

Interviewee: Manekshaw, Sarosh**Interview Date: September 21, 2011**

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Sarosh Manekshaw
University of Houston Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
Date: September 21, 2011
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Mr. Manekshaw's office in Houston, Texas

UQ: This is the oral history interview of Sarosh Manekshaw. The interview is held at his office in Houston, Texas on September 21, 2011. The interviewer's name is Uzma Quraishi and this is being conducted for the Oral History of Houston Project at the University of Houston. Alright you can begin by just telling a little bit about yourself, your background and your childhood.

SM: Okay I was born in Faizabad, India which is a small town in Uttar Pradesh. My father was an engineer working over there and basically being a small town there were really no schools over there so at a very young age I was sent off to boarding school in Naini Tal and...

UQ: Can you spell it?

SM: N-a-i-n-i T-a-l, two words. Later on my father moved to Mumbai, at that time Bombay, and I was still in boarding school and then I went to the Doon School in Dehra Dun. After doing my schooling I went to the Indian Institute of Technology. IIT Kharagpur, where I graduated with a degree in chemical engineering. And, immediately after I got my [under]graduate degree I came to the United States. I came here in 1968 as a student and I was at the University of Pittsburgh where I did my Master's degree. I was

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working towards my doctorate when at that time I lost my assistantship and I had to start working so I never completed my doctorate but I was working towards it. I worked in Pittsburgh for a few years. I worked at an engineering consulting firm over there, named Chesters Engineers and then at the end of 1975 I was hired by Pennzoil Company in Houston and I moved here in early January of 1976. I worked for Pennzoil for 23 years and then in 1999 they gave me a early retirement package which I accepted and I got into my own consulting business and since then I have been doing my own consulting in environmental safety and health management. It's just a one man operation so I'm a sole proprietor I just do that on my own.

UQ: What's the name of your...company?

SM: My company's called Manekshaw Consulting and I just on my own just enjoy working for myself.

UQ: Do you put in 70 hour weeks?

SM: No, definitely not. At least in the early stages I was working a lot and trying to build up my clientele. I'm now at a stage when I'm trying to just take it easy and do work as much as I want. I basically work, I'm basically servicing now most of my old clients. I'm not really eagerly taking on new business and I'm not soliciting any new business per se more or less. Then in the last few years, the last three years or so I've been commuting between Mumbai and Houston. I've been spending approximately 3 months in Mumbai and 3 months here, roughly. A little bit less in Bombay then in Houston. I'm spending more time in Houston but spending there as well.

UQ: Is that for business purposes?

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SM: A little bit of business I do have some business over there but more just spending time with the family and, you know relaxing and enjoying myself.

UQ: Alright, tell me a little bit about your childhood family, your parents and your siblings what was your childhood like?

SM: I had one sister. She was older than me. She passed away in 2007. There were just the two of us, as I said we were both because we were in a small town we were both in boarding school but when we came home for the vacations we really had a very close family life and spent a lot of time, when my father moved back to Mumbai I would spend a lot of time with my grandparents and my aunts and uncles and cousins. So we were a close family and...

UQ: What did your father do?

SM: My father was an electrical engineer and he worked for a company called Indian Cable Company and then later on he got transferred to Calcutta from Mumbai and so I spent quite a few years in Calcutta as well. As I said all my schooling and college was always in boarding because even IIT-Kharagpur was boarding. So it would be just the vacations that we came home for.

UQ: How old were you when you were first sent to boarding school?

SM: Six. Six years old because for the first few years I think from about 3, to 5 or 3, to 6 from that time my mother was home schooling me sort of because there really wasn't anything else to do over there. So it was sort of home schooling. So I guess she felt it was beyond her capability and according to the first standard, first level of first grade, she wanted me to have a proper education.

UQ: What was your neighborhood like? Where your parent's home was?

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SM: When we were in Faizabad basically in a boonies to put it...

[Interruption.]

SM: Okay so as I say it was a real hick town there was really nothing much over there. Out station what we used to call in India it was known as an out station. There really wasn't anything. The only thing I can remember was there was a big military containment in that area this was.... I grew up there just after the war, after World War II so there were a lot of military people based over there. I can't really remember anything else in that.

UQ: So, Indian army?

SM: Yeah, Indian army. Anything else based in that town from my memory. So there really wasn't any activity or such over there.

UQ: Okay.

SM: Then when we moved to Bombay, of course Bombay being a big city. Of course we had my grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins and also that became, then we had a lot more social interaction with all of them over there in Mumbai.

UQ: Okay.

SM: Calcutta was also, that was a big town and had a big... but we were a very close family as I said and at that time the social interaction was maybe within the family.

UQ: Okay, close friends when you were young?

SM: Yes, we did have a lot of friends. Of course a lot from schools, you know from boarding school I had a lot of friends. I did make some friends even in Bombay and Calcutta and growing up over there.

UQ: Okay, tell me about your boarding school.

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SM: I went to... I started off at a convent run by Irish Catholic nuns when I was little.

I didn't really much care for it. Then I went later on I went to Doon School in

(Dhera)duns. I just loved that place I just loved it. It was just great.

UQ: What was the difference between the two?

SM: I think it was the environment over there. I mean the Catholic school there was a lot of considerable discriminate, I don't want to use the word discrimination but the non Christians or non Catholics were not sort as readily accepted as the, you know the Catholics. And also I just, I just didn't care much for that environment over there but when I went to the Doon School there was...I don't know if you are familiar with you are probably not because you have grown up over here. The Doon School they call it a public school in India but it's really a private school. It's probably "the top" school in India. And it was boarding again but they literally had people... my classmate was Rajiv Ghandi by the way. I mean literally my classmate used to sit next to each other. So we had people from there. We had Raja's sons and you had people from working class families like me. But when you were over there, there was no discrimination, no one felt different, no one felt superior, no one felt...everyone had to wear the same uniform. Everyone had to do the same thing. There was no favoritism there was no discrimination. Everyone was treated equally.

UQ: So religion wasn't a factor?

SM: No, it was not. It was more or less a secular type of school. I mean we never had, we had what we called assembly but they would have very general sort of prayers, ...there may be something by God or something by someone else. They were not really like Christian prayers or Hindu prayers per se, very general, "do good" sort of things.

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UQ: Okay.

SM: Basically I really enjoyed myself over there, really, really enjoyed it.

UQ: How long were you there at school ?

SM: For about five years in Doon and I did my senior Cambridge over there.

UQ: So your... I guess middle school/high school period?

SM: Middle school/high school period yes, yes.

UQ: Okay. You're obviously not Catholic.

SM: No, I'm Parsi [Zoroastrian].

UQ: Parsi?

SM: Parsi.

UQ: And that is what you felt sort of influenced your treatment at the Catholic school?

SM: I don't know I hate to say that. I hate to say I was discriminated against at 5, 6, 7 years old you hardly know but it just... I just didn't care much for that place. I don't know why I just didn't care for that place.

UQ: Was it diverse religiously or was it mostly Catholics?

SM: No you have to go to chapel every day, or church whatever, you know... you have to go it I mean wasn't an option.

UQ: Okay.

SM: I mean you have to go and you have to say your "Hail Mary's" and all that sort of stuff. I really didn't...

UQ: I went to a church school as well when I was young.

SM: I really didn't care that much for that sort of stuff.

UQ: Were there other Parsi's at the school or was it almost all catholic?

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SM: I don't really know I can't remember.

UQ: But all the students were Indian?

SM: They were, my sister was there. One of my cousins was there before me so yes there were other... but I really didn't much care for it.

UQ: How far was the school from your home, your home town?

SM: A few hundred miles. I can't remember. About 300, 400 miles probably. It was not, it's not like commuting distance, it was pretty far.

UQ: Okay, alright. So then after that you went to the other boarding school, Doon.

SM: Doon, which I loved, then I went to IIT Kharagpur

UQ: The full name is did you say Dehra Dun?

SM: It's the Doon school D-o-o-n and D-e-h-r-a D-u-n, two words yeah. Capital D. Dehra Dun.

UQ: Alright.

SM: Then after that when I graduated from high school I went to IIT Kharagpur, you familiar with, you must have heard about the IITs in India.

UQ: Sure, of course.

SM: It's one of the top engineering colleges over there. Socially I hated the place.

UQ: Why?

SM: It was very isolated.

UQ: Geographically isolated?

SM: Geographically isolated. There was no social interaction in the sense that it was probably what 3,000 males and about probably what 30 females. It was really no social

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interaction. That's a period when you really do need social interaction between the two sexes.

UQ: Sure.

SM: I was very isolated from that point of view. But living conditions were atrocious as far as I was concerned, very spartan. The food was horrid. I was really miserable from that point. But the education was absolutely tops. I cannot say anything negative about the education. The education was what really made me, gave me the skills and technical background to be what I am. So from that point of view I have no complaints about the place. But the social and living conditions were really, really terrible. I was sort of miserable. Starved!

UQ: That's what college is about, though.

SM: Kharagpur was about 70 miles from Calcutta so I'd go home for the weekends once a month at least and at least I could get a good meal at home on the weekends.

UQ: My daughter feels the same way. I think it's a universal college experience right?

SM: Yeah I'll tell you what I was telling my son when he was at UT and I said, "I don't know what you're complaining about. This is luxury compared to what I was." So I say, "Don't complain."

UQ: True. But not luxury compared to what he's used to.

SM: Yeah but well that's the thing I mean everyone gets used to a different standard and he keeps saying, "Yeah I know you walked to school 10 miles in the snow every morning..." [Laughs]

UQ: Alright... so you graduated from IIT.

SM: Yes.

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UQ: And then you decided to pursue higher education?

SM: Yes.

UQ: And the strongest option was the U.S. Did you consider other places?

SM: Yes I did consider, I did apply to United Kingdom. I applied to the University of Manchester and but I got admission over here and I got admission to Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh and I decided they gave me an assistantship so I decided to come here because that was a big thing. I had... initially I had come out on what's known as a Tata Scholarship from India. There's an organization called the Tata, a trust that gave me a scholarship to come out over here and I got my assistantship over here, all of \$210 a month.

UQ: Hefty!

SM: Because when we came here in '68 you couldn't get money from India I mean unless it was black money. Officially, there was no way you could get money and really as far as that's concerned every since I came here I didn't take a penny from my father. I mean it was all on my own. So from college on out I was on my own I was living on my assistantship and in Pittsburgh we went to Pittsburgh we started off, there were four of us Indians living together in one apartment and even in those days we all sort of tended to stay together. It was a real slum dwelling but we had great fun. I mean we just had great fun.

UQ: It was all Indian students?

SM: There were all Indians, four of us there Indian students and it was a big apartment building. The whole building was a slum dwelling.

UQ: What do you mean by that? Explain...

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SM: Let me tell you this much we got written up in the Pittsburgh press they came and took photographs of our apartment and how atrocious the conditions, the living conditions were.

UQ: Wow!

SM: So it was that bad but as I said we were students we didn't care and we... another floor with two or three other Indians and so we run a communal kitchen basically. We would all cook together one big meal and everyone would share. It was just the way that we would do that and we just had great fun over there. I loved it over there. As I said we had...

UQ: ... get that door?

[Interruption]

UQ: Alright so this building, were there a lot of students from the University of Pittsburgh or no?

SM: Basically a lot of, mostly a lot of students lived in that building. There were all different students. The land lady was, she was the biggest cheapskate. For example, Pittsburgh is very cold I hated the winters in Pittsburgh. She would turn the heat off at 10:00 at night.

UQ: Wow.

SM: I mean we were freezing in our apartment. We'd call down and she's say, "You should all be in bed." "We're students we're studying over here." No student goes to bed before 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and she would just turn the heat off whenever she felt like it.

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UQ: Were you there the whole four years?

SM: No, I only lived there I only lived in that apartment for nine months. We signed a nine month contract.

UQ: Okay.

SM: And as soon as my contract came up I moved out. But we had a lot of fun over there. Let's put it this way, just to give you a couple of examples one day I came home in the evening like at what 5:30, 6:00 from school and I find these two policeman sitting outside our door, standing outside our door. And they said... when I came to open they said, "Do you live here?" I said, "Yes." But we had, as I said we had a run a communal kitchen over there we had put up a big sign outside the door saying, "Indian Embassy Pittsburgh Branch." It was just a hand written, hand written thing!

UQ: Right

SM: It was a hand written thing so that everyone knew where to come, which apartment to come to. So they thought they wanted to get in because in the building above us someone were, had one of these drug factories making meth or something and they had... the police raided them they had thrown it down the pipe shaft, these old buildings had a pipe shaft. They wanted to come in and recover it from our apartment. But they couldn't break in because they thought it was Embassy and you know there was diplomatic immunity. He was really mad at us when he found out that we had done that.

UQ: That's a great story!

SM: But you know...we used to do crazy things like that. And then just we had a party over there one evening called everyone over on a Friday night or Saturday night 7:00, 7:30 and no one's shown up! Those were the days before cell phones. So finally

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someone about 8:00 someone calls up and said on the land line. “What happened to your party?” “We’re waiting for you.” He said, “Some lady was standing down in the lobby saying the party’s cancelled.” The landlady was standing down in the elevators, “Are you going to a party?” “Yeah.” “Party’s cancelled.” And she threw them all out!

UQ: She was trying really hard to control her building.

SM: It was really hilarious but we had, as I said we had great fun. We just enjoyed ourselves over there students.

UQ: So you socialized mostly with each other while you were there because you had other Indian students?

SM: Yeah in fact out of those I’ve still got three or four very, very ... I mean those Pittsburgh days, those were sort of like who have become my closest friends. I’ve got one who is living here now in Houston. We see each other every week. We meet and we get together every week so we are very, very friendly still. I’ve got another one who is Bombay when I go to Bombay I spend, again, most of my time with him. My other roommate is in Palo Alto, California and I keep in touch with him regularly. In fact when his son got married we decided to go up and visit over there and I went to his son’s wedding and all that.

UQ: So it sounds like you forged some really close friendships during that time.

SM: Yeah we had some very close relationships with some people over there.

UQ: Okay. The other...

[Interruption]

UQ: Okay let’s continue.

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SM: So you were talking about Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh days was great fun. I really enjoyed it. I hated the winters in Pittsburgh. I keep saying I spent eight very cold winters in Pittsburgh. But then I started working. I worked for a company called Chester Engineers. They were an environmental consulting firm and enjoyed myself over there again. Over there I made a lot of close friends and there were a lot of young people most of us were all single so we used to socialize a lot together and still keep in touch with a few of them from there.

UQ: Also in Pittsburgh?

SM: In Pittsburgh.

UQ: Okay. What was your initial impression of the city?

SM: I love Pittsburgh as a city. The place is hilly, it's green everything. I just as I said the only thing negative about Pittsburgh was the weather, the cold. I could not stand the winters over there. I'm not a cold person. I mean even the winter in Houston is cold for me. But I loved the city, it's a beautiful place.

UQ: What about the people how did you find them?

SM: Very friendly, enjoyed, I mean really, really friendly people. In fact, just talking about friendly people you know when I first moved, when I was, when I got the job in Houston before I moved over here I was telling all my friends over there, "I'm moving to Houston." This was back in '75. "I'm moving to Houston." They said, "Are you crazy? You're going to Texas? They don't even like Yankee's over there let alone foreigners." But I came to Houston and I really enjoyed it. But Pittsburgh was a really friendly place. I really enjoyed the city over there.

UQ: What about the neighbors in your building in that?

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SM: Again I lived in a ... after that slum dwelling I moved to a number of different places. I was renting so you... you sort of rent a little bit better, you know... as I started working I tried to move up a little to a better apartment and, and I got to know the neighbors. I mean I sort of more on a just “knowing them” basis not, never really became very close friends with any of them. I mean my social circle was essentially the people at work and the people I knew from school. So those were my social circles not really so much from the neighbors. But we were friendly we got together; you know someone would have a party they’d invite everyone so that no one complained about the noise or something. You know how students are or young people are. So...

UQ: Okay so the residents in that first building...

SM: The slum dwelling?

UQ: Yes, but I don’t want to call it that, but the slum dwelling...

SM: You can call it the slum dwelling. We all called it the slum dwelling. I mean even now when we talk about it amongst ourselves we talk about it as the slum dwelling.

UQ: Really? Okay. So the residents of that building how did they treat you since you had come from out of the country?

SM: Again, a lot of them were students. So you know we were friendly.

UQ: Were they internationals, the students?

SM: Some of them were there were quite a few international students but...

UQ: Local students?

SM: Local students as well. See one of the things that kind of happened is when we first came, when we first came to the United States, I arrived about 10 days before school started and they had a program where you stayed with a family for 3, 4 days.

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International... they called them International Hosts or something I can't remember right now. But I stayed with this family and they sort of, you know it was like a transition here and it was during that period that I found these other roommates because we went... in fact we went to the international students office to register and I met this other guy and he said, "We're looking for a roommate." I said, "Count me in and I'll stay with you," without even looking at the place (which was a big mistake). But the problem is when you come in about 10 days before all the good housing's gone. I mean, you know because all the people who are coming in locally they've already got all the good apartments. So you really end up with the dreads which is this... and the other reason was that we had no transportation we had to walk to school so this was about the closest maybe about a mile or so from school. So it was about the closest we could you know find, otherwise we would have to take a bus or something which would add to our expenses commuting.

UQ: So when you started working at that company there were other immigrants who were also?

SM: No, when I started working I think I was the only, I was the only Indian in the company I was working with. My boss, my immediate boss was Italian and he... he was just about the only other, foreigner. I mean he was an Italian immigrant who had come originally to the states. So other than he and I, I think all the others were basically all Americans.

UQ: Okay.

SM: But amongst the, amongst all of us junior engineers at that time, we all got together great. I never felt any discrimination or anything about that. In fact my boss

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Walter, who was the Italian guy, I mean he... he came in one day to me. This is the time when computers were just more or less those not the big main frames but the mini frames I mean the small ones they were computerizing everything and...

UQ: What year...that we are talking about?

SM: This was about wait let's see... '72, '73 and this was the time... engineering offices have these engineering specs, specifications, so that and everything was manually typed out, you know the electric sites, electric typewriters. So when you had to send out a proposal or a report you had to have it all set up. So they wanted to computerize so they could just cut and paste and get it all computerized. So he comes to me one day with a stack probably about double this size, 6 inches high of all the engineering specs and he says, "Sarosh." He says, "I want you to proof them and edit them." I said, "Walter, that's a punishment that's not an assignment." He says, "But you are the only one here who can speak and write good English." I said, "That's not right I don't want... that's not right." But I did a little bit but I mean we used to always joke and he and I would joke that we were the only two who really knew how to speak proper English because we had both been educated overseas and you know we learned the proper English. So we would always joke about that.

UQ: Okay, that's funny. You came to Houston after working for Pennzoil?

SM: I started, no I started with Pennzoil over here.

UQ: Over here, okay, it was a new job?

SM: It was a brand new job yeah.

UQ: Okay so what was your impression of a few things: first, the city of Houston?

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SM: I found Houston to be so bland compared to Pittsburgh. I mean geographically it's flat I mean you know, I always have lived on this side of town I mean there's no trees, there's no... I mean there's minimum amount of trees you know and I found it very flat because Houston..... Pittsburgh is beautiful hills and you know the rivers and all that. It's just a bland city. So physically I thought it was just it didn't much and massive. The driving distances were absolutely...

UQ: Even then even when you first arrived?

SM: Yeah, I mean I used to live, I lived out I lived in an apartment. I came here in '76. Now you've got to understand the time period. '76 was when there was the oil boom in Texas. The auto industry had shut down in Michigan. There were more out of town plates in Houston then there were Texas plates. They say the best selling newspaper in Detroit was the Sunday Houston Chronicle because all the jobs sections and they will say if you came down to Houston and didn't find a job in two hours you were unemployable. Because I mean just everywhere there were signs for people wanting. The oil industry was booming and everything related to. So as a result all of the apartments were also taken up. So living, you know, finding an apartment was a little difficult. I had to find a place and I came down on apartment hunting trip and I said, "I like this apartment I'll come by in two weeks or when my stuff comes in town." She said, "No you better take it now because it won't be here two weeks from now." So it was, occupancy in apartments was just at the start the boom was really building. So I came here right at the beginning of the boom.

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UQ: Okay so what were your impressions having been forewarned by your friends in Pittsburgh that, "You're going to Texas, oh no!" what were your impressions of the people?

SM: I really enjoyed myself. I made friends in the apartment complex because I really didn't know anyone over there. I didn't have, I initially didn't have too many friends in at work because again everyone was new so I slowly started making friends so it was really a major adjustment.

UQ: Okay what about Indian friends?

SM: I had one, one person who I knew from Pittsburgh who was here. When I knew him he was in Pitt with me so he and I were... the two of us became pretty good friends. I mean we do a lot together. So slowly so just in time I started making friends. But yes in the initial stage I really hadn't, other than this other friend of Ashok Kumar, I really didn't have too many Indian friends in Houston.

UQ: Who were your friends then?

SM: Just...

UQ: Coworkers?

SM: Coworkers and people in the apartment complex. Really we didn't... we had these big apartment complexes and people get together in the swimming pool and you have a little cook out together. You get to start to getting to know your neighbors over there. So we had developed a social circle around there.

UQ: What was their background largely?

SM: Oh, various backgrounds. People from different I mean all sorts of backgrounds. Again it was all young working people so we would all get together.

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UQ: Did you find that they actually were from different places outside of Houston?

SM: Yes, most of them were from outside of Houston very few from Houston. So it was... then I am still a bachelor at that time and in 1978 I went back to India and I got married and we came back here. We stayed, again, in the apartment, same apartment for about a year, year and a half... two years practically and then we bought a house not too far from here about 2 miles from here.

UQ: Okay so the marriage was that something that you were interested in pursuing or did your parents suggest it?

SM: No, it was more, I mean I was introduced to my future wife and we met and we decided to get married. It was not a long courtship. It was, again, because the problem is you just don't have time to spend going back and visiting and all of that. So we had to make a decision and we decided to get married. So we got married.

UQ: How did, how did you meet her?

SM: We were introduced through mutual friends.

UQ: Okay.

SM: A lot of that is the way that it's done over there in India. I mean you are invited over and someone says, "Come on over to this function" and it happens to be this young lady over there and that sort of thing.

UQ: Okay, did you have the opportunity to meet other people as well?

SM: Yeah, I met a lot of women over there in the holidays when I'd go and we'd go to parties and there would always be someone or the other who... It's all done very subtly and very elegantly I mean there's no pressure on you over there. I mean you

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all...everyone knows what the purpose of the thing is but there's no embarrassment or seeing if it doesn't gel.

UQ: Okay.

SM: I think from that point of view I like the way that it's set up over there. There's no pressure and yet they give you, the people give you the opportunity to meet.

UQ: Did you have in mind a particular type of woman maybe a professional or stay at home?

SM: No, I don't think so. That's a difficult question to answer you know what I mean. It gels or it doesn't gel that sort of thing. I met other women who just didn't you know didn't do it.

UQ: So professional wasn't so much of a consideration?"

SM: No, no.

UQ: Okay. What about religion was that a consideration?

SM: She is a Parsi like me and that was an important. To me it was an important, very important criteria, yeah it was I did want to preferably marry a Parsi which I did.

UQ: What about language was that a... ?

SM: She spoke fluent English. In fact she speaks English and Gujarati.

UQ: What language do you speak aside from English?

SM: Gujarati.

UQ: Gujarati as well.

SM: I know Hindi also because I went to school in UP so I knew. I had to learn Hindi in school so I speak Hindi also.

UQ: Okay.

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SM: So English, Hindi and Gujarati are the three languages I know.

UQ: Okay were there any disagreements you had with your parents about who to marry?

SM: No.

UQ: You were pretty much on the same page?

SM: Yeah, yeah.

UQ: What did they want for you as far someone you married?

SM: I guess well by that time my mother had passed away. My father was I think he was quite pleased that I married a Parsi girl because I mean there's always the, you know it's difficult for parents to tell their kids what to do nowadays but there's always the expectation and if you meet the expectation there's always the happiness to it. So I think he was happy about it.

UQ: Okay. Did you have other female family members who were more central... played a more central role in setting up meetings, introductions?

SM: Kind of yeah because you know when I used to go for these three weeks or four weeks vacations to India and as I said you were always sort of, you were... if you haven't been to India you probably don't understand this but when kids reach a certain age that's all people are talking about. "We need to introduce him to a boy or a girl" depending on who and then you have these functions going on over there. I mean, "Come on over for dinner to our place." "Come on over to lunch to our place" or something like that and then you have these social interactions. As I said it's not in a large group thing so as I said from that point of view there's no pressure. As I said I walk in and I see a young girl over there my age I know what the purpose of the meeting is. You know...

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UQ: Okay alright, so back to Houston, you'd been here for some time. Not in Houston necessarily but in the U.S. Had you thought about getting married here or meeting girls here?

SM: I never really met anyone who I was sort of interested in from that point of view, from marriage point of view. That never really appealed to me.

UQ: Did you have friends who were?

SM: I made friends. I mean you meet people and you interact with them socially and all that but nothing...

UQ: No, I guess, did you have friends who dated American women?

SM: Well yeah, yeah. Out of, I think one of them, in fact, one of my old roommates he married an American but most of the others all got married to Indian girls.

UQ: So the majority were marrying women from back home?

SM: Yeah.

UQ: And the ones who did date or marry American women what were the American women's background? Were they Europeans, Euro Americans or?

SM: Yes.

UQ: Okay alright. So you've come to Houston and how did you find the people at work? The reception was fine?

SM: Work at that time was terrific. I mean I really enjoyed my work. I really, really enjoyed my work. As I said the oil industry was booming and you just couldn't do anything, go wrong and I had a great job. I was given a lot of responsibility by my boss to go out and do things and so I really enjoyed the work I was doing at that time in the first few years when I was working over there. And I was making rapid progress also in

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getting... moving up the hierarchy, the corporate hierarchy so I really enjoyed it. And in 1989, my boss was retiring and he had called me in and told me, he says there were two of us who were being considered I mean they short listed it down to the two of us for the job and he says that his boss was going to make the final decision and then one morning they called me in and told me that I was offered the job of the Director of Environmental Safety and Health. So it was in 1989 I took over as Corporate Director of Environmental Safety and Health for the whole Pennzoil company. So I was their top senior most environmental manager over there. And we, at that time, environmental movement was very strong so we had a lot of cleaning up problems to do within the company.

UQ: What do you mean the environmental movement was very strong?

SM: There was a lot of enforcement actions being taken. You know pressure by EPA and OSHA to comply with regulations; there were a lot of regulations to meet. So companies had to do this. Companies were reluctant to do it because of its cost of doing business. It doesn't help your bottom line. You know spending money on building (I'm using this as an example) spending money on building a waste water treatment plant doesn't help your production, it doesn't help improve your profitability, it's an expense. So companies are reluctant to do that. They were under pressure by government and the regulatory point of view to do those things. So it was something that had to be done but kind of reluctantly. So by that time I had gotten to the position where I had to start making decisions and I had to go selling these programs to my management and that started getting... I could start seeing a lot of tension building up. Because I would be telling them what they need to do and it was not what they wanted to do. So there would always be this tension and I would just say, "Listen, this is it." I finally go and call the

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lawyers and say, "This is it," you make a decision and say what I'm telling you what you need to do. But I would start feeling... that is when I really started feeling the pressure of the politics in the job before when I was really a junior engineer. I really wasn't involved in the day to day politics. I started finding that as a director that's really my role, my role became more of that: trying to convince management that they needed to do things and often not very favorably received. My message was not very favorably received by management.

UQ: Would do you think that was largely because of the message itself or the messenger?

SM: No, to the message. They didn't want to hear the message. I would say, "Listen you don't have to do it." But you've got to make a note that you said it's not going to be done and they didn't want to do that because they knew they couldn't do it from a regulatory point of view. That was where the... they were trying to force me to make those decisions and I'm not in that level that I make those decisions. I don't make operational decisions. I make technical decisions and I'm saying that you guys are making operational decisions on what's to be done or not to be done, I'm only telling you this is what the regulation says it needs to be done. So that was where the tension started building up and but it wasn't only me, I mean as the Director at Pennzoil. The same problem is going on in a lot of other oil companies as well. And remember by that time later on the oil industry was not doing that well. The boom times had gone.

UQ: Right.

SM: They were losing money, companies were losing money. The price of crude had dropped down and they were very reluctant to spend money on all these projects. So it

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wasn't only me it was everyone in the sort of... all my colleagues in other companies as well.

[Interruption]

SM: So yeah that's when I started really not enjoying the work. Plus I had 60, 70 or more employees reporting to me and I was babysitting most of them. You are, sort of trying to get them working and doing all the administrative work. I really wasn't doing the technical work I was trained to do. So I really, towards the end I was not enjoying my job.

UQ: How long were you the director?

SM: Nine years.

UQ: Wow.

SM: So in 1998 my boss told me. He says, "We're giving you a retirement package."

I was kind of bummed out but kind of happy as well. You know I look at it now in retrospect I got out of a toxic environment. I was very stressed and was not enjoying my work. That's when I decided to go out on my own and I keep thinking that was one of the best decisions I made. Sole proprietor. I don't report to anyone. I have no one reporting to me so I have no responsibilities to people and I can do what I want.

UQ: You've been doing this since '99?

SM: Yes since '99.

UQ: So they must have had some sense of your dissatisfaction? I mean the butting of heads was probably obvious to them?

SM: Yeah I think we all knew that was going on over there. My immediate boss was very nice but it was the interaction with the other operations people that was and I was

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reporting to legal counsel, general counsel, and he was very supportive because he understood from the legal requirements point of view what to do and he would be in the same position. He would just tell them, "Listen" he says, "Here is the regulation. Do it and what Sarosh is telling you is technically correct. I can't argue with him. You guys can do it or you don't have to do it." But when he would say it, it would carry a lot of "you better do it" kind of thing. He wouldn't say it in so many words but it would carry that weight which I couldn't tell them.

UQ: Okay did you have any concerns before you came to Houston about what the city or the state would be like?

SM: No, not really. Other than the little story I told you what my friends were kidding me about, you know I found people very friendly over here. I enjoyed Houston. Now I love Houston I mean I don't think I'd move anywhere from Houston unless I moved back to Mumbai. I don't think I'd move anywhere else in the states.

UQ: Okay, when they told you that little story what were your thoughts? Were your alarm bells going off?

SM: I'm thinking "Oh, my God, where am I going?" You always have this, you were under that impression where everyone was walking around in cowboy boots and you know the old movies and the pistol on their hips and big cowboy hats and all that I go down and I see everyone dressed in three piece suits and, you know... you pretty quickly realize the different environment. But I really I enjoyed myself in Houston. I can't say anything negative about Houston.

UQ: Okay. Before you came here did you consider Houston or Texas to be a part of a southern region (Mississippi, Alabama) or something different?

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SM: You know we never really... I mean at that stage when you're young you really didn't think about that. My social circle was around Pittsburgh and all my friends were in Pittsburgh I mean I never really thought about going out of, you know, there. So I never really had any feel for that in those days. You know when you are young and that age you're really not all into the politics and understanding of what the differences you know in the regions are and pretty isolated from that point of view where we were. But when I moved down here I just, I felt at home when I came down here. I didn't have any problem adjusting.

UQ: Okay, to revisit just for a little bit kind of the assisted courtship that exists, that system that exists in India. Generally it seems as though everyone has some input; it's not as if it's an [totally] arranged marriage system.

SM: That's correct.

UQ: It seems...

SM: It's not arranged in the sense that you are not told, 'This is the woman you better marry' or 'you're going to marry her.' That was not the situation.

UQ: Did you... I understand that your mother had already passed away by that time.

SM: Yes.

UQ: But in your understanding were women more involved in sort of setting up these kinds of things?

SM: Yeah, yeah, I think that sort of tradition in India you always hear the women talking about, "Oh, I know a nice boy, nice girl" sort of thing you know. Even, "I have a son who is 30 years old, who is a bachelor and even now when I go back I hear stories, "Oh, we know this really nice girl for your son." I said, "I'm not getting involved... let

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him... I don't want to touch that one because he's an American he's not going to be pushed into all this other stuff." So yes that still goes on, a lot of it.

UQ: Okay when people do talk about it (because I hear the same kind of conversations as well) and when people do say that there's a boy I think he'd be a really good match for this girl what kinds of criteria are they matching these people by?

SM: I think more by social, you know the social background, the religious backgrounds. When I say social I basically mean the social economic class you know and religion and those are the, kind of the main criteria that are used to match.

UQ: What about looks, does that factor into the discussion?

SM: I'm sure it does but that's... I think looks gets more into personal taste it's sort of a taste issue.

UQ: Do you hear it talked about? She's very...

SM: I don't... you haven't grown up in India so... is that correct you haven't grown up in India?

UQ: No, I didn't grow up there. I grew up here.

SM: Well the Parsis—I've got to say this, I have to say it—it can be very racist and so they will say, talking about the boy to find the girl. They'll say [in Gujarati] "*gori majanee che.*" Do you understand that? So, "she's fair." That's the criteria you know and it doesn't make a difference to me.

UQ: So you heard that going on there?

SM: Yeah we hear that. You know, women saying, [in Gujarati] "*O, majanee gori chokri che.*" You know that sort of enhances her beauty that she's fair. So things like that. Yeah you do hear that.

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UQ: Do you hear it more referring to girls then to boys?

SM: Yes, to girls more too.

UQ: Okay why do you think that is?

SM: I don't know. I don't get...I just hear it. But as I said you know people can be... but you know even now in India I don't know if you know I mean this fairness criteria is becoming... you've got all these... you'd be amazed if you go down and see the TV there are all these whitening creams and make yourself fairer and all this stuff. Evidently it's not only in the Parsi community it's in the whole Indian community, the whole Indian sect, the importance of being fairer.

UQ: Okay.

SM: It doesn't make a difference to me.

UQ: Do you see it here with the Parsis in Houston?

SM: No.

UQ: Do you hear those kinds of conversations?

SM: Definitely not.

UQ: Huh.

SM: Definitely not, definitely not.

UQ: Huh why do you think that's changed?

SM: I don't know. But I think that's more in the old... I mean I see that as more old fashioned. I don't think you don't hear that so much now as you did earlier. Things changed over time you know we adapt and I guess people realize that these are not important any more. So in the old days you hear that you don't hear that so much now.

UQ: In India?

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SM: In India. Even in India now you don't hear that.

UQ: Even with the presence of these commercials of whitening creams and this and that? But you don't hear it so much spoken of?

SM: Over here I haven't heard any in this circle, over here in the Parsi community in Houston or in America I haven't heard people using that as an important criteria to judge a woman's beauty by and I'm glad they are not. I don't think it's really important.

UQ: Do you think there's a link between viewing women's fairness between viewing that and Colonial presence in India?

SM: Yes, I definitely think so. Yes.

UQ: How would you explain that?

SM: Because the Parsis were very Anglo, they were great Anglophiles, great lovers of the British, probably one community in India which adapted very quickly to the British. Back in the early times going back when the British came in as early traders. So yes, very definitely. And then by and large if you understand the Parsi community in India—not any more—but they always they always prided themselves on their own Persian ethnicity which was much fairer than the normal Indian, so yes.

UQ: Oh so then would you say that this sort of concern with fair skin was more prevalent among Parsis than among other Indians back then?

SM: I don't know ... yes it was at one time but I don't know now.

UQ: Yeah not now, but I guess back then?

SM: At one time yes, very definitely.

UQ: Interesting. You've enjoyed your stay in Houston. You've been here many, many years. Who do you interact with now?

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SM: A couple of about two or three social groups of friends. I interact a lot with the Parsi community. I'm quite active in the Parsi community not as active as I used to be but I'm still quite active at the Parsi community so a lot of Parsi friends.

UQ: Tell me a little bit about the Parsi community here?

SM: Okay, at present we are approximately 600 Parsis including children and all that roughly. We have a big center down at the corner of West Airport Boulevard near the Beltway.

UQ: What's it called?

SM: It's called The Zoroastrian Center.

UQ: I see.

SM: We have regular functions and meetings. We've got the Zoroastrian Association of Houston, I was on the executive committee for 4 years back in the eighties so actively participated in the community, helping develop the community. We helped develop the center, build the center and all that.

UQ: What kind of activities does Zoroastrian Association do?

SM: I'm more active in the... I've run like education, children's education. I've helped with children's education, adult education.

UQ: When you say education you mean religious education?

SM: Yeah religious education teaching Sunday schools.

UQ: Okay.

SM: Right now I'm not active in the day to day, as active in the day to day functions more because as I said I'm spending a lot more of my time overseas in India. But we started a library group over here. We're trying to build a library and make it into one of

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the leading research centers in North America. That's our aim is to build it up we are building that up. There's a very close friend of mine who is leading the effort. She is a librarian by training and she's been very active and just very fair. She is originally from Pakistan but we are very close. There are a lot of Pakistani Parsis here. A lot of them have immigrated over here, probably half the Parsis in Houston are from Pakistan, maybe even more than half.

UQ: And they all congregate?

SM: Yeah.

UQ: The Zoroastrian Center as well as the association?

SM: Yeah we socialize together as well as meet at the functions and all that at the center. So I'm quite active over there. I'm very actively involved in the library function. We... not only the physical library itself but the books and all that. We also have started putting on regular lecture series and educational series. We have talks and we bring in speakers from out of town, you know to have that and they are really well-attended. I made a speech a couple of weeks ago over here. I gave a talk over here as one of the parts of one of these series. So we bring in a lot of people. I've spent a lot of time on my own studying the religion and this is interesting because this is something that happened after my son was born. I was sort of a non-practicing Parsi.

UQ: Was your family very religious growing up?

SM: My grandmother was religious. My grandfather was religious. My father was religious but not overly religious. I mean we said our prayers every day and do the rituals and all but not pushing the religion sort of thing.

UQ: But it was a presence in your life?

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SM: Yes. And after my son was born I sort of said, “What do I have to offer him from a religious point of view? If I don’t practice my own rituals and things...” I started doing that. In the bargain, I started learning and reading about the religion and I got probably if I can boastfully say probably one of the largest private libraries of Zoroastrian books in North America. I think I only know one other person who probably has a larger library than me.

UQ: Okay.

SM: So I mean I’ve been studying a lot of the religion. I’m not a... I wouldn’t call myself a scholar by any means but I would probably consider myself to be more knowledgeable than most of the people here, most of them.

UQ: The Zoroastrian Center invites in scholars from India and Pakistan?

SM: Oh yes, we invite people from all over. We’ve invited two people from England over the years. We are having another session in October where we are bringing in one of the professors from Yale. We have had people come in from other universities in California and also we’ve had... we’ve got people of reputable scholars coming in and talking.

UQ: Okay.

SM: So I’m very involved in all of that, in those activities.

UQ: For the youth what kind of activities do you have besides Sunday school?

SM: They have... I really don’t get involved with that that much but they have regular activities. They have their lock-ins. You know where they get together for the weekend.

UQ: Right.

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SM: At the Center. And the Center is closed off and only them over there. They probably have the chaperones and all that.

UQ: Sure.

SM: But they have a great time from what I understand. I'm not really into that side of it. So but they do, we are concentrating... we have some people who are very, very enthusiastic about children's education and they are pushing that.

UQ: Okay as Parsis grow up in Houston are they marrying Parsis or are they marrying others?

SM: I'm not sure what the statistics are. A lot are married out. A few have married... I mean are married... I mean I know of a few who have married within the Parsi community. Unfortunately a lot of them are also marrying out of the community.

UQ: Who are they marrying outside?

SM: Americans basically.

UQ: Okay.

SM: Or Hindus.

UQ: That's my next question. So they are marrying other Indians?

SM: Yes.

UQ: Okay, so then I guess the concern must be for the Zoroastrian Center. When Parsis marry outside of the religion, the religious community, the children— do they embrace [Zoroastrianism]?

SM: Now you are talking about... it's the dread topic that I call it. The dreaded topic, this conversation: intermarriage. Amongst... it is so volatile and it's just... you've got extremes on either side. You've got the extreme fundamentalist who said, "No, either

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both parents are Parsis or you cannot accept the children into the community.” Then you’ve got the other extremist that says, “Everyone can come. You can put anyone you want to.” Because conversion is not really a very, it’s not been a... it’s not been the norm within the Parsi community. In fact it’s not been the norm in the Parsi community until very lately it’s started raising... it’s over here in North America. And North America is pushing the envelope so to speak in this area. So it’s a very, very controversial topic. This whole issue of... and unfortunately no matter which talk you to go by anyone, it always deteriorates into conversion, intermarriage. Every topic even when I was talking the other day it started off on this and I said, “I’m trying to get off this topic” and I said, “Everyone focuses back on that. That’s a divisive topic let’s forget about it. Let’s talk about our community, how we can increase.” So I just call it the dread topic.

UQ: So when Parsi children grow up they out-marry. Does everyone come to the wedding or do some people refuse even to attend?

SM: I have heard that there are... that there are some people who will not attend, but more or less not. In North America there is a greater acceptance in North America and so it’s not, it’s not as... that’s not really as big an issue in North America anymore. I mean a lot of my friend’s kids have married out and, you know we go to every wedding.

UQ: Okay and when you say they are marrying Americans are they marrying Latino Americans, white Americans, African Americans?

SM: White Americans, most of them that I know are white Americans or Indians.

UQ: Okay are they also marrying Latino Americans, do you see that?

SM: I’m trying to think if I know anyone who is married to a Latino American and I really can’t think of any that I know of. I can’t think of.

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UQ: Okay what about African Americans?

SM: One case I know of and it didn't last out, the marriage, the marriage didn't last.

UQ: Okay what about other Asian groups, Chinese, Vietnamese?

SM: There are some who are (I think). In fact one of my cousin's son's in New York is right now very seriously dating a Chinese American.

UQ: I see.

SM: He may marry her.

UQ: What does your cousin think about that?

SM: I don't know. I haven't discussed it with her.

UQ: Okay.

SM: I think eventually the parents want the child's happiness, that's the main thing.

UQ: Right.

SM: You're not going to do something to make the kid unhappy. And I've got that same dilemma myself. Our son, 30 years old, if he comes back tomorrow and says, "I'm going to marry this girl that's not a Parsi," I'm not going to be upset about it. I would love him to marry a Parsi girl. But if it's not I'm not going to get upset about it. He's got to live his life. I'm not going to tell him how to live his life.

UQ: Have you told him or shared with him that you would prefer?

SM: Well yeah I think he knows. We have sort of, kind of discussed this. He's not adverse to any... He's not adverse to saying, "I'm not going to marry a Parsi girl" but he's not... really it's more of an issue of trying to find... he's living in Dallas, there's not that many single Parsi girls in Dallas.

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UQ: So do you and your wife do the same kind of thing when he comes back here; you have dinners with this girl or that girl?

SM: No, we don't. He knows most of the single girls over here. So I mean he's grown up in Houston so he knows who's who and I don't think he's really serious about that.

UQ: Okay. In India, Mumbai, Calcutta the places that you are familiar with, did Parsis marry... out-marry with who is there?

SM: They are starting to. They are starting to now amongst the younger even over there a lot of them are marrying Hindus, Muslims, everyone.

UQ: So it's really it's not just a concern for Parsis in North America it's Parsis... it's happening...

SM: In Mumbai and Calcutta it's starting to become a problem. See this is the issue that you are... the Parsi population is dwindling the number of available girls and boys is getting less and less. They are interacting with a wider range of people in schools and colleges and work. So I mean the chances of them marrying someone outside is increasing outside the community.

UQ: Do you have I guess... a painful question do you have a lot of hope that in the future you will be able to sustain—

SM: No, I don't. In fact that is what... the talk I gave. I'm saying that I don't see... I just studied this paper which says that Parsi community has a declining birth rate. I mean he's saying by 2050, the community can get extinct practically, especially with all the intermarriage and all that going on.

UQ: Okay.

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SM: So no, I'm very pessimistic about it. I wish it were not. But in fact this article says that intermarriage even if you accept all the intermarriages the birth rate... I'll give you an example. I think my grandfather had eight siblings. My father including himself there were six. We are two, my sister and I and now I've got my son, is one. So you can see how through four generations how we've gone, we've declined. It's a very interesting statistic. I was quite amazed when I heard this. One of my grandfather's sisters, my paternal grandfather's sister had 21 pregnancies of which 14 survived. I mean in those days they were baby producing machines.

UQ: Yeah.

SM: Now with education one and two, two is the max. I hardly know anyone who has three kids. You cannot sustain a community with less than 3 kids.

UQ: That's true.

SM: So that's what's going to decline, that what's going to cause the decline of the community birth rate and birth rate is a function of education. As we've increased our education our birth rate is declined.

UQ: Okay.

SM: I'm talking about the Parsi problem not about my own problems.

UQ: Okay. You had mentioned Parsis kind of invoking their lineage to Persia and having fairer skin and Iranians having fair skin. If you look at India as a whole there's a whole range of skin tones right? Within the Parsi community do you see that same range or is it largely...

SM: Yes.

UQ: Is it largely fair?

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SM: No you see some people very dark skinned.

UQ: Okay.

SM: And let's face it there have been inter... okay I'm going to put it a little bit differently. Back in the old days when a Parsi guy went off into the villages to do his trade or something he'd shack up with a local lady over there, you know.

UQ: That's the case for any community.

SM: They would produce kids and, you know they were accepted. At that time, they accepted from the paternal point of view. That's another thing I didn't want to get into. The paternal... it's more acceptable to have the kids of the Parsi father accepted into the community. So those kids would be accepted into the religion. So you'd have... you did have that mixed blood over there. And so I mean yeah you do you have a wide range of skin tones in the Parsi community. You see some very fair practically blonde, blue-eyed Parsis and you see some who are very dark skinned.

UQ: Do the... or at least back then in India did the darker skinned Parsis have a harder time getting married?

SM: No, I don't think.

UQ: No?

SM: I don't think that is the case.

UQ: Okay. So you are talking about three groups of social...

SM: Yeah then we have a... I've become since moving in here with Bobby in Bobby's office and becoming friends with him I've developed a circle of Indian friends which I really didn't have because before I was more isolated within the Parsi community but

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now since moving in with Bobby and meeting all his friends and getting into his circle you get into...

UQ: What's his name?

SM: Bobby Singh.

UQ: Okay.

SM: He's an interesting person you should talk to him also sometime. I don't know if he'd meet your criteria...

UQ: I'd like to. So you moved in, when you say moved in...

SM: I used to office separately over here. I had my own office and Bobby used to be on the 4th floor at that time. We became friends. And then he moved down here and because of my commuting I didn't want to pay 6 months' rent when I'm not even over here. So I basically left. So when I come now I just sublet from him that office.

UQ: I see. So how long have you shared, how long has it been since you've been here?

SM: I've been here now two years.

UQ: Oh fairly recently okay.

SM: Yeah but we've known each other for a much longer time. But there are a group of friends over here. I've sort of become friendly with a lot of his friends over here. So we have... so that's another second group. Then the third group it's a very small group. It's... it actually is surprisingly its friends of they are the parent's of my son's friends in school when he was in high school. He was in Saint John's in high school over here in Houston and when they were all in high school all of them... the parents we'd all get together like once a month or so and we'd go out to somewhere like Ninfa's or one of

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these places. The parents would all be together and the kids would all be together and we'd socialize and also set up a parents group so that we could all talk amongst ourselves knowing what is going on with our kids and interact. We still are friendly with a few of those parents and we get together so that's sort of like the third, a much smaller group not very big.

UQ: Okay so the Indian friends that you've met through Bobby, his last name is Singh, so is he Sikh?

SM: Yes.

UQ: So are these friends also Sikh?

SM: No, all over. I mean all Indian. Wide range, north to south.

UQ: Okay.

SM: Pradeep is the one... Pradeep is Mr. Human Encyclopedia— he knows everyone. And in fact I was first introduced to him when I lost my job at Pennzoil as a person to talk to through a mutual friend of ours. We instantly hit it off, Pradeep and I, when I first met with him. So we've been close friends since then.

UQ: He's a great guy, very helpful.

SM: I've got great respect and admiration for him. He was really, really helpful and he's very helpful to everyone. Anyone who calls him up, you know, he's willing to drop everything and help that person and that's why when you said you knew Pradeep I said, absolutely will work with you, not a problem.

UQ: He's been a tremendous help to me as well just getting me set up with different interviewees.

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SM: As I said I call him the human encyclopedia. He knows everyone. You just ask him and he'll give you... if you ask him for two names he'll give you twenty!

UQ: That's exactly what I did I asked him for two names and he gave me twenty!

SM: That's what I did. When I said, "Give me some names to talk to." He said, "I'll email them to you." And he sends me this big laundry list of names. So he's really, really a nice guy. Pradeep is part of this group.

UQ: Okay.

SM: He started a group over here. It's a men's group okay. We call ourselves the AARP it's got nothing to do with retirement thought most of us a lot of us are that stage, not all of them. AARP stands for Ashok, Ashok, Revinder and Pramod. These are the four that started this group and it's a group of guys we meet the first Monday of every month for dinner at a restaurant. It's only the guys. It's now about 15, 20 of us and not everyone come to every one of these people are traveling. We just sit down once a month and talk. We just have a great time. It's a guy's night out.

UQ: That sounds great!

SM: We sometimes someone comes up with a problem we solve it for him or hopefully try and solve it for him and you know we talk about, we go around the room and everyone says what they need to talk about or report anything exciting going on in their lives, their problems and all that. It's sort of a nice little group.

UQ: It's sounds nice.

SM: And we also interact with each other, not in between the monthly meetings we meet and interact with each other.

UQ: Okay. So what do the wives think of this?

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SM: I think they think, "Thank God you guys are out of the house!"

UQ: Makes sense to me.

SM: Like children.

UQ: Alright your son you said you sent him to Saint John's. So after your convent school experience did you have any reservations sending him to...?

SM: No, in fact it is very interesting, Saint John's it's an Episcopalian but it's not religiously overt. They just have a Wednesday chapel and it's all different groups and in fact there was another Parsi girl with him over there, in his class. And one day he went up there in the organized chapel and said, "Why don't you have the Parsis come up and talk?" He said, "Okay you're on next week!" So sort of they gave him a date. So the two of them got together and they made a little talk on Zoroastrianism, what to say at one of their chapel sessions. So yeah there was no overt religion there. As I said other than that Wednesday chapel and it was sort of more open to all the denominations presented it was not something...

UQ: Okay. So you didn't find any similarities?

SM: Not pushing religion. No, no, no... not at all.

UQ: Okay.

SM: He went, before that he went to the British school which is just down the road here, just down Whittington back here. Excellent school, excellent school I've got to say the basic foundation of education he got over there at the British school there's no doubt about it. In fact, and when he moved to Saint John's there were 5 or 6 of his classmates and they were all doing great over there. In fact, I remember talking to Saint John's teachers saying, "We need to go and visit and find out what they are doing right." So

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with me probably that was the most important parenting, well two things in parenting I look at. First of all probably most important is setting up a good value system in our kids. Without that value system they are not going anywhere. So you've got to set up a good value system which I hope I've imparted to him. Second, is giving him the best education we can afford. I will tell you something that happened when I was working and earning, while he was at Saint John's, was astronomically high fees. We had to do without a lot but I felt that that was worth it and I really now look back and have no regrets giving him the best education we could. So...

UQ: What did he end up doing?

SM: Then he went to U.T. He went there and had a ball at U.T. He did well. He did psychology and government affairs and we sat and talked and I told him I said, basically, "You're not going to go anywhere with a bachelor's degree in psychology. If you want to go somewhere you've got to do a doctorate." (Which he really didn't want to do.) So we were examining other options and I said, "One option is you can do law." Because from government affairs he was very interested in the law side of it you know they do constitutional law and all that. He was really interested in that. I said, "How about law?" "Yeah law is great no problem." So he sat for his LSAT's and he got admission to SMU in Dallas and he graduated and he's a practicing lawyer in Dallas right now.

UQ: Okay I was going to ask you regarding where you live. Have you always lived in the same house?

SM: Yes, we've lived in the same house since 1980. We bought the house in 1980 we've been there since then.

UQ: What's the area?

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SM: Two miles down the road it's called Village West. It's between Wilcrest and Kirkwood off of Westheimer, north of Westheimer between Wilcrest and Kirkwood.

UQ: Okay have you seen that the neighborhood has changed?

SM: Very much.

UQ: Since 1980 to now?

SM: In the last 5 years it's changed dramatically. After Katrina all the apartments around us had Katrina refugees and there's been a lot of problems.

UQ: What kind?

SM: The crime rate has increased. In fact, like in a three week period there were about 10 hold-ups between Wilcrest and Dairy Ashford along Westheimer. Businesses were being held up.

UQ: Really?

SM: Yeah, the Houston Police had to bring a special squad in over here. If you talk to the Houston police they knew about it. "Oh yeah the West side we know about that."

UQ: How do you hear about it as a resident of the area?

SM: Our association, our residence association has a newsletter they are putting out all the stuff, the information.

UQ: Okay.

SM: We've had a lot of break-ins in the neighborhood. So from security, we love the area we like everything that's around us. It's very convenient, but from a security point of view it concerns us. We've been talking about whether or not we want to move or not. But we haven't decided on where and when. But we are seriously talking about moving.

UQ: What do you like about it? You said from... you like the area what about it?

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SM: Just that everything is close by. I mean not far from malls. You've got the shopping centers you've got the grocery stores, everything convenient, the restaurants. Everything is nice and we have a lot of friends in this part of town.

UQ: What about your neighbors, immediate neighbors?

SM: We know a few, we've never really been very intimately close to our neighbors. We knew each of the people around us, but more on a just talk to them in the yard we don't really socialize together.

UQ: Okay. Are there many Indians in your immediate?

SM: No, not in the immediate area.

UQ: No, where are they from, your immediate neighbors on your street, in general?

SM: In fact it's really interesting because when we first moved in we had a really international neighborhood. We had Chinese, we had African Americans, then us, then Egyptians. Then we had Dutch, then we had other Egyptian, across the street we had Greek... so really we had a little mini United Nations over there.

UQ: Yeah.

SM: We knew each other but as I said more in passing by and talking in the yards and all that. We really haven't socialized together.

UQ: So now it's not as diverse?

SM: A lot of them have moved out. Some of them have not some of them are still there from the old neighbors. Three of us is probably still the original from when the houses were first built, three of us are there most of the others are new.

UQ: Who is moving in to the neighborhood some of the Katrina folks or?

SM: No, no.

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UQ: So a couple of questions about current affairs.

SM: Yes.

UQ: Just your opinions on things, your perceptions. One question, are there groups here in the U.S. who you think are discriminated against?

SM: Definitely. All the minorities are discriminated against. It depends on where and in what context you are discriminated against but yes there is discrimination.

UQ: Can you give me some examples of what you are talking about?

SM: I definitely think African Americans are discriminated against. I think Latino's are discriminated against. I think it's in many areas Asians when I say Asians I'm talking about the Chinese and Vietnamese then of course the Indo-Pakistani's there's a lot of discrimination. It may not be overt but there's discrimination.

UQ: Does it take place in the work place?

SM: In the work place mainly, I'm talking about the work place.

UQ: Okay and even in white collar work professional?

SM: Yes, I can... I think it's difficult to prove but I can definitely think that my position I was discriminated against.

UQ: How can you say that when you achieved such a high level in your company?

SM: Because I could have gone up a lot higher. And that's the thing you know you have to prove...as a foreigner you have to work twice as hard as the other person to achieve what you did. I'll give you an example why I think I was discriminated. When my boss retired he had a lot of perks which when he retired and I took his position I didn't get them.

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UQ: Okay did you try to negotiate for them?

SM: I talked about that and I was just told that they were no longer available.

UQ: I see.

SM: You can't argue about that. You know why but you can't argue with that.

UQ: Okay.

SM: They will throw you a few drinks to make it seem. But it's discriminating. That is very difficult to prove discrimination. I mean as you said no one tells you to your face you're not doing this you're not getting that. You don't belong to the right country club and play golf with the right people. They don't tell you all that stuff. But you know. I'm intelligent enough to know. So yes it's very much in the work place.

UQ: Did you see discrimination against, well first of all what was sort of the demographics in your company? The presence of different minority groups Latino, African American, Asian... white? I don't mean specific numbers obviously.

SM: No, within the context of that I can tell you that there were quite a few. There were four or five of us Indians who I think all of us should have been at much higher levels than we were. But none of us had gotten to that.

UQ: The same could be said for the African Americans?

SM: Yeah, I can't say I mean looking back I think even enough women there were no women in that time. Going back to the 80's and 90's there was really no women in the oil industry in senior positions. It was very much a white man's club.

UQ: So do you see the discrimination against the various minorities is the same for each of the groups or is there any particular group that is discriminated against more?

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SM: No I think I think it's uniform discrimination. If you're not the white club you're not... it doesn't make a difference who you are.

UQ: Okay I see. What about within groups from India? I guess for example Punjabi versus Hyderbadi versus...

SM: No, in fact it's very interesting. I think we look at us as more homogeneously once we come here especially in the states. I think we tend to look at ourselves the more homogeneous group and we don't really... I mean maybe when we are sitting together in at a party or something teasing each other. The Gujus or the Punjabis or the Southies, but it's more in jest really nothing. There's no again nothing amongst that we have.

UQ: Okay. How would you compare safety in the city of Houston versus in the suburbs?

SM: I don't know. I really don't know much about the statistics from that point of view. I mean I hear stories about the home break-ins in Sugarland against Indians and but I've also heard about home break-ins over here against... again from a discrimination point of view... I mean they are home break-ins are just home break-ins. I know that there was, at one time there was in the news about all these Indians getting their homes broken into this was quite a few years ago in Sugarland. From what I understand there was a group of people that heard that Indians kept jewelry in their house. I had a break-in in my house many years ago. And it was a professional looking for jewelry.

UQ: What did they get?

SM: My wife had gone to India. My son was very young she had taken him to India and she told me. She says, "Please take all the jewelry and put it in the safe box." I am an awful procrastinator. Thank God I didn't procrastinate and I put it in the safe box.

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UQ: At the bank?

SM: At the bank. I come home one evening we had gone out for dinner. Some friends had invited me over by myself so they invited me over for dinner. I came back. We had an early dinner and leave early so 8:30, 9:00 I was back home and it was winter time and I came in and the house was freezing. I walk in and I'm seeing all the doors and windows wide open. All the sliding doors and they are all wide open. I knew immediately someone had broken in. So I made a hasty retreat, so if the guy's still inside I don't want to accost.... So I went out and picked up a rock, made noise and all that.

About 5 minutes later I went in and called the police. They came in and I had not touched anything. By the time I looked around, it's amazing, in the bedroom every closet and every drawer, dresser drawer, had been opened and strewn around the house. I knew he was looking for jewelry. My camera was sitting on the front, not touched. The TV set was not touched nothing. VCR all that stuff. The only thing that was missing was a pair of gold cuff links that I had. And he had... all the while my wife's junk jewelry he threw on the floor like in disgust "what is this junk that you've got over here." So he was a professional and then the cops came in and we talked. He says, "He's not going to have left any finger prints or anything." He said, "It's no use." But so yeah I guess they are after... there's probably some truth to the professionals being after jewelry.

UQ: Okay. What do you think of affirmative action? What's your opinion about that?

SM: I think it's mixed. I have mixed feelings about that. I really think you really do need to promote but I think some of the ways they go about doing it are not... it's not implemented well and I'm not sure I have a better way to implement it. But I'm definitely more in favor of affirmative action. I'm not against it. I'm definitely in favor

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of affirmative action because there has been so much discrimination against people. Like I'm not sure these quota systems are well run and I think some of the problems at universities you know with filling in seats for minorities and all that... my son would tell me he said, "They come and they don't know what's going on. They've probably not even got a 8th or 9th or 10th grade equivalent education when they are coming into college. And it's not fair in that case to bring them in on the quota system, I think it's not fair to the people. You have to have to develop a better system of getting them educated rather than pushing them into an environment where they are going to fail. "See this is a quota guy and he's not going to do it." So that's the point I have. I think it's the method that they are going about doing it. But they really do need to have an affirmative action program to encourage the minority student to raise their education. I'm a firm believer is education is what the key to the whole thing is. Without education you can't do anything.

UQ: Okay so for disadvantaged groups that's the solution?

SM: Yes, better education.

UQ: So I guess if there were a greater funding for stronger schools is that what you mean or?

SM: That's... to me I mean I'm reading all the politics and I'm saying, you are cutting back education! I mean it's the last thing you should cut back on. You are dooming your future to failure! I mean how can you! Everyone else is spending money on educating their kids and we are cutting back education over here, its ridiculous! I'm sorry but I think it's stupid! We should be pumping money into schools! But then I'm not a politician.

UQ: What do you think about greater government assistance to disadvantaged groups?

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SM: I think you need some assistance. Again the old method, the problem lies in the way it's done. Again I'm not sure that I have a solution to... I mean I'm not in favor of the way they did Katrina, let's put it that way.

UQ: Okay what do you mean?

SM: I don't think the way they brought them over here and just dumped them over here and said, "We're going to give you free housing for the next 18 months." Well I disagree with that. You know they should have been told, "You are going to earn a living. We're going to give you a job. You are going to do something. If you are going to get free rent you've got to do something. If you want rent you go out and work in this place and dig ditches or do whatever it is or work in this office and do something." But I think they shouldn't... they just shouldn't have been... you help them but you help them in a way that's makes them responsible for earning what they are getting. That's what I mean when I say the methodology. You don't throw them on the street and say, "You don't have a place to live." But you also just don't give them money and say, "Do what you want to do." That's why I have the problem I have with these Katrina refugees who are living all around me.

UQ: So are you saying there isn't a strong work ethic?

SM: There is no work ethic. There's no work ethic.

UQ: Okay.

SM: I mean if you don't give them an incentive to earn what they are getting there's no incentive to do anything. Sit at home watching TV. Kids are lazy, they grow up in that environment, they see their parents doing nothing.

UQ: So even if those kids were educated that wouldn't... that wouldn't be sort of?

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SM: You're not getting educated when the kids not getting any parental guidance in education.

UQ: So it's education, parental guidance as well?

SM: Yes. That's why I said the value system setting up you know, be responsible for your actions. Do your homework. Do your studies. Do this, all that. There's no guidance from the parents. There was no incentive for them to do anything.

UQ: What about before they were Katrina refugees, do you think...?

SM: The neighborhood was great! Beautiful place, we never had a problem, seldom that we had a problem that we heard of. I had a break in but we had break-ins and all that but not the way it is now.

UQ: It's not as if Katrina "the event" you know the hurricane and then the fact of them being evacuated here that that sort of created a vacuum of values right? I mean where were the values before?

SM: Well again without trying to be racist let's put it this way. Those people over there were doing nothing and they were living in subsidized housing over there. As someone said, I heard someone say what the New Orleans Police Department couldn't clean up got cleaned up for them. You know but and those people are here now. And I'm sorry I'm not saying it from a racial point of view, I'm just saying there's no work ethic in those people. They are expecting everything.

UQ: Why is this?

SM: Because they've always been living like that. The government... that's what I'm saying that's the problem with these welfare programs. Make them work! There's plenty

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of jobs to do. If I'm paying you... you work and earn it! Make them work 4 or 6 hours a day doing something to earn that rent.

UQ: But it's just been going on for so long.

SM: Well they started out with a year. They extended it to two years then they extended it to three years. I don't know now what the status is. I don't think any of those people are still paying rent. I can't believe that, they can afford to pay that rent. The apartments are going for \$800, \$900 a month or more! If you're not earning... I don't know where they work. If they are working I don't even know that. I shouldn't say I don't know maybe some of them. I'm not saying all of them but there are some.

UQ: Okay anything else. I have covered what I need to cover anything that you feel you would like to?

SM: No, I've been answering your questions. I've enjoyed this discussion. I mean you probably asked me a lot more questions than I've thought about in years.

UQ: Well I've enjoyed it it's been tremendously helpful, unless there's anything else.

SM: No, I mean is this the sort of stuff that you wanted to know? Is this going to be helpful to you in your? I don't know what's the next step?

UQ: Well let me close this off and then we can talk a little bit more.

End of Interview