Nagamani Beligere

Oral History Interview

February 16, 2016

Interviewer: This is an interview with Nagamani Beligere, as part of the Masala Chat Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted on February 16, at the residence of Nagamani Beligere. Nagamani Beligere is being interviewed by Joel Gonzalez of Indo-American Heritage Museum.

Int:  Can you please state and say your name?

Nagamani Beligere: Nagamani N-a-g-a-m-a-n-i. The married name is Dharmapuri.  D-h-a-r-m-a-p-u-r-i. But my professional name is still my maiden name, Beligere. B-e-l-i-g-e-r-e.

Int: When and where were you born?

NB: I was born in India in a small town called Tumkur in Karnataka state in 1935.  I was raised in that town until I was eighteen years of age, so I was born as a second, actually third child from my parents. But the second child while they were raising because one of the child passed away. So I lived in that town until I was eighteen years of age, until I finished my undergraduate college. Then I joined medical college in Vandalur, that’s another big town. It’s very well known now as the “Silicon valley of India.”  So it was one of the cosmopolitan cites, we were raised both in Tumkur and Vandalur.

Int: What languages did you speak growing up?

NB: We speak at home Kanera. Kanera is the language of that state.  Each state has a different language in India.

Int: It is native language to the state?

NB: Yeah, it has script as the writing all those things.  It is a well known recognized, what do you call, language.

Int: Was that the only one?

NB:  Yeah, that’s the only language in that state. Now there are a lot of other people who have migrated to the city. Just like people migrating to America, a lot of Indians are migrating into that city.

Int:  How would you describe your experiences growing up in Tumkur?

NB: Tumkur was not a very small town, it’s a district town. My father was an attorney, he was in a very good position. I was raised in an upper middle class family, I should say. This was because we were seven children at home but we had a lot of education at home, music, dance. A lot of music we were taught while in school.  We were taught dance and all the cultural activities. My parents were very much interested in that.

Int: And this was very early on?

NB: Very early on! I was hardly three years old when they started teaching me music. So that was our parents interest. They wanted all the children to learn some music.

Int: Did your family practice a certain religion?

NB: We are Hindus, so that’s the religion we practiced. But every Hindu family worships different deities like detonations like in Christianity. We are Shaivites and so we worship Shiva at home, that kind of thing. Other than that, we were also religious in the sense that my father was involved in a lot of temples and activities. He was a great devotee of Shiva. Every religious festival we celebrated at home, he invited people and gave them gifts.  Those kinds of things he was doing when we were children.

Int: You said your father was an attorney?

NB: Yes.

Int: Did your father like being an attorney?

NB: He like it very much in the sense that he was one the top notch attorneys. During the time he was talking a lot, just like you talking about immigration. If someone came up to him about that he would go and represent them in court. He was a well-known lawyer. He had a lot of demand everywhere, so from Tumkur to Bengular a lot of people wanted him to travel.  He also became a notary public. In India, notaries aren't like everybody that can.  They were given a chance to become a notary. He was also on the peace council. He was selected to represent the peace commission to go to Russia in 1955. And when I graduated he came back and said that a lot of Russian doctors are women and I had applied to medical school. He was happy that I got into medical school. That was the beginning of my medical career. So he was very progressive and on his return what he saw in Russia, he explained.  He was also in.  He was a very educated man and leaner. He was also in the political field, he wanted to contest as a parliament member. He was in a high position; he was a colleague of some of the governors and dentist. He was also a very busy man with all the activities.

Int: What about your mother?

NB: My mother was not a very educated woman, but she went to maybe primary school. She was married when she was about fourteen years old and afterwards my father educated her. In the sense that he provided teachers at home so she can learn English. She learned Hindi as the language of India after independence. She was a good musician and she was a wise woman. She had a lot of common sense of how to do things and she wanted all of us to, all seven children to be educated. Not necessarily just the boys but all the girls, too. We all have like a double degree, in the sense that we all have taken basic science courses and arts college. The we got a post graduate education. I did medicine and I was the first doctor in my house and in my father's family. So that was a great achievement for her to educate every child.

Int: You did say that you had siblings correct?

NB: Yes.

Int: How many siblings did you have and what were there names?

NB: I can give you the names. My oldest sister, her name was Mangala and she is now eighty-four years old. She was a schoolteacher in India and her husband is an engineer in the industry in India. They are all retired now. They live in America with their children. I am the second one in the sense because their was one siblings that did not survive. So I am the second oldest and my brother who is a next to me his name is Kupaderni and he is in New York. He is an engineer but is also a tennis coach in New York City. His court is in, I don't know Brooklyn or Long Island, one of those places. My third sister is a…she was an attorney in India. Now she lives in Germany with her daughter. My fourth, fifth siblings is my brother whose name is Manjenar and he is a PH.D from Oxford. He became a CEO of Southeast Asia company and now he retired. Now he is running a school for poor children in India in Bombay. Then comes my other sister who is Mamacar, she is in New York. She is a pediatrician and works there. My youngest brother is also an attorney, but he didn't practice for a long time.  He became an estate planner and holder. He takes care of our land in the village. He is also a tennis champion in India. So we are seven of us. Big family, his name is Pridiship.

Int: When did you come to the United States?

NB: I came here, August 17th 1963. I landed in Seattle Tacoma Airport.

Int: And that is where?

NB: That is the state of Washington.  I had to fly on the Westside, so I came through Japan. Our first landing was in Japan and then Alaska and then Seattle.

Int: You said that you had received medical training, where was that at in the US or India and can you describe that experience?

NB: Medical training? I started in India. As you see we are all teenagers when we go to medical school. By the time we graduate we get maturity, but at the same time I lost my father right after my graduation from my medical school. I graduated in 1962 in May. My father had a heart attack and he died in October 1962. At that time there was no jobs for doctors in India. We were interns working for no money. And we had go on strike to get some money. So then they stared paying a hundred a piece. That’s like peanuts. That’s what they started giving, then I decided all my friends, colleagues,  and my medical school started going out of the country. I was doing an internship in medical school when one of my colleagues told me that there are a lot of openings in America. We are all going there if you want to apply, you can apply.

So he gave the address and some other papers, so I applied and at that time you also have to take a exam to come to this country. It's like an entrance exam to the profession. So I took the exam and I passed the exam. Then I applied and got a job at St. Joseph's hospital in Tacoma, Washington. Tacoma, Washington is an army center, actually. That St. Joseph's hospital was a community hospital actually and nuns ran it. So I joined the hospital and because I was coming alone, also, I did not have know anybody. I wrote to them because I said, "I'm coming alone, I need someone to come an receive me."  Otherwise I won't know where to go, so the sisters of the hospital were very kind enough to come and receive me at the airport.  It was only thirteen miles from the airport Tacoma.

They took me there and put me in a [???].  They used give us a free housing, next to the hospital they had some homes. So they gave me one of the resident’s houses, actually a two story building. I had to stay upstairs because there was another family living downstairs. So I lived there, as a vegetarian I did not know what to do. So they would give me loaf of bread and milk every evening from the hospital. So after a week or so I found a small shop around the corner of the, you know, the block. I went there and found some rice and some vegetables.  I brought it home and cooked it. So that was my experience and it was very pleasant. Although I didn’t know many of the, oh, you know I didn't know the customs of America.  But I knew the British customs because when I grew up in Tumkur, that was a town where…because I was born before the independence time, there were a lot of British living in that town. One of the family was right next door and their children use to play with us, so we knew what English was and I started to learn. Our parents wanted us to learn English. So it was not anything different when I came here and also when I cam to Bangaloo it was a cosmopolitan town.

Int (19:25): It was a city?

NB: Urban City. So we had seen every kind of thing. We use to watch English movies. I didn't feel like a fish out of water, but at the same there were a lot of people in Tacoma, Washington. I don't know if my husband showed you the picture. One of the things was that we were introduced early by other colleagues like our own professors who kept watch. This is one of the families (NB shows Int. a picture of family). This is my surgeon and his wife, they use to invite us to their house for lunch and breakfast and sometimes take us out to. She took me one time to concert, opera concert, which I had no idea what opera was. It was because she knew I could sing, she decided I should see the American concert. There were a lot of American families, theses are the families who I got introduced to when we were doing internships and residences. I use to wear a Sari at that time so they would come and take pictures of me and invite to women's club. It was to come and participate there.  That was a very nice experience actually I should say because I was able to understand what there was.  There was not much of a difference between what our culture and this culture was, except the language.  That's how I felt, at that time and so they use to take us.  This a Mt. Rainier picture (Shows a picture to Interviewer).  I am wearing a Sari and this is the lady who took us to Mt. Rainier, so this is some of the earlier experiences I had.

Int: Did you like the opera?

NB: Opera was, you know, the very first opera I had no idea what opera was. So I was almost like, this is totally different then my Carnatic. I was a Carnatic music person, I knew my music very well and it was very difficult for me to understand opera music. So you know, it takes time for us to get use to this cultural aspect. It was because, you know, although we grow up with all this British, they did not have any of those cultural activities in India. Maybe they had?  But we would not see because we were not part of the entertainment, as I say.

Int: Was there anything else besides the medical training that brought you to the United States?

NB: No. One thing which happened was I would of not have come to this country if my father was alive. At that time, fifty years ago, the girls wouldn't go out of the country, out of home without getting married. That was the culture. Even till this day a lot of good families they don't send their daughters out by themselves. They have to get married and go, that was the cultural habit. When I left, although I was a physician, but there was no other choice for me except to find a job because as it is in India they were only giving a hundred a piece as an intern. So I could not have survived with a family and my father passed away.

My mother was young only forty five years old, I had five younger brothers and sister below me. They were…two of the them were in college and my youngest brother was only eight years old. My sister was fourteen years old, it was difficult for my mother to take care of all this. It was my own decision. Nobody else asked me to leave, but I decided that I needed to go out and help the family. That's why I said, you know, the women's club in Seattle would come and pick me up and say give some club entertainment. I was a speaker and all that, when I was in the emergency room they would come and take my picture. You know how I work in the hospital and things of that sort.

So it was totally a different experience. When I came, I came with the idea that I will work for two/three years and then I'll go back home. That was my intention. When I started working I realized that I had to do more than two or three years of training because that would not give me enough experience or the money to go home. When I applied for medical profession, I did not have any money to come from India because although I came from a upper middle class family we did not have nine hundred dollars to pay for the ticket. At that time also it was nine hundred dollars, one way ticket. So that was quite expensive for me. I wrote to them, "I cannot afford to come, but if you buy the ticket I’ll come and repay the whole thing." So that was one of the things they bought the ticket for me then I worked for a year for them. I was getting a hundred and ten dollars a month, $2,400 a year. That's all I was getting. Still, it was much more than I would of gotten in India. So I said, okay fine I took it and then I tried to support the family. Half the money I would send home every month, so they can survive.

Then I would take care of my needs with like fifty dollars or whatever it was at that time. That was quite a bit of money you know, even fifty dollars a month for myself with a free house and very little food.  Even if you go and pay ten dollars you can get real grocers at that time. So it was easy to live here, then I decided I have to [???]. That was a community hospital; I wanted to go to some university teaching hospital. Then I went to Canada, British Columbia because it was next door and it was easier and they were announcing for residency training program. So I took the job there, I stayed there for a year and that's the time I bought the car. I paid the total amount and dealer tells me nobody pays the whole amount at one time, everybody buys with credit card. I told them, "I don't have a credit card."  So he was surprised I was paying the whole amount of the car, but anyway, afterwards from the University of British Columbia, I came back to Boston Children's Hospital.  I stayed there for two more years for getting my residency then I went to Philadelphia Children's.

That's where I met my husband; we got married in Philadelphia Children's. All my training was at University hospitals all through. All these years there was no graduate medical education in this country, when we came to this country. Graduate medical education started in 1970, because in 1965 when they had the Social Security Act. They realized they had to start some new hospitals they had to create. In order to create the new hospitals they had to train the doctors, that is when the graduate medical education started. The federal government started funding the graduate medical education, even till this day that’s what it is going on. Even in 1969, I did not get any money except the hospital was giving me $4,000 a year for the cardiology training, but it was some of the best training in the country. So nobody would of have gotten the training if I not gone.

One of the cardiologist was a pioneer in pediatric cardiology who trained me at Philadelphia Children's Hospital. His name is William Rashkind, he is a very well known cardiologist at that time. It was a very good experience for me and then we went to Winnipeg after my husband got, what do you call…he had to leave the country because his visa was expiring. Then we went to Winnipeg, Winnipeg is also a University Hospitals, Winnipeg Children's Hospital. Then I worked there for a year and a half, almost two years. At that time, our first daughter was born in Winnipeg. Then we decided to come back to the United States, immigrate to the United States, before that we went to India for two months looking for a job. In 1971 in June or July, we were in India going to different Universities looking for  a job but they all said they do not have a job for us because we are too highly qualified. Also that was the time there was a recession in India, 1971 or 1972, there was a recession in India.

So at that time we decided, we had applied to come to United States anyways. So we decided to we'd come back.  And that decision was a good decision I think, we came back.  We came back to Chicago and we never left. We stayed here because Chicago has been good to us.  In a way, there was lots of opportunities for my husband to grow and I took a job at the University of Illinois at that time for $19,000. Although I had MD degree and five years of post graduate education they  were only offering $19,000 for me. But I took it that was essential for us to stay here.

Then we had two more children, here in Chicago. We continued working. In 1980, I decided to go into private practice because my children were growing big and they needed to go to school.  I did not want to leave them here and go to fifteen miles from here to work. So I practiced here in Elmhurst for about seventeen years until my son graduated from high school. Then I went back to the University of Illinois as a professor, worked for another fifteen years and retired in 2005, 2009 I guess.

Int: If we could go back little bit, going back to your arrival.  Were there any expectations as far as what you thought the United States was going to be like?  Or any images you had?

SB:  I really don't remember expecting here. Well, we had seen some movies you know that's what I remember. That's what I was expected, but at the same time the people in Tacoma they made me feel at home in the sense. Even the patients, they would come and say, like if I had a weekend off, they would come and say, "come on over, we are having a barbecue at our house, we'll take you there."  So they would take me there to barbecue and bring me back to my home residence quarters. That was a very good experience in a way. Also a couple of my colleagues also were also in the same college and hospital, so there was…I did not miss too much in the sense. Except of course I missed my family, but other than that, I really didn't think I missed a lot of my…or that I was looking for something, no. So that was that. After a couple of my friends joined us then we started cooking in a mess, we would all eat at the same time because each one of us pitched in and bring in some grocery and cook and eat.  We use to call it a mess, but it was like a hostel.

Int: When you were first arriving what were some the challenges you had?

NB: Of course you need to work with your local graduates you know? That's something you had to build because we don't know what their education is in the first place because we are coming from a different place. But our education was much more superior than the local education but also they were very nice. Our college was very nice, plus they knew we are coming from a different part of the world. They also wanted to know how much we know, how much we don't know. They were cooperators. It was good actually, I didn’t think that was different. But when I went to British Columbia in Vancouver, I had a lot of British colleagues, you know. They were all coming from England to do their residency in Canada. So that was a different experience. There were also a couple colleagues from Holland like my chief residence Degrute and all those guys. They are from Holland. They were all my colleagues too. It was a totally different experience in the sense you learned a lot of things from them.  Exchange of ideas and things, yes.

Int: When you first came you said you were in Tacoma, Washington then you moved to British Columbia for more training. How was your life in Vancouver?

NB: As I said there were a lot of British there. That was a different experience in the sense, at that time British Columbia was full of English people. Now there is a lot more Asian influence coming from Hong Kong and that area. So that time there were only British who were, even the professors were British. My colleagues were like the interns were British. Of course, Canada is not that much affluent as America was, but although I didn't see much of a difference. There were a lot of children brought from Kamloops, in British Columbia. They use to bring children like Indian local native Indian kids. Very very sick.  They use to, because they were so far out four hundred kilometers or what not. Those days they use to fly them in helicopters. Those children were brought to British Columbia Children Hospital at that time. That was a very nice experience because those kinds of activities we never saw here.  You know when I came to United States there was no transport of helicopter. They were bringing them in ambulances sometimes we use to say at Boston children's hospital bus load came. We use to have around six o'clock…the mothers would bring their children after their school or whatever. Lot of African Americans in Boston Children's at that time.

Int: And after British Columbia, you took more training in Boston?

NB: Yeah, it's only pediatric training but you know I did an internship in Tacoma, Washington and then I went to pediatrics to British Columbia one year. Then I came to Boston for the next two years.

Int: Are there any experiences or individuals from your arrival that you think about or had a lasting effect on you?

NB: Hmm, well in the sense as I showed you theses are the people that helped us quite a bit and some other families who helped me also in getting use to the idea of living here alone. Because I never lived alone, as I said I was from a big family. Those are mentions I had to make.

Int: Would you say that making friends in the United States was difficult or not?

NB: Not really. At that time people were anxious to meet Indian families because especially if they knew you were alone. They would like to meet and take you around. They know that I am a physician in the hospital so they also wanted to know things in India. As I said the women's club and all that.  I use to go and talk. And also radio talks and all kinds of things they were asking.

Int: How would you describe your first job in Tacoma and experience working there?

NB: One thing I should say, it was a catholic hospital because they are not very. They did not know much about the Indian culture and things.  I was also wearing a sari at that time. It was always a clean white sari. One of the objections from the catholic nun, one time I was working in the surgical unit…actually what happened was I was posted in the surgical unit at that time, then the nuns objected that I cannot wear the sari in the surgery because they thought it would bring in dust or something.

Int: Oh, more for sanitation and sterilization?

NB: Yes, their idea of sanitation. Anyway, they complained that I am wearing a sari and that I should wear some western cloths. Then my colleague explained to her the nun, "You know it's like asking you to take your hood off. You are asking her to take the sari off, it's not possible, she will not do it."

Then we wore scrubs in the surgical unit that should not be a problem. So I said, "Okay, I will wear the scrubs, it's not a thing."  I mean I am a surgeon I have no problem. So they agreed on it. Those are some of the things. Also early in the morning when we were making our rounds they would go with the light and prayer. We couldn't go in front of them even though it was an emergency. We had to stay inside our rooms, so those are some of the things. I did not know religion as well, the Catholic. I was very new to the country and as a Hindu that was much more difficult for me than just the culture. I still remember early in the morning we were making rounds and one of the nuns says, " No, no you can't go, you can't go." There was an emergency call coming and I can't go out. So that's the kind of things we were facing.

Int: How were you treated as far as opportunity and advancement/ recognition for your work?

NB: In the very first year, you are taking about?

Int: Throughout your career?

NB: I think it was okay. I didn't have any problems for recognition or anything. But what I would say as a lady I still feel this country has not advanced. They have some sort of discrimination if you are a woman. As I said my first appointment, I only got $19,000. I told you right here in America, in Chicago. I went and asked the head of the department, "You know I’m getting $19,000, for my qualifications. I already was a board certified pediatrician and I have five years of experience, I want you to increase my salary."  He told me, "Oh, you're husband is already making a lot of money, you don't need to make."  This is the kind of, at the University of Illinois medical center that is what happened. So I felt very…I told him, "You are not paying [me] for my husband, you are paying for me, for my qualifications."  So I just walked away, you can not argue with the chief of the department. Several times it happened although I stayed there a long time. To get my promotion to associate professor, I had to struggle a lot because they kept telling me each department…I was in two departments as appointed, both in pediatrics and prenatal fellow program. So one of the professors tells me, "I don't know how to evaluate your work because I am not a pediatrician." Other people said, "you don't belong in our department."  So they kept tossing from one department to another. For a long time, for almost ten years this went on. Until we got a new chairman, this new chairman recognized and he said, "I will help you to promote your papers."

So he took me on. It took me fifteen years to get my promotion at the University of Illinois [and] any other white man or woman in that my position would of claimed long before. The professor who got my appointment said, "You should have applied to associate professor when you came in here, you had all the qualifications. I said, "Why did you not tell me that before. I’m here already ten years and you are telling me now?" So these are the type of activities, which I think, are still not very… they still think women are not capable of doing things. That is my only thing that women are not treated well because you keep saying that no woman fight. If she says something she will lose the job. So anyway it took almost fifteen years to get my associates professorship then I worked for a couple more years and said "This is it, I am going to quit."

Int: I am very sorry to hear that.

NB: It's not something which you what to talk about, but you asked me whether there was any problems. It was a part time position but I was there five days a week, almost full time. But they never considered, "Oh, she was working five days a week." Although I did have a lot of publications and research they did not think it was okay.  So it took some time for them to realize. I think it was also the two different persons and not the same people that helped.

Int: I know you already touched on it, but your career in your early years, when you first got to the US, how would you describe your interactions with your bosses?

NB: At that time there was no problem. As usual, if you aren’t vocal, you aren’t getting anywhere. That is a fact everywhere I think.  Fight for rights. In the sense [that] we wanted more money or whatever.

Int: By this time you guys had already met already married and had children.

NB: Yeah, we had three children by the time I joined the University. In 1974, she was born and in 1972 I had the second daughter. Our first daughter was born in Canada.

Int: Did you guys become US citizens at the same time?

NB: Yeah, same day, same time because we already had two American children. We decided we'll do it. One of the things is if you are an American citizen, you'll have more opportunities. Every application would say whether you are a citizen of this country or not. Plain residency is not enough. Even to get a grant, if you want to do research. You need to have a grant. If you are citizen of this country you a better chance then not a citizen. These are the discriminations what I am talking about. This is professional discrimination.

Int: That is a good way to put it. Professional discrimination.  These next set of questions are more about community. You had said that you guys are very involved in the community.

NB: Yes, yes. We have been very much involved in our community activities. As he said, not only at the temple, we have involved in what do you call it. American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin. Several community organizations we are involved.

Int: Can you tell me more about the community center and temple and your role?

NB: Yeah, the community center I believe started in 1978 I think. The temple organization atarted in 1978, 1978/1978 that was a preliminary meetings about how to organize and all those kind of things. In 1978, it was established and since 1978, I've been involved in that temple because my idea was to improve the cultural activities in the temple. That was one of the ideas, so initially we started. I started singing myself in the temple. Later on, I was developing something like a garden center for the temple activity. Then we made some food because we had no cook in the temple, we had to make our own food. I was in various committees like music committee and also volunteer committee and all those committees. Religious committees, some of those committees I was an organizer…not only that we have our own language organizer from that part of our country and I was the vice president of that organization. I also organize several music concerts for them also. I've been involved in with a lot of activities in the community. And also as a professional, I volunteered at many school even at CPS, gave children school physicals and things. University of Illinois has a school in South Side and I went and examined the children in that area. That way I was volunteering myself even as a professional. I was also the principal of the day at Chicago Public Schools. They have a day for anybody who wants to participate as a Principle for the day.

Int: Okay, how was that experience?

NB: That was good. Actuall,y I was able to go one of the school where they have the pregnant girls. You know the teenage girls who are in the school system, I was involved in that. I went and talked to the girls and another time I was on the South Side school. It was a big school, it was like 400 children and they wanted to know why I became a doctor and all those kind of things. Also how to get to that positions, all those things the children wanted to know. We talked about those kind of things and discussions. So that was good, that was Daley's time. Mayor Richard Daley recently retired. I didn't know much about his father.

Int:  Is there a certain organization or community center that you are more affiliated with besides that one we have already mentioned?

NB: As professionals, we go to Institute of Medicine and Chicago Pediatric Society. But it's impossible to be involved in many many societies because we were also too busy with the children and also our own profession. Only on the weekends we can go, so yeah.

Int: So what do you like to do in your leisure time?

NB: I do knitting. I knit I do some sewing and music. Those are all lady things I do. Of course shopping, as ladies we cannot complain about shopping right?  We do go for vacations sometimes, but most of our vacations are in doing professional work. Whenever we go to a country, we go and do some professional lecture or interacting with other people. Then afterwards we see other parts of the country.

Int:  I know you guys had mentioned China, Poland, Lithuania and Argentina.

NB: Again, professionally meeting and then we would do the whole country.

Int: Is there a certain experience or something special that you will always remember about coming to America?

NB: On the way to America?

Int: Having coming to America in general?

NB: On the way to America, we as you my husband told you I was given only eight dollars exchange value.  At that time the ruby was very high.  Now it has devalued quite a bit. Eight dollars I had…so in two dollars, I spent and went around seeing Japan. In 1963, it was right after world war they were building Tokyo.  I went to go see the palace and things. Another experience I remember is 1967, when I went to India and stopped in Italy in Rome. I saw the Vatican that was one of the experiences. My experience is Tacoma was very fruitful and also British Columbia was very nice.

Int: What was the hardest part about life here in the beginning in America?

NB: Of course as a girl, I was alone and that was a difficult thing to come to terms with you know. You didn't have anyone else and you had to stay in. I was highly protected at home, they weren't allowing us even to go to movies by ourselves. We always had to go with a chaperone. And here alone by myself although with a lot of freedom still  I was scared to go out. I was scared to go out although the crime was very low at that time. People never locked their houses. That was very interesting thing in Tacoma. They would invite me to their house, there is no one at the house, there is no lock or key. They said, "it's okay, no one will take anything here." And that's how they use to tell me. Another experience I had, one time in Tacoma, they took me to a fair that was in Spokane Washington. Spokane has a large number of Indian population, local Indian-Americans. When we were going one of the older man, he looked at me and said, " Where are you from?" "I'm from India."  "So you are my cousin, he said. I was surprised because an American Indian similar felt he was my cousin, so it was very nice. At least he was accepting me as his cousin.

Int: That made you feel good?

NB: Yeah, it made me feel good because it was something somebody identifying with yourself.

Int: Are there any recommendations you would give to someone who is planning to leave India and come to the United States?

NB: I would say come legally, you know because right now the question is whether legal or illegal entrance. I know there are a lot of Indians in this country who have come have not gone home. I would not recommend that for anybody because it is not a good thing, in a sense it does not say good things about the people who have come legally. So that is one thing, if they are bright enough to come and make their life here, it is a wonderful opportunity for them to come here.  I think if they are young, see people who are young should come that's my recommend.  Not at the old age, old age you cannot do too much here.  It is also very difficult, cultural. I would not like to go live in another country now because all my friends are here and all my life is here. I would like to stay here where as people at older age. If I go to India I would have a difficult time because I don't have any of my friends there. Even my relatives are very few, so I would have to make new friendships, new associations, new living situations. It would be very difficult for me at my age. So I would not recommend, but I think young people they have no ties back home so they can invest their life here and make something good out of it.

Int: Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not talked about?

NB: I want to know what is this American Heritage, who stared this one? What is this supposed be?

Int: The project itself will be accessible through the website the exhibit itself does not have a location but they do have a cultural center. Basically, it is a grant project that got accepted and what they are going to do is collect oral histories from different people, prominent members in Chicago. We are collecting oral histories narratives to make a collection of different people.

NB: Where are you going to put them?

Int: Some of them are going to the actual website and then they could possibly be used by the Smithsonian Museum. They have an exhibit called Beyond Bollywood. They are going around the country collecting different projects right now.  If it does get picked up, it will be in the Smithsonian Asian Pacific program and it will also be used by the Field Museum in 2017, hopefully.

- – [End of Recording] – -