One of the professors responded me, oh

you can come and in our laboratory for two years or something. Then I send my CV to him. By the meanwhile, I haven't got my Ph. D yet, this still under the process, and he said oh we can offer you post-doctoral fellowship, you need a Ph. D. I said that's fine, I'll wait. And I don't know what happened, he turned around and wrote me again, you can tenta-, you can come and join our laboratory tentatively as a research assistant until you get your Ph. D, after that you can be working as a post-doctoral fellowship. I said that's fine, okay. That was my first break coming to the United States. And you want me to continue further, my life in United States, you want me to stop over there?

N: Well, I, I have some questions.

M: Ok

N: Just about, the whole story that you've given so far, moving between high school all the way to moving to America for that first Cleveland position

M: Mhm

N: Um, so, I, I feel like, so you were, you were, you mentioned earlier that early in your childhood you thought of America as being a very highly civilized, highly refined sort of countr-, or the Western world to be all these sorts of things-

M: Yea, yea

N: When you were younger in your childhood.

M: My impression was all the Western especially American people are very smart, extremely smart people...

N: Mhm

M: They are highly technologically savvy people, they invent things, they do highly...coming from India, India has progressed really well in the past 20 30 years

N: Mhm

M: But still that...the relig-...I, I cannot say religious belief...people believe in things, whenever's good and bad, they need to listen to the leaders or elder people. Whatever they say, you should not question them, you need to take it

N: Mhm

M: There are a lot of things being done in India...which doesn't make sense. You don't know the meaning why you are doing. If you ask them, oh you are not supposed to ask such things, your grandfather did it. Your father did, you're supposed to do it.

N: Mhm

M: But later I realized everything has meaning behind it, but it got lost in the history I think.

N: Mhm

M: So one of the hindrance, it was hindrance, now India is progressing well, is like the political and society system...it put you block for your progress, like uh...they don't give the opportunity, telling, oh that is not the way it is being done here, that is not the right way, hey if you die like this, you may get sick, or you may die, or something like that.

N: Mhm

M: So those things I could not agree with really well. I need reason, I need reason if you do something, I need some logic behind it. I know you cannot understand everything in the world, in the nature a lot of things happening without any meaning or without any understanding, we cannot question, oh why the sun is coming in the east, there must be some reason or something

[N laughs]

M: I understand that.

N: Mhm

M: But whatever our human being able to understand, and reason out, this our duty to do that

N: Mhm

M: That's what I think.

N: Mhm

M: But if you deny that things, society will not progress, you are going in circles, you believe in belief and uh...so, but, at the time I thought, oh these Western countries, they're logic and...

N: Mhm

M: They have a reason to do everything, that's one of the reason for me. That's my opinion.

N: Right, and that was, that was from the exposure that your dad had given you and from like your general exposure...

M: Not only my dad, it is whole society

N: Right

M: My uncle, my grandfather, my neighbor...

N: Ah

M: My father's relative, my mother's friend, my...

N: Yeah

M: Everybody, the whole society is like that.

N: Right

M: So that is-

N: Right, I was, I was speaking more towards what your, why you believed America was as different from what you believed India was at the time

M: Oh yeah, if, you touch really good point which I forgot to tell you.

N: Mmm

M: I was in elementary school, I don't recall when it was...there was one newspaper, there was a big news, American scientists sending human being to the moon.

N: That happened, and you were in elementary school at the time.

M: Mhm

N: Ooooooh

M: Big news! Very big news! They are sending human being to moon, they are going to walk on the moon. It was like shocking. Moon is equal to god in Hindu belief at that time.

N: Right

M: It is Chandra-mama, what they call, they are so many songs about it, they are so many things. I said, how can you do that? It is god's place, human beings cannot go there. That is not possible. Then, the thing can't progressed, or what happened, I was in, still I really remember well I think. It was in school. That day the school, they did not teach anything, they did not do anything, they turned on the All India Radio. All India Radio means it was one of the radio program

N: Public radio.

M: Yea. All the kids, like 30 40 kids gathered around the radio, listening about the live radiocast of the Apollo 11 I believe, going to the moon and how this Neil Armstrong and Ben Carlins I think? They detached their thing from the rocket to...went to the moon, how they landed on the moon, and how the Neil Armstrong put his foot on the moon. That was really turning point I think, which now I look back, that was one of the good thing.

N: Mhm

M: Then not only that and in the Indian newspaper, they were coming, oh if you want the picture of the Neil Armstrong and Ben Carlins and another person...I...I sorry, I forgot this-

N: Buzz Aldrin?

M: Yea. There are three people went to the moon.

N: Mhm

M: One person stayed back in the mothership-

N: Right

M: -other rocket. Two person got into the tiny one and went down.

N: Mhm

M: And uh two of them got down and got on the moon, but Neil Armstrong was the first person, that I really remember well

N: Mhm

M: He put his foot...I think it is US Embassy or somebody, if you write to them. They will send the picture of it. Then I wrote to them in a regular mailing thing, can you please send me the picture of it? At the time, I don't even know how to write proper English.

[N chuckles]

M: Somehow I send it and put my home address into that and send it to them

N: How old were you at the time?

M: I think I am 8 years old...or 9 years old.... or I don't...this 19-

N: 2nd or 3rd standard?

M: When is it? 1964, am I right? When was, 67? When the moon was, by they landed?

N: I think-

M: You can check in google later, and find out

[N laughs]

M: So at the time, maybe, in the early middle school era or something...then I forgot about overnight or...I was, I was a kid, was playing and...

N: Mhm

M: And one day there was a big envelope came.

[N laughs]

M: My mother was panicked.

[N laughs]

M: Oh something came to my Manohar's name, I don't know what it is, it is a big envelope, they ask me to write a signature, I refused to do it

[N laughs]

M: Then my father went to the post office, he used to work in a post office so he knows how they...hey what is that, and they said United States Embassy, they are sending something. My father also didn't know, why they send me, send you something. Then anyway they got it, let us open it, there was a picture of this big, beautiful color picture.

N: Mhm

M: At that time we had an old time black and white camera with all this blurry picture, it was so sharp...and oh Mano, then he asked me, why they send it to you? Oh no I wrote to them. Oh did you? Then I look at the picture. It was so beautiful. I don't know what happened to that picture, we moved around a lot in India, it got lost, anyway.

N: Mmm

M: This all the impression I got about America. The difference between where I was and what all the things happening...this are all the small, small things when I...when I look back, it is a small, small thing that add up in our mind, and fortunately I fall into right place in right time, happened to like science and technology, that American people need at that time, which I don't have a clue about that

N: Mmm

M: I am really interested in science and technology

N: Mmm

M: That was the reason. So I was doing science and technology, I learned a lot of things, and I don't believe in, I need to reason to follow any instruction, in India it was not provided

N: Right

M: Those kind of things. Everything added effect, I was, that is the fact I learned

N: Yea. So of course you had like a really great impression of America growing up in your earlier life.

M: Uh huh

N: When you entered into grad school and coming to America was becoming more and more a reality, especially when you'd gone to London...after you'd gone to London and you'd heard from your friend about the job in Cleveland...what, had your perceptions of America or what you knew about America changed or grew up until that time? Or did you still have a similar perception of America as you had had as a younger child?

M: Let me understand your question right. My understanding about United States of America, the day I landed in United States.

N: Mhm

M: And my understanding right now talking to you

N: Mmm

M: You want to know the difference between these understanding?

N: I was, I'm trying to sort of get to...if your perception changed between when you were a young child, ordering that photo, to when you were deciding whether or not you wanted to move to Cleveland and immigrate away.

M: Yea, let me step back a little bit. Even when I got an opportunity for coming to Cleveland

N: Mmm

M: I never made a decision, okay I am done with India, I am going to United States. I'm never coming back

N: That was never the intention.

M: No. This a exploratory voyage, what is what...

N: This was just a job

M: No, this is just uh....when I think back it is uh, young people like college kids make uh...they make all kind of decision, it may be a stupid mistake, it may be an emotional mistake, it is a combination of everything. It may be stupid, emotional, adventurous, running away from home decision.

N: Mhm

M: Not running away from home decision....like uh, you are restricted in a house, you are supposed to do things which I am not really keen on those things

N: Mhm

M: So I...that is the only thing. In my back of my mind, I have always think that I will go back to India.

N: When you first came?

M: When I first came. Not only when I first came...after...then if you ask any immigrant, any legal immigrant in this country, they will tell you once you got to the country, it is not like they handed you a job and a United States citizenship and you can go and buy car and buy house and live happily. It is like, you need to earn everything.

N: Mhm

N: When you come to United States, there are different category of Visas you need to get. First you need to get a work permit, and you need to get exchange visitor visa. They used to call J 1 visa, I don't know what they are calling now.

N: Mhm

M: That is means...J 1 visa means training somebody in highly skilled manner. After certain period of time, they should go back to the country, and serve the country for a few years before they come to United States again. It is called...so when I got a fellowship that was that kind of arrangement

N: Mhm

M: I learn a few things in United States research laboratory and go back to India and help the Indian government or whatever to do those kind of...that is in paper. In reality, what happens is, people come here, they get trained in highly sophisticated instrument, when they go back, they can't do anything there.

N: Cuz the instruments-

M: There is no infrastructure.

N: Mhm

M: You run a, for example, if you know chemistry or biochemistry or something, like a nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, NMR, or mass spectroscopy...highly sensitive instruments where you bombard the atoms and take a picture or whatever.

N: Mhm

M: I'm putting in a very crude, layman's way

N: Mhm

M: And uh, you learn that, and what we go and do in India, they don't even have a regular pipette to pipette. The liquid transfer to transfer liquid from one container to another container...so that is the reality of it

N: So there's a serious glass ceiling

M: There is an understanding between these two things.

N: Mhm

M: So the Indian government knew really well, I mean....so what they used to do, they used to provide a waiver certificate for you.

N: Mmm

M: That means, okay, Doctor Manohar went to the United States for training, but we don't need his service to our country, if he decided to stay back, he is free to stay back...so I got all this document and everything...and uh...the decision was ok, let me for few, couple of years and see how things are going

N: Mhm

M: But what happened each time after couple of years, new opportunity thing. Like for example, when I was in Cleveland, I didn't have a post-doctoral fellowship, I was working as a research assistant, I didn't have a Ph. D, but I used to work in one research study called the anti-accident enzyme or whatever.

N: Mhm

M: That project was running in University of Vermont, University of Vermont by one professor...and one of my friend told me, hey they are doing a project related to your work, why don't you contact the professor? Then I contacted the professor, oh yea we have a [coughs] excuse me...we have a research funding, we need somebody to carry out the research project

N: Mhm

M: Then I send my resume, they called for an interview, they actually paid for my flight ticket and everything. I was so excited, oh god, they are paying for everything, that is cool! Then I went, at the University of Vermont I started doing the project, by the meantime I was getting little old and my parents were asking when are you settling down, what's your plan kind of thing.

N: How old were you then?

M: Maybe around 27 or 28 at the time

N: Okay

M: So those kind of thing. Then I said, okay, this is like a usual Indian custom, like I didn't bother to look for a girl or anybody...they kind of went for arranged marriage, and we know the family and everything, my uncle's knows them really well.

N: Mhm

M: That kind of, uh...my current wife, they contact her family and they ask me whether, are you willing to visit India and talk to girl or talk to her family...I said what the heck, within one hour I'm not going to decide anything, you guys arrange for an engagement, that's fine with me.

N: Mhm

M: Then I from Cleveland I went to the...went back to India to visit for two things. One is to defend my thesis, Ph. D thesis, I need to get rid of public very well, and all this examination process. I did that, and I went to uh...I went my home and told them, okay you can go ahead about the marriage, I'll come back later or something, I went...then by the meantime, the University of Vermont fellowship came through, so I went to the University of Vermont

N: Right

M: And then I stayed there one, one and a half hour, and then went back to India, got married, and uh...once I got married I told my wife, I don't know what I'm doing, maybe I'll stay about a couple of years and maybe we can go back to India. Ok that's fine...she doesn't have a....she's a typical Indian girl, they...she was listening to her parents so far

N: Mhm

M: She had never made her own decisions so far in her life. And uh she said, okay, whatever you said that's fine with me. And we got marr-, we went back to Bangalore where we got married,

my wife came, joined with me...not joined with me, I came then, later she came joined when we were in University of Vermont...and she was a veterinary doctor and I asked her what you want to do, she said oh if I don't find the veterinary practic- medicine is really good for me, I want to do something else. And I ask her, what do you want to do? Oh I can work in the laboratory as a microbiologist or something. Okay go ahead. And then she was doing small volunteer job here and there and we were at the University of Vermont.

N: Mhm

M: At that time, the research funding got restricted and we had a hard time getting money kind of thing...then I thought it may not be a good idea to stay in Vermont for long time...I like to apply for a....then I thought about what should I do, should I go back to India or stay back? Then I thought, ok, let me try for any fellowship in one of the good university, if I get it, I will stay back or I will go back. By the time, I don't know, luck plays again, in Harvard Medical School, I just sent one my applications, one of the professor called, send me a letter, oh we have a research project, do you want to spend one or two years here? Then I said oh, it is Harvard, how can I go and survive there, it seems to be a really big deal to me. And one of my, a couple of my friends were working in Harvard, they ask me, oh all you need to do is put up a hard work, it's not a big rocket science. Then I thought, okay if I go to universi- Harvard Medical School, maybe I will have a better opportunity or something. Then I went to the Harvard Medical School, I was working in immunology and cancer research kind of thing. So that is how it pro-, again I postponed my decision, okay let me finish my fellowship, alright?

N: Mhm

M: And then we'll make a decision. I finished my fellowship, and at the time I thought I would apply for some faculty position and then go back to India. Spend couple of years and, as a faculty, you go back, you get to get a job maybe better. Then I started applying and really good opportunity came from University of Utah, they want me like a junior faculty there to work on one of the research project. Then I said okay, let me go and find out...by the meantime being in Salt Lake City, Utah, the immigration process was so easy there because there is not many immigrant.

N: Oh, okay

M: And so they...within a matter of like uh two years I was managed to get what they call a green card through my job. I mean, all I did was to go through one of the attorney, and he made sure every papers are right.

N: Mhm

M: And we got a green card. Once you get a green card, it is almost like getting mini-jackpot, you don't have through all this bureaucratic immigration process, you are set for your...so far you are like to stay here, you can stay here.

N: Mhm

M: If you want to go back, you can go back. Return your green card and go back

N: You get the freedom.

M: Yeah, you get absolute freedom.

N: Mhm

M: So then I said okay, let me stay back some more time...so that's what happened. By the meantime, my first son was born...that's you.

[N laughs]

M: And it was 1994, and then being in Salt Lake City, having a family, I'm not sure. Now we are having a green card, my mind has changed. Why should I go back right now to India because I have all the freedom here?

N: Yeah.

M: And again I got another good chance at University of Pennsylvania, one of the Ivy League school, one of the highly prestigious laboratory, as faculty position, junior faculty.

N: Wow.

M: And I had a independent, very independent hand to run a project. I can hire students and I can hire lab technicians, I can do whatever I want, only restriction, it has to be within the mucus immunology area.

N: Mhm

M: Then I jumped on to it, I didn't even think about second chance. That is the best place to raise family I think. Then at that time I kind of changed my mind, let me live in Philly area and I can visit India, help them out kind of thing, because I got my green card and I got my decent job and I got my child here...then, things were after that, they, we, University of Pennsylvania's pretty good.

N: Mhm

M: I spend like 7 or 8 years I think and work wise I am very happy, and then...okay, let me buy a house, then I bought my first house there. By the meantime we got our second child, a daughter, and then I stayed back at University of Pennsylvania, thinking okay I may stay back over there. Then it is not a tenured position, after a certain time, you need either move up to tenured position or you need to go for a faculty somewhere or something like that.

N: Mhm

M: Then at that time, already finished, what, like 11 years in this country.

N: Yea

M: 11 to 12 years...so I am eligible to apply for a United States citizenship.

N: Mhm

M: Then I thought, okay, alright...I didn't want to, I could have gotten a faculty, a decent faculty position in one of the Midwest area or southern area or something, but I didn't want to move to some remote area, I like to live in some big metropolitan area.

N: On the East coast.

M: Uh, yea, that is another thing. When I was in Salt Lake City, I had a lot of free time on my hand, not free time...It is kind of a...I have some time, I have to agree.

N: Relaxed work environment.

M: Yea like uh, weekends I don't go to work, there are other people helping to do the research experiment.

N: Mhm

M: I used to watch all the American history and all the state history kind of thing

N: Mhm

M: Being an immigrant at the time, I thought Salt Lake City, I don't have to tell anybody, it is a very good place, people are very helpful, very friendly...but, we are immigrant, we are minority there.

N: Mhm

M: And there is nobody there to associate my issues to anybody...all by, this all by own.

N: Right

M: Especially when you have a child...when the kid goes to school, I don't want my s-, ki-, children to be some odd apple among oranges or something

N: Mhm

M: So that's the reason. Then I started traveling a little bit...I mean um...none of my friend traveled as much I did in this country. I went to California, I went southern Cali/United States, I went to east coast. Somehow I felt comfortable in east coast, west coast is very comfortable...

N: Mhm

M: But uh monetary wise, I thought Philadelphia area, Baltimore area maybe better.

N: Mhm

M: Then I started exploring this University of Pennsylvania opportunity...I didn't even thought twice, then I moved over. Then I uh...to move further, I got my green card already, I'm eligible to get a citizenship, I have a very good qualification.

N: Mhm

M: I can easily get a faculty position or I can work as a scientist in industry...so I thought uh I thoug-, at that time it didn't, I didn't want to go back to India or something like that.

N: Mhm

M: My idea was, okay, spend some more time here...get my knowledge, make some money in fact, and go back and settle down in India...that was my thought. Then I applied for a...but I didn't apply for citizenship for a long time...I was in a dilemma...uhhh should I become a US citizenship or not.

N: Mhm

M: Because we don't have dual citizenship, we need to give up our Indian passport. I...I didn't make a-, I should have got the citizenship a long time but I kept postponing and postponing and postponing.

N: Why were you postponing?

M: Because I didn't want to give...to be honest with you, I didn't want to give up my Indian passport.

N: Cuz you always thought you might...

M: Go back.

N: You might go back.

M: Yea, may go back.

N: Mhm

M: And I like to have a voting, even though I didn't vote all the time, I should be a part of Indian government selection, that is what I thought.

N: So being a citizen and voting for your elected government was important.

M: Yea, that is what at the time I thought, that is why I didn't do it.

N: Mhm

M: Then progressively, I used to visit India one...once in a two years or once in a three years on top of that. One time, I was flying back, I thought about that, and then I forget about the Indian real society when I was living there. Whenever I go back, it reminded me, all this bureaucracy and belief and all those things.

N: Things you dislike about-

M: I don't like...even in my whole family they kind of do follow things...

N: Mhm

M: Without any thing...and it is always give a weightage to the money kind of thing...which I realized when I was coming back...why am I holding on to that Indian things so hard? Of course, India, I was born here, they gave us education

N: It was your home

M: Home. But they didn't give education, I grabbed it...

N: Mhm

M: Because I was interested to study...I never was one of my elementary classmates, driving auto rickshaw, driving a cab, having a small shop in the street corner, I could have been one of them, am I right?

N: Absolutely

M: Why I'm here? My father didn't like it. My mother didn't like to come. It is my own effort. Then I...this country gave me the opportunity to work here...why I'm holding on to it? That is what I thought. Okay, I don't want to give up India completely at the time, but still I can help India, in a way, whenever possible. Let me go further. I came back and I applied for citizenship. It came through. And then I thought, okay, instead of working in a faculty, doing some research, small research for them, let me work in one of the federal agency, where it impact the whole United States, the whole world.

N: Mhm

M: I was exploring different government agency, like uh...to me I am interested more in medical field. I was exploring National Institute of Health and Food and Drug Administration...again luck played role and the Food and Drug administration, they have a temporary, I mean tenured, not tenured, they call it term appointment. They have a opportunity for a regular entry scientist. So I applied it, I got it, I came for an interview. Until that point, I didn't have any desire to move out of Philadelphia. I thought I am going to settle down there. But when the opportunity came, I could not deny. But at the same time I didn't move right away. I told my wife, "Let me go and work there for a few months and see how it works. And then we can decide. Then I came and joined in Food and Drug Administration and started working. I kind of uh, even though there were bureaucratic, other issues are there, I see a lot of opportunities here. Even though I didn't have a permanent position, I am confident, down the road I am going to get one.

N: Mhm

M: So I thought, let me stick around here...but at the same time I don't want the risk of selling the house and moving whole family to a really highly expensive area

N: Mhm

M: And it will get into some kind of limbo...once these things didn't work out, then again I'm in the street

N: Mhm

M: Uh...so I told my wife, let me go and we'll see what's happening. I started commuting, commuting not every day, but weekly I'll come here, rented a room, and started working. At the time, my son was in elementary school, first grade and second grade, my daughter was in...kindergarten? Maybe? Yea...my wife was trying to change her career to information technology...she is studying. And she kind of stressed out, taking care of two kids at...taking care of home. I come in the weekend, clean up the room, and go back again...that she was really upset with that. She kind of told me, either you come back here or I'm moving there. Then I said, what are you talking about, we bought a house only two years ago, we cannot sell it, we have to get into lease or something. She said adamantly no, I cannot do it anymore, you make up a decision, otherwise one day I'm going to hide in your car trunk, when you are driving to DC, leave the kids at home, I'll be with you

[N laughs]

M: I got a little...she's not going to do it, but I understand what her point is. She came from a well to do, middle class family and her father...her father is a very hard working man, my father in law...he is like me, he is a man of-, he born as a son of a agriculturist, he worked in a land in a remote area, he went to school, by what I heard, by biking ten miles per day to the elementary school

N: Wow

M: And you need to cross the river I believe...so he would cross the river carrying the bicycle on his head and go to the other side and go. That's such a hardworking man. He made it in Bangalore, he married a girl in Bangalore, and he raised a family. He knows the value of that, but he got a really good position in Veterinary Agriculture University. What he thought he made a mistake...not a mistake, but he gave his family very protected life, provided everything. They have a servant, they have a government vehicle to go around...so my wife doesn't know what is challenge, and what is difficult. Food is there, transport is there, happily going to college and come back. She got admission through the influence into the veterinary medical school. She studied, as soon as she studied she got a decent paying job there...her, she didn't even give a penny to the family, all money she was spending...so she was having a happy life. And after came here, it is...America you know, it is...you need to work...work is the number one thing here.

N: Mhm

M: Without labor work, you cannot survive in this country, and I could afford only so much. I could not afford to have a servant in my home...or a vehicle at my home with a driver or all those things. But she didn't occur to her, so she is kind of, these kind of thing...

N: Mhm

M: Anyway, so she doesn't want to take care of family on her own...then I don't know what to do, I was thinking and thinking and thinking, one time I thought okay, let me quit my job, go back to university. Then I thought, this is a good opportunity, why should I lose it? Then I thought, let me move to Philad-... D.C. area and maybe we can rent a house for a one year or two year. And then...then I thought it, that seems that to be a very good decision...then I found fortunately the same realtor who sold our house, I naively ask her, I am going to move to Maryland area, can you take care of the house, rent it out, and kind of thing. I don't know any legal issue or financial issue or other kind of thing. She was very, Oh, oh no don't worry, we will take care of it. Then okay, then we rented a home here and we moved over here and again is it a good or bad, I don't know after one year, they wanted to, the house we are renting, they wanted to sell it to somebody.

N: Mhm

M: I was thought, oh with these small kids, I don't want to move. Let me try to buy the house, even though I didn't have any money at the time. And I took all the money which I used to save for retirement or anything...I took that money, I scrapped here and there and I put down the down payment and bought the house here. Then you know, you are now grown up now, things how it worked out...I was hanging in Food and Drug Administration, one job after another, one project after another, even though I didn't get a permanent position for a while.

N: Mhm

M: But I was happy what I'm doing, I thought I should not worry about a job too much because in this country, nobody's job is permanent.

N: Mhm

M: All my friends were so focused to get decent job and I was focusing on raising family. Oh job will come one day...so I kind of uh...is it a good decision or bad decision or I don't know, I spending enough time with my family, make the kids are getting a good education, whatever I could do, and provide whatever my wife needed, house and kind of thing...then it was almost 9 or 10 years now, then...kids are grown up, they finished high school, you are in college now, daughter is almost going to finish...and again the luck plays a role, now I changed my job in one of the leading food safety institution, it is supposed to be a government position, I will know within a matter of a year or something...then I see a lot of opportunity to moving up, but still I didn't forget the India in back of my mind, how I'm going to help it. This position may help because this is the money we are getting from the federal government for agricultural...not necessarily research, it is for extension and education, as its related to food safety area...food safety area, it's a broad aspect, it is including providing decent food to the people. So what in back of my mind I'm thinking is, I can branch out to international program, get uhh money from

United States as well as the World Health Organization and help people back over there....and that kind of opportunity provided by the United States, I don't think any other country can provide that.

N: Mhm

M: So, still I can voucher for United States.

N: Mhm. That's great. You mentioned when you were talking about moving from Philadelphia to Maryland that uh mom wasn't, she wasn't as super equipped to stay at home, take care of the kids, like all that kind of stuff, right? Um...I guess when you were first deciding on getting married, when you were around 27, 28 years old, your parents were asking you, hey when are you going to settle down, like you started this whole career in America, when are you gonna start making a family or whatever. Um...why...why did you decide to get an arranged marriage with someone back in India who wasn't...wasn't aspiring or wasn't, you know, planning their, planning to come to America themselves...or hadn't had that uh...

M: I didn't understand your question, I mean....you need to spell it well out.

N: Right so...yea...so um....I guess instead of seeking a spouse or seeking someone who is already in America, once you'd already moved here, um...or someone who was planning to move to America, I guess why...why did you decide that it would, it would work out better had you just got an arranged marriage in India?

M: No, you cannot blame it on uh arranged marriage or anything.

N: Mhm

M: First of all, I am not equipped to marry a woman raised in this country because I'm a fresh immigrant from other country, what you call fresh off the boat am I right, F.O.B, whatever

N: Mhm

M: Even though I am educated, I am educated in biochemistry, not educated in society or whatever...I know pretty well that it will take a while for me to get...not...you know when, my story...I never thought about staying back here.

N: Right

M: I'm always thinking about going back.

N: Right

M: And at that case, if I marry a woman or girl from this country, what's going to happen?

N: That's almost the same as getting a citizenship...you end up settling there.

M: Yeah. There are, you need to, not only, generally you generalizing immigrant...immigrants are different from each country.

N: Mhm

M: Some countries they don't have a food, they just run away from their country.

N: Right

M: They came for asylum.

N: Mhm

M: And some countries, they are okay, but they want political system or whatever... for my, in category, from India, India don't people run away to...to other country, they go to make their life prosperous.

N: Mhm

M: Better than what they have. Most of them are educated or business people.

N: Mhm

M: Nobody there like uh...we have a problem, but most them don't like come here for food.

N: Mhm

M: Most of them come here for higher education...

N: Mhm

M: Or higher businesses...expanding the business, those kind of people only come here.

N: Right

M: That is one thing you need to uh...differentiate between them.

N: Mhm

M: Why I'm coming to that means, there are some individual they make up their mind, even in India itself, not necessarily in any other country...okay let me go to the country I'm going settle down, let me find out the way how to do it...so they pre-planned, they come here

N: It's calculated.

M: Calculated. They try to find a spouse, they try to find an employer.

N: Mhm

M: Whatever the means, they don't go through the proper channel, any way they like, they marry and they get citizenship then divorce, those kind of thing.

N: Right

M: Those kind of...I am not in that category, you know what I'm telling? I came for adventure, simple adventure.

N: Mhm

M: Higher education or some higher opportunity, I always go back that is one thing, that is the reason, and not only me, all my colleagues, my friends all...you should not categorize like arranged marriage and other marriage or something, there is always a risk in marriage...whatever you do, there is a risk involved. No two individuals are not same. You know...it may take a few years maybe. Even the kids born to the same parents, they lived in the same house, they went to the same school, they are different. Their thinkings are different. Their motivations are different.

N: They're two different individuals.

M: Yea. The whole idea is, you put your ideas and motivation together, you make it work.

N: Mhm

M: And uh...that is...even sometimes you may be a North Pole and South Pole, if you understand each other, it will work really well.

N: Mmm

M: I can use your strength for my advantage...

N: Mhm

M: And you can my strength for your advantage. And my weakness, you try to cover it up. Whichever you don't like it, you try to come to the middle ground, that is the way it works. It can be like a two, well suited person or something. It is a negotiation process. Every day is a negotiation. Get up in the morning, 'do I make the coffee,' 'are you making the coffee?' This is an example.

N: Right, right.

M: So, in general, when somebody come here for higher education. They go back to get married. The parents arrange it. The parents put their best to find a suitable person for you. And usually it happened to my friend's place, the spouses, they are inclined to come to this country. They try to, explore the thing. And for example, (mumbling) they come here as a medical doctor or as soon as they come they just jump into the, the medical board exam. They study really hard, get their qualification and start the profession. I know doctors, I know dentists, I know like a

pharmacists, I know pharmacologists, but in your mother's, in my wife's case, she lacks I should not blame her, I think it's her own personality, nothing wrong with that, she was an easy going woman. She doesn't have a big motivation on her. 'Okay, I am grown up now, I have to live somewhere I have to get married, there is no other choice.' In fact she told me, one time, she was a little old in the marriage game, 28 or something I don't know exactly, her mother tried to through her innocence, whatever they tried to arrange a marriage, she refused to do it or whatever, I don't know the history. If you do like this we cannot take you for, we cannot take forever, you will find an old rich man, (pause) alright?

N: Yeah

M: Cause when you get, in India when you pass 30 years old it's really difficult for girls to get married. Now it is changing. But another time. There's a time, if we cannot find a groom for you, and we need to find some other, now in India it's not diverse. Those kind of old people they need some kind of company or something. You need to look for it. She got scared at the time. At the time, my parents proposed the marriage, she agreed. My thinking is she want the escape from the that situation. She didn't care where she's going, what she's getting into. That's what my understanding is. But I don't blame her, I mean we, she, it's okay for her too. But all I like her to do is, she needs her own interest to do something, in this country especially. If it is come other country, it's okay, I cook for my kids, and I will clean up the house. She's still trying to find out what is her real passion, what she wants to do. But it most other places, in my friend's cases, because they went and married a girl, arrangement is not like some strangers.

N: Right

M: Something like oh I find a girl something like that let me go talk to her parents or something. But you know we know her family they know our family really well. My uncle, know, my father and mother several years, they always making common things like marriages and funerals. It is not something they... they know my wife and the childhood. She's really a nice person, she's really sincere, whatever she wants to do she do it perfectly. Only thing she lacks is the driving force. In this country you need that. That's what's my strong belief. If you don't have a driving force you cannot succeed..... whether it's the right decision or wrong decision, that's sort of a second debate. The first debate is okay I want to do this. Not like I want to be a United States president, small baby steps, small goals. Okay in three months, I want to finish this whatever education, okay I finished it. Let me go and gain some experience in sixth months. Go and find some opportunity to get the next one. Oh, I don't like this. Let me change my career. Try different one.

N: Right

M: Then sometime it comes, oh 'this is what I want to do.' Go do it, not like blaming somebody 'Oh I'm raising kids, I don't have the time.' Those are all excuses, that's what I think. So, what your perception is kind of not right that's, what I'm telling you, because like you go and get married and back in country, it mattered, that's not the case. In your case it may be different, you've grown up here. It may be not a good, smart idea, to go and look for a girl or whatever spouse, you know, village in India. Unless the girl may be a smart, educated, well aware of things. You know what I'm telling?

N: I understand.

M: For my case, that is the only thing you can do. For other situation, I haven't made a decision to stay back here. I always wanted to go back. That is one thing. The second thing is usually when the girls are brought, married a woman here. They know what they are getting into, they have idea about a life, there's some kind of life-

N: Plan something, yeah.

M: You know in your mother's case, that part is missing. That is the only problem. Still we are okay. We are living a decent life here. But what do you call, not really the American dream you know? Like having a mansion, having a Mercedes car, driving around and spending money, those things can't, but those thing won't happen to everybody. You need to work your bottom off. From morning till night. Doesn't matter what profession you are, if you are a doctor you can be in the hospital Mondays 6 o'clock, if you are a lawyer you can study night for next day case. If you mess up three cases, you'll be poor. You know what I mean?

NM: Absolutely.

MMM: You're understand? You will be there till three in the morning, to make things right. You will stay until 10 o'clock, so if you want to succeed, it is possible to succeed, in this country. No doubt about it. But only if you are willing to sacrifice, put hard work. Of course there are additional factors- you know somebody- that helps. The right person, that helps. Networking helps. This all helps a lot but without your knowledge, without your hard work, you cannot do it. Just networking won't help. I scratch your back you scratch my back. Somebody scratch your back, it is your turn to scratch their back, and you don't have anything to scratch back, next time he's not going to scratch your back. So it's a give and take. So bottom line is your knowledge, your motivation, your hard work. What a marriage is I don't know like the back of my hand. So nothing wrong in arranged marriages, there are good things and bad things like marrying and having kids. Before things are different. Once you're married, you need a giant back. You need to do laundry. You need to tackle the taxes. Once you got the kids, you change the diaper. Every day you need to get up and do the things. They solve all the problems. They may look smaller to you, but these are the little things that come to the big picture. So, you never know another person, until you live with them for five years or ten years. So, you cannot look for a girl for around twenty years. Those kind of things, alright? I think I answered your question.

N: No, no absolutely. Uh, just to change gears a little bit, do you remember what your first meal was when you came to America?

M: (pause) Woah. (pause). No, the thing is I am a little bit different from any other fresh immigrant. Because I traveled to United Kingdom.

N: Right, and there's similar foods there.

M: Yeah, well yeah, so which one you want me to tell you? American food or United Kingdom food?

N: Both!

M: United Kingdom I remember really well, because I was traveling from Christian Medical College to London, alright.

N: First time in the western world...

M: First time in the Western World. So, I was going bananas for three months before. I don't what/where. I don't know, I wasn't... I became very nervous. And then to tell you the fact, I don't know what is TV at the time.

N: Really?

M: We don't have a TV. We all dependent on radio at the time.

N: What year was this?

M: When I went to London, '85?

N: 1985 no TV.

M: In India I mean TV was there, I

N: It wasn't a normal thing to have...

M: It was like only super rich can have it.

N: Okay

M: At that time what happened I was in uh doing my graduate study in Case Western University. Where I am staying off campus, we are not allowed to stay on-campus. Because we undergraduate people. But we are allowed to have a meal, in what they call hostel. 8 AM to 8 PM right, they give you breakfast, lunch whatever. Excuse me. Um, but I, when I was about this things are happen with what they call mess, I don't know you can check in the dictionary or something. Meal providing facility. It is not-

N: A cafeteria

M: It is not cafeteria you go and pay money and buy it.

N: Oh okay.

M: It is like you had to be a member, alright? You had to pay a monthly, there was a guy. The menu is as follows: breakfast was this, lunch is this, and the dinner is this. But for our extra lunchtimes, if you buy them they will keep an account. There's a guy sitting with a little pencil and paper, with the big ledger. And they have your name on your own page. Each of the extra, they call them extra, they write it down. So monthly they would give you your bill. So for this

month this is your charge. You pay them. But I cannot, you cannot walk in and be like 'give me a meal' or something. There's no such thing.

N: Okay

M: But I can take some of my friend as a guest. But we need to tell them, this is my guest. He's is going to eat with me, then they will make the charge.

N: Write it down, okay.

M: So, why am I telling you this?

N: Because you were gonna tell me what you're first meal in the UK was.

M: Oh, okay, alright! I guess so. Then, in this mess, they have a big hall, okay, you can go and eat. But also people, it's hot in summer, there is a small, kind of recreational, not recreational exactly. But where they put the magazines, the small board games. Now for the meal. Not necessarily the breakfast usually the lunchtime after dinnertime, people go and hang around there for a half an hour or so. Break room, or read magazine. Why I'm telling you this: in the place, they bought a black and white TV. First time. 1984 or something.

N: This is a year before you're going to leave?

M: Yeah, something like that. But I used to watch- are we done?

N: No, it's okay, keep going.

M: On there it was an on and off kind of thing. But I never sit down and watched. Once this category came, then I thought I should watch something. You and I used to go for movies and I never go to Hollywood, I mean Western movies around. Except some other movies. You have this action kind of. Then I got into start. Okay let me, I remember the show it was "The Odd Couple."

N: Odd couple.

M: Uh-huh. There's a comedian like two different characters, they are roommates, they fight all the time. The odd couple. They're not. I tried to watch I could not understand what they are talking about. I understand here and there. I really panicked oh my god. How am I going to understand this?

N: (laughs)

M: This is going to be a really tricky situation...Anyway I kind of take- what is it, the customer suit and tie and everything. My father was also getting excited, he bought me a fantastic VIP suitcases, that is really expensive one. He bought a suit I think from Bombay. Then I went to Bombay and I packed everything and everybody was so excited- 'He's going to United Kingdom' and other things.

N: First person in your family to leave.

M: Yeah, first person in the family to leave. And then I got in the flight, it is so ironic. I got a very good fellowship they arranged me a, they gave me a flight to connect with them. First class isn't, it's a British Airways. They have some exclusive club class, it is not a first class, it is not a regular class. I guess it was some kind of a business class. They can, so you can go and get water or whatever you like. It is your enjoyment. Uh, stupid me, I don't know anything about that.

N: (chuckles)

M: I was sitting in the chair and the next person an Australian person was sitting. He started to talking to me, I understand a word here and there, and he was telling me something "blah, blah, blah." And then the stewardess came and said, "Would you like to drink anything?" And the British man said "I understand drink." They were drinking something I don't even know the name. Then I said what should I order, if I tell him water he'll tell me I don't know anything fancy. "Orange juice" "Orange juice?" she said. "Yah, orange juice." And she gave me a big glass of orange juice. I could not even finish it and also orange juice like that in India it would be sweet, it was so sour and I could not drink it. Anyway I finished it. And before I came to London, at Christian Medical College there was some doctor doing some kind of fellowship in London, one of the King's hospital or something. Without his family and kids, he went down by himself. My department contacted him he got into some kind of hostel in London. Then he said "Oh, I'll go to the airport and take Manu and I'll ask him to settle down." Then, he came to the airport. Then I got off the flight and my unfortunate thing, I don't know what the security people were thinking but they did the total check on me. I don't know the reason still. They went through my suitcases and everything, and finally I was cleared after 1 and ½ hours my poor friend was waiting outside. And he was having my name on it. And I went there and because in the morning time I really remember well. This morning, this Sunday morning I think. I don't know 10:30 or something, the traffic was very bad. They made all the arrangements so I don't have to. Then first time I got into this, what they call tube, their train. And it was going from the airport to the train, I was so quiet. I was like "oh my god, what is this."

N: Right, compared to Indian train.

M: And then I looked out of the window at this train going so fast, it was sometime in the, when was it, sometime in April in the late spring or middle spring or something. People were hanging in their backyard, they would hang the clothes to dry. Then I thought, "Why are they hanging the clothes in the car." Anyway, then they take me, they took me to the, whatever, hostel. We dragged a couple of suitcases from the tube station to the hostel, and introduced the guy, who was in charge. And he put me as a roommate, and those things. The first day, dinner was, the provide dinner also, even though in the bed and breakfast. They had a provide dinner, and breakfast, lunch on your own. So, I went to the, this dining room. They had a good arrangement, they put your nametag on the table.

N: Oh, wow.

M: Where you're supposed to sit, they keep rotating, so you can meet everybody in the hostel

N: Oh, okay that's really nice.

M: Yeah, okay. And they gave me a choice of eating some menu, one is like, I remember pork, I said "I don't want to eat pork" they said "chicken?" I said "Okay chicken I can eat." I said "give me chicken." They gave me a chicken, I thought they would give me a chicken curry with something else on there, and then what provide me is one piece of chicken on some beans, some potato, one egg or something. But this funny thing, the egg, the boiled egg, they put it on the container, like it was sitting on top of it. And then they give me the fork and the knife. Then I looked at it. Then my table person understood, I'd never eaten or something like that, "oh you just cut it and you eat it." They're all kids, college kids, now I realize

N: Was this an Indian hostile?

M: No, it was run by a Western.

N: Ohhh, and I bet everyone there was white.

M: Yeah, I'm the only Indian there.

N: Oh, wow.

M: Not only white there but from different places one guy from Ireland, one guy from Brazil, one girl from Italy.

N: They're all travelers...

M: No, they are studying something in London.

N: Oh, okay.

M: I was a kind of student there.

N: Right, on fellowship.

M: Yeah, then I cut the chicken somehow I ate it. It was not, gahh, this was my first meal I remember. My next day it is a very funny day. I don't know, like I went to the work, I got sidetracked but coming to the meal... there was a Nigerian woman was in our lab. And she used to bring her own lunch from home or whatever. And my, this British guy, is his name I don't know, Martin, he also packed a sandwich and came. For me, we didn't have a lot of rice and curry or anything. So I said, 'okay, what should I do for lunch.' He said oh I'll take you to cafeteria and buy whatever you want. Then, he took me to the cafeteria and he left me there. Because that is the Western system. I thought he was going to order me something, help me settle down.

N: Sort of hold your hand, yeah.

M: He left. I said "okay, fine, I'll do it myself." I looked at that and I could not find anything Indian. There was no burger or anything. Then I found a fried liver. I thought 'I could do liver.'

N: Oh no.

M: (chuckles). Then they asked me “rarely done” or “well done” or something, I didn’t understand. I said “rarely done.”

N: Ohhh, nooo (laughter).

M: That lunch went really well (chuckles). Then what they did was they put a piece of really, liver. Even I can see some badly cooked, on some kind of vegetable, broccoli or something. And they gave it to me. I looked at it. ‘What is it? I’m supposed to eat this? But I did not want to be like uh, a kind of thing so I said ok I’ll eat it but I could not finish it. I could not, I didn’t like it. Then somehow, then I went home and I was, I would eat the bread, and marmalade, what they call marmalade. And the jelly. That was what I was eating for a few weeks. Until I met this Indian lady. Then I started my own cooking. But you always hear the story is different. One of my friend is living in Cleveland...

N: Right.

M: And he was living with a roommate.

N: Was he the one who told you to come for the fellowship?

M: Yeah, so he took me. So, in London I learned to cook something. That lady taught me to do some small things: how to cook rice, and how to warm a cup of tea and how to make coffee, how to make tea kind of thing. And then the whole house is on me, there’s a full-fledged kitchen.

N: All by yourself.

M: All by myself, I didn’t know the, which luxury I got into yet. And what I luxury it was then. It was a three bedroom single home, all by living by myself. Fully furnished, it had everything. And there I get paid like 35 pounds per week or something like that. But I can prepare my own meal or whatever. Grocery store was not far away, so in the weekend in London I learned a lot. They one thing, Sunday everything was closed. You cannot do anything, you can go for a jog you can go to church. So at the time I was [unintelligible] and I was cooking. So I knew a little bit of cooking when I came here. So my friend took me to his apartment, and because I knew cooking already I started teaching him to cook, kind of. So, America is not that big of a challenge for me, at the time. Because I already know cooking, whatever. In addition, America is better place for food rather than the United Kingdom, London or something. By the time I got exposed to all the burgers, fries, and everything. So I could eat other things, so it was not that much of a change.

N: Gotcha. Well I have two, maybe three, last questions.

M: Sure.

N: So, first of all, what do you think the hardest part of moving to America was for you?

M: (pause) Hardest part. I never thought there was a hardest part. Everything I take it as kind of an adventure. Or a challenge or something. The hardest part is I always focused on my work that may be something that nagged me all the time. Only this VISA issue, I always worried about it. 'Oh my god, what should I do. Should I go back to India? Or should I continue here?' Even though now when I look back, everything fall into places, until you know what you are going to get into, it is a sleepless night. 'Oh my god next January 30 my VISA is expiring, what should I do.' That is one thing that was the hardest part. Somehow we managed to, I worked through that. And the other hardest part I can think is, even though I have the knowledge and experience and education, I could not compete as good as a fellow American. Because their communication, their society is much much better than me, in general.

N: By society you mean the socialization, like their social skills?

M: Yeah, yeah. I don't know the right person, right time, right place. Even though my colleagues and my friends are networking, our networking is with the fellow Indian. Go to the Saturday night birthday party and complain about United States and Indian government, and have a couple of drink, and come back and sleep. That is our networking. We never really assimilated with the American coworkers. We never really networked at that time. We'd like to do it. In professional ways, there are two major issues. One is to prove yourself, you have to be productive. When you focus most on productivity you don't have time for all kind of whatever nonsense and networking, and going somewhere and talking to people. Having lunch, and cup of coffee. Those were all, uh, kind of pulling me back, but I should done that. Other thing is of course, I need to acknowledge that, even though we are bright and intelligent, our education system is different. These people know how to do things, as a society. Like, what do they call [unintelligible]. The American giant is a common cause. They would put the personal agenda a little bit outside. The common cause is important, they'll work together even though they have difference. They work really efficiently, there is a common goal.

N: They have good teamwork?

M: Teamwork. If you put three, I don't want to say immigrant, I know only Indian people. If you put three Indian people, they have their own agenda, then common agenda. Even if they have a common agenda, their personal agenda is much better.

N: They prioritize them higher.

M: Yeah. And if you have three person together, they'll be two political parties. But in America that is not the case. But, because we, because I have been grown up in kind of society, even though I'm much better than any fellow Indian, still I don't learn exactly how to, assimilate to the mainstream people. Even though I can try, I can wear a white shirt and nice tie and a jacket and shoes, and talk with an accent or whatever I try to talk. In the same way it is the other way around too. I don't blame them. American people want to network people similar to them. They don't, only a few people jump on and go. Suppose the three people are there, one American, one Indian and one... they say "hey Pete how are you doing?" They talk about baseball or whatever, vacation they went, their dog, and finally they will talk to you too, "Hey how are you doing, how are you doing?" There's nothing in common to talk. You know? They don't know me.

N: The small talk is limited.

M: Yeah. The only thing they know is your work. Or how is the weather?

N: They only know, yeah.

M: They don't ask me "did you watch baseball yesterday night?" I need to start those conversations. So those were kind of challenges.

N: So you feel like the perception of you being Indian and sort of, as an immigrant, sort of limits the amount of socialization that you got in contact with.

M: I should not blame it on somebody too. It is part on me too. I need to go the extra mile, to do that. But once it start, I had a few good friends there, we talk all nonsense, that's okay. But it takes a while, you know. But those are the hardest things. Major challenges for immigration, there is the job, there is getting to assimilate, but personally I didn't have a motivation to assimilate.

N: Some people do, and you didn't.

M: Right, I didn't. I am, this country is a fantastic country. You can live whatever way you like. I know how to live in this country. I set my boundaries. I am happy with that.

N: That's good. Um, another question I wanted to ask, is that especially since you've moved to America, and especially since you've moved to the DC metro area, there have been more and more south Asian immigrants that have followed, and the population is growing in America, right.

M: No, they are, let me understand your question before you. In America, South Asian population is growing. That is your statement.

N: More people are immigrating to America from India, from when you first immigrated here.

M: After me?

N: Yeah, after you. And it's continuing to grow at a faster rate. Um, how do you feel about it? Do you, especially in the DC metro area with so many Indians now...nowadays you'll go to the gym, go to the grocery mart. It used to be I feel like 10-15 years ago you wouldn't see anyone who was Indian or looked similar to you. Now if you go to the local Costco, it seems like half the customers there are Indian. How does that, how does that make you feel, that the amount of people are now around, the community that is sort of growing.

M: Yeah, you have two questions here. One question- how do you feel about fellow Indian-American migrating to United States. That's number one. Number two is how do you feel about fellow Indians immigrating to DC area.

N: Yeah.

M: It's a follow up question. And in general, I am very happy. Happiness is when you see your own people. When, you don't know, especially your mom, she will get so excited to see American-Indian people. When I was living in Vermont, or in Salt Lake City, I remember in Vermont we had a professor his name is and we were very happy. We always complained oh there are a lot of Indian people who have started. Honestly I didn't tell you I didn't like either Salt Lake City or Boston. I am very happy here. Not in Boston, in the city in Vermont, Burlington. Personally I didn't like it at all.

N: Because of the lack of Indians.

M: Mostly the weather, I didn't like the cold. Second thing is basically, now we understand why I didn't like it. I didn't see my own people there. At least a good population. Boston I liked it, but that is a different story. The pressure is too much, the weather is not good, those are, I didn't like it. So, I am very happy to see fellow Indians. And after the DC I am very happy. I am very happy that the information technology boom.

N: The dot com boom.

M: A lot of this is Asian, Pakistani and all these Asian people, brown people. I am very happy about that. I never felt, some people felt [unintelligible] not like other immigrant people.

N: Oh, okay.

M: You may not know that things are completely different, they are taking the same jobs.

N: Are you saying Americans felt that way, or other Indians who are established?

M: Other Indians. The established Indians.

N: Who had come over earlier, they didn't like the newer wave of immigrants that they saw it as competition.

M: They're kind of a competition. That is what they call 'Indian Mentality'

N: It's competitive.

M: Yeah, that is, tough on Indian people. It is not like, that is my opinion maybe I am completely wrong, but maybe not. There can be some that think the same thing I may not know. Because I see them in a gathering. In other communities the people help each other, kind of thing. In Indian community they help only certain ones, a little bit. They are very happy and they help you settle down kind of thing. But at the same time, they cannot tolerate if they if you really succeed them. Suppose you start doing better than people. Another thing I don't like much in Indian gathering is there's a kind of, there's some kind of measuring scale. Especially of the immigrants.

N: It's like comparing your yard to the neighbor's yard.

M: Yeah, like “what kind of VISA you have?” “Oh, when did he come.” “He came last year” “Oh good, very good. Where do you work?” “Oh, I’m on a fellowship.” “Oh, fellowship? What kind of VISA you have?” “Where do you live?” “Oh I live in an apartment.” “Oh, nice to see you.”

N: Oh wow.

M: That’s it. What’s in it for me- from you. Those kinds of things. (muttering) Those kinds of moment [unintelligible] You live in an apartment, you live in a house, you live in a bungalow. Immigrant, citizenship, those kind of things. Personally, what I think, I tried to, I just smile at them. There are different kinds, some people smile back some people ignore you. That’s fine. If they smile at me then I said “hello.”

N: So sort of acknowledging that “Hey I recognize that you’re Indian, you know that I’m clearly Indian” sort of smiling at them.

M: I don’t know, I need to tell how exactly it happens. If two fellow Americans see, it’s like fellow Indians. This way, you smile. In my case they say hello, you say hello. The next question, “Are you from India?” Straight, right on your face.

N: Even though it’s forward, it’s not too awkward either. It’s assumed

M: Yeah it is common. “Are you from India?” Then they ask “Which part of India?”

N: Next question, right.

M: “Oh you speak Tamil I speak Kannada I grew up in Bangalore 1:36:35

N: Once they find out where you’re from, and they are also from a similar place, do they start speaking to you in that language immediately?

M: Yeah, that’s true. In fact I met your friend’s father. Exactly, I’ll tell you what happened. I saw him in the gym a couple of times. Not only that day, a couple of days before. And then he ignored- not to say that- we are all shy people, Indian people.

N: More reserved.

M: Yeah. I thought it may just be one time but the second time, he kind of smiled a little.

N: Does like acknowledging, right.

MM: And then the third time it happened I saw him in the locker room, he didn’t say something, then I went to the sauna, I don’t know what they call it- the hot room. Where you sit on the bench-

N: It’s a sauna.

M: Usually the people are nudist. But Indian people are a little modest I was covered with a towel. But he doesn’t know, I think, that I am here]. He came in and sat, and of all the people

only we two. He looked at me and I looked back and kind of smiled. He smiled at me. And then I thought 'What the heck?' And I was going to say first "Are you from India" "Do you happen to come from India" I asked him. This is how it started. He said "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah I am from India." Then he said, "Are you" Of course I am. Then he asked "Which part of India?"

N: Right (chuckles)

M: I said, I usually say Tamil Nadu. Then he said "Oh are you from Chennai?" I said Oh no no, I am from Coimbatore." Then "Oh I know that state really well." Then I asked him, "Oh where are you from." "Oh I am from Bangalore." Then I usually just go say "Oh my wife is from there." That is how the conversation start. We tried to find commonality, even though finding a commonality sometimes chemistry doesn't work. Your character might not like my character.

N: Right, some people are more excitable, some people are more reserved.

M: Not, their personal, I have to like you. You may be interested in only car, I may be interested in Chinmaya and pooja. What is the common thing? So that it won't grow. But if you find a common thing. Then we call each other, things work out, we become friend type of thing. That's the way it works.

N: Okay. Really cool. So two last questions now. Cause were wrapping it up. Um, (pause) let's see. If you were to be remembered by something as concise as a sentence, or a paragraph.

M: Oh, I'm not answering this.

N: What legacy would you hope to leave for future generations?

M: (pause) This is kind of a gray question, okay. Leaving legacy, I don't understand legacy. The property I leave? Or the giving of education to my kids? Or how I should be remembered by you people or others?

N: How you should be remembered.

M: Oh, alright, okay. What I like to be remembered is, that, he is an honest person. Whatever he tries to do, tried to do he did his best level. And he tried to provide a decent thing, and he doesn't look for shortcut or other thing. That is what I like to do, whatever he tries to do, he tried to do his honest best work. That is what I would like somebody to remember. I always believe in hard work. Even though I am as extremely a hard worker as what I used to be, I became lazy after coming to this country a little bit. But I believe in hard work, I you put in hard work and find the right person, you will definitely, anybody can succeed.

N: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me before we finish?

M: This is very open-ended statement. (pause) I like to tell the immigrant people. That's what I like. Putting all the small differences aside, coming in as a group, alright? Not against the society or something. Try to help each other, who are in trouble. Not necessarily fresh from other country...Like infrastructure, this country, this society is a challenging society. You don't know. From outside looks everything rosy. You have a lot of issues. You have to prove yourself

all the time. You need to be excel in your job, you need to excel in your family life. And things won't, work out as you planned. Your company moved to Mexico, you don't have a job. Or your federal agency might file bankruptcy, you never know. Then, when you are in difficult time, you need to come together and help people. It is true, I think, people should seek help also. Other thing like Indian or whatever community, they don't tell their problem to the outside. They have a hell of a lot of problem in their home, but they, want to go buy a big house somewhere and paint it really nicely, call all of their friend to throw a party, acting as though everything is rosy. Next day, Sunday morning husband and wife fight for three hours about the financial issue and other issues. They tried to put up the show. It is necessary, you need to present yourself well outside, but it is not always the case. Seek help when you have a problem. Indian people don't open up easily. They don't help each other easily. That's my, only issue from what I can tell. So that is what I would tell my fellow immigrant. If you work hard, you can really succeed at the same time help other people.

N: Okay, well, I'd like to thank you very much for your recording.

M: Wow!

N: And this will go in the archives.

M: This is more than an hour.

N: Thank you so much.