UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Pradeep Anand
University of Houston Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
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UQ: Okay it's recording and this is the oral history interview of Pradeep Anand on June 20, 2011 at Rice University, Houston and the interviewer's name is Uzma Quraishi. Alright, you can just begin by telling a little bit about yourself, your background, your childhood.

PA: Okay starting from a chronological standpoint it's a good way to start. I was born in Bombay just after independence, 1950. So I grew up in a very idealistic India. Nehru and my parents and everyone wanting to build a great and new nation kind of thing. I also grew up in a terrific city. Bombay which was kind of more of a melting pot than any other city that I've ever been to, people who are from different parts of the country. My grandparents themselves had migrated from the south in the early 1900s. So I was a third generation…my mother was a first generation. I was second generation Bombay-ite.

UQ: Where did they migrate from?

PA: Tamil Nadu. My maternal grandfather migrated from Tamil Nadu and my paternal grandfather migrated from Tamil Nadu North Arcot to Bangalore and then my father migrated to Bombay. But for all practical purposes I consider myself as a

Bombay-ite because I grew up in a very Marathi neighborhood. Interestingly enough I went to an Italian Catholic school. English was the medium of education. Then…

UQ: What was the name of the school?

PA: Don Bosco. It's a global, actually a global educational order. The Silesians, it's everywhere, including the United States. They are known for their technical training globally but in India they are known for their just very high quality education. They are like the Jesuits except they are Italian. They are from the Turino area.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I grew up with my grandparents. They lived with us and then also, my parents, three siblings (two sisters and a brother). One of my sisters and a brother are here in Houston, in Sugar Land with me. One lives in Missouri City, my brother… well we live within 10 minutes of each other. But it was almost a very idealistic, ideal, idyllic environment. Our family background is we are Tamil Brahmins. We are known for our focus on education. Just to give you a perspective, two of my father's siblings are… one of them was one of the very early… all my aunts, my father's sisters are incredibly well educated. To take a little bit of historical perspective, women have free education in the Kingdom of Mysore, that's where Bangalore was and all my aunts, three aunts, were very accomplished. One of them actually did her Master's in nutrition I think at Berkeley and this is early 1950s and she came back to India to teach nutrition at Lady Irwin College in Delhi. My father's next brother one of was the first person to get a scholarship. There is a Colombo Plan after independence where Britain offered scholarships and my uncle was one of the first students to go to Britain to do is Master's and Ph.D. in chemistry. So that's the kind of background that I grew up in. In the sense that you had all these very

accomplished people so we had a tremendous pressure for educational excellence in our family.

UQ: Sure. So did these relatives, when they went to study, did they all come back to India?

PA: Yeah, they all went back to India. In fact my uncle finished his Ph.D. at Edinburgh. When he came back to India he couldn't find a job. He had a Ph.D. in chemistry and didn't have a job. Then he went, I think he went to Canada after that, came back, didn't have a job and then he said, "Okay…" He did his post doc and he was in Ottawa (5.06). He came back and no job in 1958. He decided, "Okay now I'm going abroad for good." And then he got a call from an industrialist from Ahmedabad, a Sarabai, saying I'm building India's first plastic plant can you help me? And that's what he did. He stayed back and built India's first plastic plant and retried from it whenever he retired. He stayed with the company right through his life.

UQ: The relative who went to Berkeley, was there a scholarship program in Berkeley?

PA: I'm sure there was. Our family couldn't afford, I mean none of us, honestly we were very middle class. And to put it in perspective middle class in India had no savings. The middle class in India essentially depended… one generation took care of two generations so it was a cycle that was kind of permanent. So my grandparents lived with us. They were pretty independent, they had their pensions and all that but they really couldn't live independently. So the responsibility of my parents was not only children but also the parents and that has continued like that, a continuous cycle throughout history probably. But that's the way it was. I'm certain that my aunts, my uncles would have never left. My grandfather in Bangalore worked for the government. He was in the

meteorological department. I mean none of them could afford, I couldn't afford my airfare when I came to the United States and if I didn't have the scholarship to come here I wouldn't have come to the United States. I got a scholarship in India, that's why I came. Otherwise this place had no attraction for me.

UQ: Okay, hmmm.

PA: But all of them came on scholarships, went on scholarships.

UQ: So the scholarship you received was here in Houston?

PA: Yes.

UQ: To?

PA: The University of Houston.

UQ: In engineering?

PA: No.

UQ: In what?

PA: In business. Marketing.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I came to the business school. So that's what I did, my MBA, but I almost got my Ph.D. when one of my… the guy who went to hire me told me that, "Don't get your Ph.D. nobody will hire you."

UQ: Over qualification?

PA: Yeah, I'd be over qualified to be in the industry. So I stopped it… I'm still I mean I haven't been recently but I've been an adjunct professor at U of H for the MBA program.

UQ: Okay, alright. So how did you find out about U of H that you applied there?

PA: U of H, very simply was because my sister got married and moved to Houston.

UQ: I see.

PA: One of the things was, I received, I was admitted to all the Ivy League schools but I didn't get a scholarship. University of Houston, my sister was here. [She came here because she married someone who was already in Houston. Her husband, came because his brother had settled here. They were both engineers and came in the early 70s. The first brother eventually returned to India but my sister and her husband stayed. Houston was on the map. I had never heard of UH but I had heard of Rice. There was a strong connection between IIT and Rice. You see, IIT had sent many students to Rice for higher education and these guys would write back to our campus and tell us about Rice. It was a network. I lived in the dorms at IIT and we all knew about Rice. It was one of the top choices, it was huge!

UQ: Did you know anything about Houston?

PA: Oh yes! Houston was a rising star at that time. First, NASA had put Houston on the global map, particularly for engineers. And engineering jobs were so abundant in Houston in the seventies. Second, the city's economy was protected by the oil boom and so, while the rest of the country was in a deep recession, Houston was booming. We all knew about Houston. I wrote the book, *An Indian in Cowboy Country*, to chronicle my journey from Bombay to Houston, though] …I'm not an in your face writer. [1]

UQ: Oh really, two years of work, huh?

PA: I just wrote it for fun.

[1] Bracketed section (pg. 5) added immediately after interview, from memory.

UQ: Right, well regarding kind of ideas about southern cities. Did you consider Houston to be a southern city or was it a different from?

PA: Different, I do not consider, I knew about the Civil War and the South and to me a southern city was more southeastern United States. This was the "Wild West." Texas was always "Wild West" for me. John Wayne, cowboy movies, so that had nothing to do with the Confederacy.

UQ: Okay so had you considered applying to schools in Atlanta, Emory, for example?

PA: No.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I mean there was no…. I would rather live, my choices I knew nobody, zero people who went to Atlanta, Emory. I mean I knew people who went to Rolla, Missouri because they were known for chemical engineering or some engineering. So, all the information that kept coming back was from universities that were good in engineering.

UQ: That was your filter, that was how you assessed it all?

PA: Yeah.

UQ: Alright so when you first came to Houston where did you live?

PA: I lived in this despicable place, ghetto, called Cougar Apartments right off of the University of Houston on Calhoun. That's where I lived.

UQ: So you had roommates?

PA: I had three roommates. I worked in India after graduating. So the big difference was when I came to the University of Houston my reputation had already preceded me. So when I came here some of my classmates were here and they'd already lived here and they had made arrangements for me to come. As soon as I came I had to do very little to

even get an apartment. One of my friends had picked roommates for me. "This is where you are going to live. This is the best place to live." It was like, "Here are the first three things you do when you come to Houston. You live in Cougar Apartments because you can't afford a car. You wait for a year; we will teach you how to drive. We'll take you for groceries, so I had three roommates from IIT Madras all chemical engineers. (11.51)

UQ: Okay. Cougar Place the apartment complex itself were there a lot of Indians and Pakistanis?

PA: There were Indians, Pakistanis. There was anybody who couldn't afford a car.

UQ: Okay, got it.

PA: Yeah anybody and in fact, the following year my roommate, my very close friend, the very next apartment was a bunch of Indians with a Pakistani roommate who is still a delightful friend of mine. Went back to Karachi, Nadir. Another… Indians and Pakistanis really didn't care where you were from. We had a Bangladeshi, she also lived in the same complex. So you could say we were South Asians. We really didn't look at ourselves…. *Desis*—it's the word that was coined literally to describe the fact that we really don't care about these political barriers between countries.

UQ: Okay, what was your next residence?

PA: The next place I went to was actually, I lived in the dorms on campus. I got a pretty nice place. I got tired of cooking so as soon as I could I bought a meal plan and rather than going from Cougar Apartments to have every meal, which it wasn't that inconvenient because it was on the way to my department. But then the cleaning part of it and everything came in and I was making good money for a graduate student. Business school guys got a lot of money. So I moved into the dorm.

UQ: Okay and you had a roommate there?

PA: Actually I had a, what should I say? I had a ghost roommate who had signed up for the room but at the last minute couldn't make it so I had the whole place to myself.

UQ: Nice!

PA: It was wonderful!

UQ: Nice okay.

PA: So for a whole year, I didn't have a roommate.

UQ: Okay so your friends, obviously you came here and you had friends almost immediately.

PA: Instantly.

UQ: Who supported you, kind of socially supported you; introduced you to other friends.

PA: I had a sister here too.

UQ: Right, but she didn't live around here right?

PA: No, she lived out.

UQ: Okay, who else did you interact with, people with other ethnic groups or …?

PA: Absolutely. My colleges in the department used to call me the original American Indian.

UQ: Hmmm.

PA: I grew up listening to rock. I knew a lot of stuff about America, my musical interests, I read a lot so I didn't have any difficulty assimilating and getting along with my colleagues. So I had no problems at all. In fact they… I would, they would be concerned they would ask me out, "Let's go out for a drink." I didn't have any

compunction about it or eating beef. "Let's go for barbeque." "Not a problem." They'd ask me, "How come you eat beef?" "If you eat it, I eat it. If you don't eat it I won't eat it." I appreciate that, I respect it. I had no problems. So I had, my roommate… I shared my office with a woman who was from Wisconsin. She was of Hungarian descent. Not a problem at all. One of my colleagues was from England and the professors themselves, you know, they could tell the difference between…they would privately ask me, "Why is it that you are so different from the other students who are from India?" I think it had a lot to do with my background. I mean when you come from a city like Bombay, there is no single culture that dominates Bombay. You have to assimilate, you have to mingle; you have to do a lot of things. When people don't grow up, when people grow up in shelter or cultural nooks it becomes very hard to mingle. I had that facility. I could speak the language and I could be understood. All those things helped. And I was curious. More than anything else I wanted to really understand what my, what my colleagues were like, what kind of lives they lived. Hungarian backgrounds, Karen, she passed away… a chain smoker… but I actually attended her wedding. Two of my Ph.D. classmates got married when they were at graduate school. So I attended these things. I learned a lot. To me it was like being thrown into a completely new experience and you just… I'm always in awe. You know I learn something new every day. So that helped me.

UQ: Okay so there were at this time you were working on your Ph.D. in the business school.

PA: Actually I was going through graduate school. I hadn't really gotten to my Ph.D. program until the third year.

UQ: Okay and the students who were with you, your cohort as well as the graduate students around you… were there a lot of them from India?

PA: Out of the 14 graduate students that were out there, 3 of us were from India. That's it. All the rest were all from, one was English and the rest were from the United States, no Canadians.

UQ: Were they from Texas?

PA: No they were from all over.

UQ: Really? Okay.

PA: They were not…let me think were there anybody that were from Texas? Nobody with a drawl, no no…there were some from… the interesting thing is they were from the Midwest, they were from… one of them was from North Carolina and some from the West Coast. They were from all over the country not just… but only one English guy that's it.

UQ: Alright when you say they were from all over the United States were they all white?

PA: All white.

UQ: Or different?

PA: All white. There was an assistant, a teaching she wasn't a teaching assistant she was like a research assistant who was African American. But she was married to a white guy so... they both took care…she had done her undergraduate from Texas A&M, I think or she did her undergrad here, I don't remember but her husband was… they moved to Seattle. But that was about it. It was pretty much, well I'm just thinking about my entire

graduate school, is there any blacks there? I had black students in my class. You have to understand I used to teach 50 students every semester.

UQ: Okay so they were undergrads?

PA: They were undergrads. Hakeem Olajuwon was my student. Clyde Drexler. These guys were all students when I was… these NBA stars were students then. So I had a lot of, it was a very mixed class. Okay so the interactions were, my interactions they were less with my colleagues in the department and I don't think there was a black professor. They were all whites probably. I never thought of it that way. I'm trying to think of, I've never thought of what the ethnic mix of the guys that taught me. But my students were mixed.

UQ: Okay what about Latino or Hispanic students?

PA: Yeah they were mixed. Latino, Hispanic, Africans… actually African Nigerians. So it depended on, this was a business school and my course, the two courses that I taught, one was in business ethics and the other was a marketing 101, undergrad. They were both required courses and I didn't have to teach 250 students. 50. I think it was 45 or 50 every semester and it really represented a cross section of the university at that time. So everybody had to take that course, 101.

UQ: Alright.

PA: Actually it was a 401 or 301.

UQ: So your closest friends were whom?

PA: Combination again. I had a lot of Indian friends because they were, you have to understand, my very first year here I got pulled into the India Students' Association very quickly. I was very active on campus in India. I was the Student President. So over here

when I came in they got me into everything, the magazine, instantly. I used to write a little bit and then. Let me think… I got involved in this India Students' Association and that's how, and we used to do programs on campus and I'm trying to think… we used to show movies on campus, Indian Movies, Bollywood movies. Now they are called Bollywood, we used called them Hindi movies. One of my very, very close friends from campus, my classmate actually and my dorm mate, was responsible for doing it every week or every other week and we used to show it at Agnes Arnold.

UQ: Agnes Arnold.

PA: And actually, Mukesh was the guy who did it. So the involvement in the ISA was a mandatory for me. I couldn't get out of it.

UQ: How long were you at U of H?

PA: Three years.

UQ: From what year to what year?

PA: In 1978 to '81. But during that time, on one side I had the Indian connection. At the end of the year they forced me to participate in this terrible thing. It was a competition for outstanding international student and I won which surprised me.

UQ: Was it a talent show?

PA: It wasn't a talent show. There was an interview and then you had to stand on stage and they asked you to sing or something and they asked me a few questions and you had to be humorous. It was like what you saw yesterday, Miss USA except no swimsuits! You just had to wear *kurta pajama* and stuff. The following year I was the president of the India Students' Association. But the interesting thing is a lot of my friends were Pakistanis. So the year I became president every activity we did ISA and

PSA together because, one of the three guys I told you who was instrumental in my learning Urdu and appreciating *ghazals,* Arji, was the president of the Pakistan Students' Association. So we did things together. (23.49)

UQ: What was his name?

PA: Arji… Arjumand Azhar.

UQ: Okay.

PA: So the first concert, Jagjeet Singh's concert in Houston was a joint venture between ISA and PSA. So we did it constantly. We wanted to set the kind of tone, that "I don't care what's going on back there… I mean, we are cut from the same cloth" kind of attitude. So it was on the *desi* side, it was Indians and Pakistani's that do things together, and Bangladeshi… I should include… a very, very dear friend was from Bangladesh but she died a few years ago, she was a radical. She went back and changed Bangladesh.

UQ: What was her name?

PA: Nasreen Ulhaq. Is it taping?

UQ: Yep.

PA: Good.

UQ: Just double checking.

PA: She died, she got accidentally run over by her own car or something happened. Anyway, and I also had my people I knew from work and students. In fact my very first job that I got in 1981, which you are talking about a sequence of events. One of my students, actually a white Anglo-Saxon recommended me for my first job. It is a very

interesting… a student recommending a teacher, because he was president of some organization that had accompanied us for…

UQ: So he was an older student?

PA: He was an older student.

UQ: Got it.

PA: And he recommended me for the job.

UQ: What was your first job? What was it and what company was it?

PA: It was a company called Geo Source here in Houston. You know the Car Max that is at Hillcroft and… that was the location. It literally became a car parking lot.

UQ: It did. So that was your first job and you started in 1981 and by this time are you married between ’85 and ’90, you were on your own?

PA: Single.

UQ: And working in the same company?

PA: No actually a lot of things changed. In 1981 I joined the company. In ’82 the price of oil dropped precipitously and Houston went into a recession. So I lost my job in ’82. And here’s the thing. Even though I lost my job in ’82 the person who actually helped me recover was a colleague of mine from U of H. He helped me find my next job. He was a Ph.D. student a white, Anglo-Saxon and the way he recommended me, you know, was just unbelievable and this was all over lunch. He called me. I was down to my last ten bucks literally. I mean I had nothing. I had shut down my apartment. I had run out of money $10 left. I had shut down my apartment. I was ready to move to my sister’s place. I had always avoided it. Moved all my material belongings to everybody, to all my friend’s garages and plastic bags and Lynn calls me up and says, “Why don’t

you come over let's have lunch?" I said, "Okay free lunch!" I went over and while… and before going for lunch he says, "Well I need to make some copies in the office next door so why don't you go over there." He didn't have a copy machine he had a small business. He went in the office while he was making copies the president of the company comes out and says hi to Lynn and says, obviously Lynn introduces me and tells me, "I'm the smartest guy on the planet. You've got to hire him he's a marketing guy too." The interesting thing was the president of the company was a market research company. His name was Jim Corbett. You may not know the relevance of Jim Corbett but in India but Jim Corbett is a very well known person in India for having come up with protected areas for tigers. He is a British guy and a majority, a lot of national parks in India are named after Jim Corbett. So when he said his name is Jim Corbett I told him, "You know what you are a very famous guy in India." He said, "Why?" and the conversation started and before… it was like 20 minutes. I made the connection with Jim and so then he asked me what I was doing. He said, "You know what I can't pay you as much but if you are interested you are welcome to work for us." Right there while we are making copies.

UQ: And he hired you as what?

PA: As a market researcher.

UQ: And that is the same job that you had before?

PA: No. I mean this was just a tiny part of my job but it was a job. Houston was in terrible recession.

UQ: Right, it was.

PA: He says, "When can you start?" I said, "How about now?" He said, "No go ahead and have your lunch and come back." So I went to have lunch and I started that

afternoon. I called my sister and said, "I'm not coming to your place. This was very important for me, you know! [Laughing] I had very good friends who said, everyone volunteered, "You are welcome to stay." I said, "No." Last ten bucks and it… so '82 and then… and Jim said, "Listen you can look for a job. Do whatever you need to. I understand we are not…" I had to take a salary cut. I mean market research is a very tiny portion of what I do. But whatever I did I did well. He liked it. But he said, "You can ask my secretary to type applications for you." Then I got to know all the other businesses around in the same building. One… almost six to eight months later… this is February to October, I got a call for a job interview and that's when my career just took off. That was 1983. In '83… even then, it was very unique. The job interview there was, I mean it was all oil industry and I was… on paper, I was what did Charles tell me? I was, on the top 10 candidates I was number 8. On paper. The guy who hired me, his name was Charles, he had a matrix in terms of experience and degrees and education and he said, "Okay here are all these guys…" and he systematically went through and he said "By the time I went through number 4, I knew who I was going to hire but you were number 8. But just from a process standpoint, I said I'm going to talk to all 10 or 11." He said, "But after I talked to you I knew all those others are not in the league." So anyway, he went to bat for me. I mean, there were an immigration issues, every darn thing and he just went out there and got me hired.

UQ: So it sounds like with the people who really helped you along the way. I guess the question is did you feel that your being an immigrant was a hindrance at all, at any point? No? Okay.

PA: I mean well has it been… was it a hindrance? People who knew me…you've got to understand, the hindrance part of it. I probably have a little bit more of a generous view in terms of prejudice. In the sense that people take short cuts. You really cannot go into researching every individual. So people have certain prejudices that they build in their minds over a period of time and you will find that in the book too. Okay? When people don't know you, or don't have the opportunity to know you or interact with you, they just look at you, "Oh you are Indian" and that's it. So they build everything based on prejudice. But when people know you or have an interaction with you I have never, ever found any hindrance. It's only when people don't interact with you and they start questioning you without knowing you. So typically I rely on people to say, "Why don't you talk to the guy?" When they say, "Why don't you talk to the guy?" I know what my friends are doing. But has there been hindrance? Yeah. There have been but from people who don't know me. I mean to say that people don't have prejudices is stupid. It happens every day. I'm sure you see it too.

UQ: Well you're honest. Most people really don't like to admit that that's the case. They don't… They would prefer to say that everything is fine rather than...

PA: Prejudice is a given thing. And I would say, and again I'm being generous out there. In a sense we all need short cuts…. Okay, just to survive. Again I'm going into evolutionary psychology here okay? You've got to really think in terms of… human beings are very good at recognizing patterns and that's built into them for safety purpose. You know you don't have to be hit on the head three times for you to recognize. But what has also happened is information, okay misconceived. FOX channel is a very good example of how people can… information and media and people who don't have the

ability to reach their own conclusions grab other people's conclusions and then that's what I call prejudice. So people have opinions and they act on it and the situation where this really affects people is when opportunities start becoming lesser.

UQ: Scarce.

PA: When opportunities become scarce is when you really see the impact of these I would say misconceived prejudices.

UQ: So did you see that in the early '80's during that recession?

PA: Yes. It happened to a lot of people.

UQ: For example?

PA: For example one of my colleagues, actually at Geosource, very early had to leave his company because he taped his boss telling him something that was racially limiting. He told him, "I'm not going to promote you because you are an Indian." He taped it. Then he won a lawsuit.

UQ: I see.

PA: This is one of the smarter guys. Most of the other people, people get smart about it too. Nothing is obvious. But people could feel it. And particularly, until 1981 Houston, they needed a lot of people but from 1982 onwards until about 1990, Houston was a very constricting environment because opportunities were not that big and you really had to fight. And being different… it's not like being different in India. In India, in Bombay people don't really care which part of India you are in. I mean you can mingle. This doesn't matter that much. The way you talk and everything else. It does have its own prejudices. It does have its own violence okay? But that's the violent aspect of it. But here there is a very different kind of violence. It is a very subtle

violence which in my opinion is that it exists out there. It's not physical but it affects your ability to a livelihood and people get limited in their growth, their career growth. "It's okay to be a minion but you can't be a chief," stuff like that.

UQ: Do Indians when they gather socially is this something they talk about?

PA: Yeah they do. They used to, not anymore because most of the… most of my colleges and me have broken the glass ceiling okay. The sheer… I mean they have broken it in thousands of different ways. But the biggest limiting thing that existed was in the '80's. From the '90's onwards things began to change dramatically for various reasons.

UQ: So would you go so far as to say there is no glass ceiling anymore?

PA: Oh there is. Of course there is. Of course there is! But that it, again, you've got to understand, it is also natural. It is also natural because there has always been a glass ceiling for women, okay? I always and that's why… by the way I was considered to be one of the better marriages of women because I could appreciate in a different way the limitations that you have for being different or being—, one of my colleagues used to say. You know you kind of understand what it is to be a woman in a man's world very simply because you have to prove yourself a substantial number enough times. You know we talk about it. It's not good enough to be just one or two X better but…

UQ: Who is "we"?

PA: In the community. You've got to be able to say there will be a two X better than the competition. And again, let me tell you why that is important. As you go higher up in an organization (I'm talking about the corporate world here) as you go higher up it is not an individual but your ability to manage people that becomes the most important

issue. You are managing other people's resources. The risks are very high, the risk of failure is extremely high so people look at things that could possibly contribute to failure and this being different being one of the contributors. And I've had very frank conversations with some of these people and they say that, "Yeah we do consider it. We do consider it but…"

UQ: Who are the people you've had conversations with?

PA: People who are senior executives.

UQ: Who make these decisions?

PA: Yeah.

UQ: Okay.

PA: But it doesn't exist anymore.

UQ: So…

PA: Typically I'll tell you Halliburton, for example, their last Chief Technology Officer was an Indian. He went right through the ranks but it is sheer brilliance. The same thing with Halliburton's competitor, the CTO, Chief Technology Officer of the company is an Indian but Schlumberger is a very much of a global company and Halliburton is turning into a global, employees from everywhere from around the world.

UQ: Okay so these glass ceilings you are talking about, you are saying there is a glass ceilings you are talking about. You are saying there is a glass ceiling for woman, has been since the beginning.

PA: Yeah.

UQ: Glass ceiling for Indians or immigrants or who?

PA: Being different.

UQ: Okay tell me give me examples of what you mean by being different. For whom do these glass ceilings exist?

PA: Okay this is something from the corporate world now. For example you rarely find an American except Dudley who is the CEO of BP, he just broke my rule. He is very different, most Norwegian, I would say Dutch or Western European companies very rarely would they consider somebody from outside their countries as the Chief Executives of their companies. Americans don't have that kind of a limitation. So we are… we are actually living in a country which is far more open and of course we push the limit too. I mean, because you can't be high enough in your tolerance for other people's talents. But when you look at Western European, it doesn't exist.

UQ: So if you look at the heads of these companies and you were to compare…

PA: They are all from the original countries. Okay? So that's what I mean, by being different as being a contributor to a glass ceiling, even BP never, ever had one until this crisis in the Gulf of Mexico when Dudley, who is an American, took over as the president of BP, the CEO of BP. So being different is more of an issue than being an immigrant or being Indian or anything else. It has less to do with… it is anything that contributes to your ability to do your job or your ability to do your work. It has less to do with your cultural background. This is what I've seen and I have to prove myself also, constantly. When I get new clients, because I work only with senior executives and then I deal with them. I know that they are looking at me. But now I'm at a stage where I've dealt with so many companies. I have a pretty good track record, I've lived here for more than 30 years, it's easy to understand me. So all these elements: communications, your history, your experience, plus your references and everything else, means a lot to them. So to

each one of us individually attempts to break the glass ceiling but cumulatively what happens is explosive and that's what I've seen over the last 30 years, 20 years.

UQ: Okay so being different from what? What is considered not being different?

PA: Hard, can I bring in your husband's experience at Infosys?

UQ: Sure.

PA: Being different at Emphasis is a big deal. How many Indian companies do you know in terms of having tolerance for? I know what American's go through, white Anglo-Saxons go through when they work for Infosys, they don't fit. So being different means whatever is the prevailing mainstream culture of the company and you being different from them. That's the way I look at it. So prevailing mainstream culture for example in the iron and steel industry took on a very, very different turn when one of the largest iron and steel companies in the world suddenly became Indian owned. Now when I go to Pittsburgh and the iron and steel industry, they look at me differently then, "Oh you are from India or something." So what I'm saying is, every time someone chips away, Mr. Mittal, Laxmi Mittal, by buying all these companies around the globe… okay he may have done something over here but this implication shows up on me. This is what I mean. So, suddenly as Mr. Mittal becomes mainstream, suddenly I'm not different anymore. As my classmates know, work for Mr. Mittal to run plants, one in Indiana and one in Africa and other places and they are all from my school, guess who is mainstream? To my clients I'm as mainstream as they are because all these guys now…are my classmates. So you've got to think in terms of being different as being from the cultural mainstream of a form or environment. You know, rather than it being… and those people have their own prejudices too. You know in terms of the kinds

of people they look at in terms of what works, what doesn't work and all of that. So I'm… I don't think there is anybody out there who really is devoid of this prejudice. It's pretty universal.

UQ: Okay. Going back to your interactions with people in your early years here in Houston, how frequent (if you can remember) how frequent if you can remember, how frequent were your interactions with Indians? Daily basis…

PA: No. Always…

UQ: I guess I mean socially outside of your school or work place?

PA: I had very little time outside of work. During the week, I mean I would say during 6 days of the week it was my social work and my social was work related. Okay? On the weekend it would be some elements would be [Indian]. So… in fact we used to joke that we are weekend friends. Seriously we are friends during weekends and then we'd disappear for a whole week and we would show up again. "Hi how are you?" and the interesting thing is, because I had a sister in town so I had friend who were in her friends circle and I had my own. On top of that I used to also do… be a guest host on this program called Music of India.

UQ: Meena Dutt?

PA: Meena Dutt. When she went on vacation I would fill…

UQ: You were her substitute?

PA: I was her substitute. So a lot of people knew me, knew me or my voice and people like Rathna, Anil, they have been my friends since I came to Houston. So I had a high profile when I was at the university, so everybody knew me and then I went

underground for literally almost 20 years because I focused completely on my work and then during weekends whoever were real close friends were the ones I stuck around with.

UQ: Okay and those real close friends were Indians mostly?

PA: Oh yeah… mostly. I have from work, because of my work, Charles for example I kept mentioning, he interviewed me. He's a good friend even today. I attended his daughter's wedding. He comes to Houston and he comes and stays with me.

UQ: Okay.

PA: He used to live in West U, I used to live in it, we used to go to each other's homes. You know his daughter and his dogs were good friends of mine. See I never lived in the Southwest. Okay. I always lived in this area. All of my friends were in this area.

UQ: Starting in what year?

PA: 1978, '79. After I had finished the dorms I moved here.

UQ: This is where you ended up?

PA: This is where I lived.

UQ: Why did you choose this area?

PA: I liked it. I mean Greenway Plaza was here. I love movies, but not Indian movies, not just Indian movies. I love movies. I'm a cinema buff. Rice Media Center was here. The museum is here. Greenway Plaza had a theatre called Greenway Three, River Oaks was here. All the restaurants were here. And anytime I had to do any kind of activity I could just do it.

UQ: Okay where in this area did you live specifically?

PA: Shepherd and Bissonnet.

UQ: Did you live in an apartment?

PA: A garage apartment okay? Then Weslayan and West U, further down on Bissonnet those are the two places.

UQ: Both apartments?

PA: Yeah, one was a condo. Later on the third place I had was a condo. No actually I lived also at Bissonnet between Greenbriar and Shepard… Greenbriar and Kirby.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I used to literally walk to the Village, Morningside Thai Café, so I knew this area very well.

UQ: Okay.

PA: And there are a lot of activities and accommodations. Culturally I like this area very much.

UQ: What about neighbors. Did you find friends among your neighbors?

PA: Not really because most of them…because I lived in an apartment and condos and again this is the time frame when Houston was in a recession, there were a lot of transients. See even before you get to know them they were gone, 6 months, 8 months, a year. Yeah people came and borrowed sugar, do this or that or have conversations but leave, pick up mail, check the newspaper, do something but really not enough to say that we were neighborly friends, no I don't think so.

UQ: So when you went to the movies or out to eat who was this with? Did you invite your friends who didn't live in your immediate area to go out with you or did you go by yourself?

PA: I never went by myself [Laughs].

UQ: Okay.

PA: Always I had company, I had company.

UQ: And did you also socially interact with your coworkers?

PA: Yeah.

UQ: And these coworkers, again I'm going to go back to ethnic, racial background.

PA: All of them, in fact, here is the thing… the ethnic background was most of them were from Texas and Louisiana although there were some from Alabama. But I worked in the oil industry. So anybody and everybody who actually contributed to the oil industry and there were Houstonians, there were… I got along very well with the Cajuns because I love their food too. So, we actually did things together. But did I go fishing and bass sport and stuff? No. I didn't do all that. The typical outdoorsy stuff, shooting things? No. Shooting animals and stuff I didn't do. But it came to do, just having fun stuff, yes.

UQ: What was the frequency of your social interaction with white Americans?

PA: I would say about 1/3.

UQ: Okay so we are saying maybe 1/3 of…?

PA: 1/3 white, 2/3 Indians and South Asian.

UQ: And once a week, twice a month?

PA: Always once, it was only during weekends.

UQ: Weekends?

PA: And I would split it… I would try to have the balance.

UQ: So you made an effort.

PA: Yeah I mean you have to; you have to make the effort.

UQ: Why? Not everyone does.

PA: For what?

UQ: Make and effort to interact with people of different backgrounds, some people are very comfortable with just Indians and not just Indians, Indians who are from their own language group.

PA: I know but I'm from Bombay too. My group; all of us have different parts of India. Bombay is very different.

UQ: Right it's an international city.

PA: It's not just… even in India.

UQ: And it's outlook.

PA: No, within India. Here's the thing. You've got to understand this very unique thing about Bombay. Nobody cares where you are from. Okay? It's almost like, I don't know if you are familiar. My friends from Pakistan say that Karachi is like that.

UQ: Everybody is from somewhere else.

PA: Somewhere else. Everybody is from somewhere else and nobody cares about your religion. Okay? I have many Catholic and Hindu and Sardars and Muslim friends. In fact, I don't know all their… what do you call them? And that's the way we were brought up. My brother's wife, okay, is half Muslim, half Parsi, okay? So this is the kind of… my sister is the only one who married somebody of her own background. My wife is a Jain. My brother, my sister, my other sister is married to somebody from Andhra Pradesh but common element amongst all of us, okay except the sister who lives here, we are all from, all of us are from Bombay. So it's a very, it's a gorgeous city to be in from a people standpoint. You meet so many people and then you see the commonalities of

everyone's ambitions, as well as every one's focus in life and things… I mean you see everybody wants very, very similar things. I had that growing up. I could see that over here. So I really didn't care where somebody was from when I dealt with them. The important thing was, to me very important, are ethics and integrity. Those are the most important things. So even though, and they needed to like movies and food and they needed to enjoy… I like music. So the program before music of India used to be a Cajun program. So I used to get along with the Ragin' Cajun. You know zydeco and you know… so there are a lot of these cultural things that helped me. I can't explain why other people don't do it. To me it's also the issue of it comes easily. Again, I'm curious. People have the integrity, the ethics it doesn't matter where you are from.

UQ: How often did you socially interact with Mexicans? Houston has a large Mexican population. Did you do that… did they happen to work in your work place or did you not cross paths with them?

PA: There weren't that many but at the same time some of my friends were married to people of Hispanic backgrounds. I got along very well with them.

UQ: Okay so your male friends married women?

PA: Yeah women from… Mexican women.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Not a problem.

UQ: Did you or do you have Indian friends who are married to African American women?

PA: I think I have only one. He is a guy who lives in Africa.

UQ: Okay.

PA: He's one of those Mittal guys. I think he is the only one that I know of.

UQ: What about friends, kind of in your age group who are married to white American women?

PA: Not that many. Most of them, I have a few… most of them are married to Indians. Indian or Pakistanis, the combination, South Asians and some of them are married actually to Southeast Asians… Thai… but not one that I can think of who is married, not too many married to white Americans, not too many. A few but let me think… yeah not too many. Australians.

UQ: What about…

PA: Yeah one married to an Australian white.

UQ: So what about your social interactions, you said you made an effort, a conscious effort to mingle with people outside of just the Indian group. You also mingled with white people; you didn't have much of an opportunity to mingle with Mexican Americans but what about black Americans?

PA: Very little. I didn't run into them.

UQ: Okay there aren't many in the companies you've worked for or haven't been?

PA: I mean most of the companies that I've worked for, again, oil field engineering companies. If they are… they aren't there, they are almost nonexistent in my work area.

UQ: Why is that, why do you think that is?

PA: Why do I think that is? Maybe they don't pick these industries… because I work mostly in the engineering world, industrial world. I don't think they pick these industries to… if they are smart… First of all like I said I deal with the upper echelons of companies. Okay? Even within them they are all smart. Now if you were a smart… I

don't see Indians there either. Okay? Very rarely do I see them in the kind of industries. If you were one of them you are probably in the IT industry or doing some start up or doing something. For example I have my own business. I'm not in any of those companies either. So one of the key elements is if you are a smart, anybody who is different and you see an opportunity to succeed elsewhere you will get out of those industries because most of the businesses I work with are very mature businesses. Not high tech. Not like the BMC's or… I've worked with one but everybody disappeared very quickly after some time.

UQ: So the people you interact with these upper echelons are any of them African American, or are any of them Mexican American or Latino?

PA: Mexican… Latino, Latino… yes actually, why am I saying that? My biggest client is Brazilian.

UQ: Brazilian okay, Brazilian mean based in Brazil?

PA: No he grew up in Brazil. See again I work with companies where I don't look at them, "Where are you from?"

UQ: Right.

PA: Okay so even though he is my biggest client I didn't even think of him as being Latino or Brazilian you know. Do you know what I'm saying now?

UQ: It's not the first thing that comes to mind when you think of this person?

PA: Not at all. To me, I really have to think in terms of… let me see, "What's that guy, what's that guy…" because one of my other clients is British. I mean they have offices in England. See my clients are from North America and Europe, that's all.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I don't have any other clients. Houston, Pennsylvania, England and then Northern Europe. Because of England I go to Netherlands and Germany, France, Czech Republic and it kind of goes there. So all of these, I would say the majority of them have very little Latino influence, unless I think of my guy who runs France who is Italian okay? So to me when you say Latino I'm literally thinking all the way from the southern tip of Argentina, Peru all the way into the Mediterranean.

UQ: This makes me think of the glass ceilings that you mentioned. Do you think there is a glass ceiling for African Americans in companies?

PA: Is there one? I'm sure there is. I'm sure… again the here's the thing that I see that hurts even before an African American gets into an office, that hurts him is all this pile of prejudice that proceeds him or her before they walk into that office. I'll tell you very, very simply, even Indians okay, it used to really, really hurt me when I used to see this when you watched what's that cartoon program, the Indian guy…oh The Simpsons.

UQ: Simpsons.

PA: And the Indian guy was the guy who was at the grocery store. Today the concept of an Indian guy is very, very different. In Houston there was the whole concept of an Indian guy very early was… what is it? Today we are known as professionals. So we've done a lot of work in the last 30 years to change that. So before my daughter goes in for an interview. There is a certain image that precedes her, that makes her acceptable. One that when you walk in, okay? So your parents have done a lot to give you a spring board. What hurts me and I really feel for African Americans is that they really don't have that spring board very often because as soon as somebody like a Bill Cosby or all the wonderful people start coming along and creating a spring board, then you've got a mass

media which… and I blame the media too to a certain extent and I also blame some of the media stars, that promote that image which is very different and contrary to helping people in the professional world. So when a black African American walks into an interview there is this whole thing that comes along and we're trying to prove to ourselves, "Why is this guy different?" And it hurts him and I feel very bad when I see that because I know we've gone through it. Okay now when I walk into an executive's office I know what precedes me into the room. It's very similar to what preceded me when I came to Houston. You know when I came to the University of Houston, alright, IIT's was already in place. People didn't have to think twice in terms of which university does this guy go to? There is, for 20 years people have been coming into the University. They all know these guys are smart guys. So I didn't have to do anything to prove myself. And if you go to a university where there haven't been previous IIT alumni it hurts me. But I'm very clear that that has happened to me. So I give credit to those people who preceded me. Very similarly when I worked in the environment I had my own challenges. We all had our own challenges. But I'll tell you one thing that intentionally or consciously or unconsciously we all consider ourselves to be representatives of our race. Okay? Everything I did literally, you can ask my colleagues, everything I did I was always in praise of South Asia. I would never apologize. And more than anything else you had to be incredibly knowledgeable about your own background for you to be unapologetic and make sure that people understood. "Listen guys while you guys were still figuring out how to carve in stone or make fire there are a lot of things that have happened. Every race goes through, civilization goes through a bad patch and by the way…we are not morons." There has to be a certain amount of

pride in where you are coming from and the ability not to take crap. I'll take a little bit. But I give it to people and say, "Hey, you are ignorant." And it's my responsibility to get rid of that ignorance. That's why I do that lecture once a year at Rice in the business school. About India yesterday, today and tomorrow, the opportunity that is India and stuff like that. But that pride existed in all of us. No one is apologetic in terms of, "Oh I'm from India therefore there's something wrong with me just because you think of it that way." But it is my responsibility to change your mind and I used to do that and I still do that. But for that, I keep constantly updated in terms of there's never enough information. I have a very different perspective on Pakistan than most of the Indians because I've gone into historically why Pakistan was created and I know more. You're a history major right? Do you know anything about The Great Game?

UQ: Yes.

PA: How many people know about it?

UQ: Right.

PA: And how would you behave if you were a pawn? In fact I was going to write an article in Outlook. So if I look at it differently and I told all my friends who are influential in India about it and they agree with me so they all (and by the way two of them are ministers in the Parliament).

UQ: India?

PA: Right on top. But you need to know that. When you… but anytime even people who pick on Pakistan. What would you do if you were a pawn and you can't trust anybody? What can you do? But the thing is, these are the kinds of things that you need to put in front of people but in a very dispassionate, intelligent way so that you start a

dialogue, a conversation so that you can get other people to empathize with your situation and then bring everybody, we are all on the same plane. Okay no one's higher, no one's lower. That's kind of the approach I take in creating a level playing field.

UQ: And as you've said so many have made these strides and really professionalized themselves so before you walk in the door there is this, kind of this…

PA: But at every opportunity I get I'll also educate. I have to.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Most people don't because they don't know.

UQ: Hmm.

PA: They really don't know. That's what makes it… or hurts me. When we have the opportunity to change, get rid of these glass ceilings I mean not only for ourselves. I mean it's about… I mean everybody should progress. I'm not talking about any one particular race or group progressing but people as a group need to progress and you can contribute to it and that's what works for me. I'm even the senior most executives I'll tell them, I'll tell them what the Great Game is about and how it started. You don't know. Last week there was a movie by Satyajit Rai at the Museum of Fine Arts, "Charulata," and there's a line out there where the guy, he's the husband has a line out there, "Oh the British are busy right now in Afghanistan." That is the biggest laugh everybody got in the room. The movie is based in the 1879 and they are talking about the British being… A lot of people didn't know the significance of that statement they just saw the thing on the surface. But the Great Game started right then. In what, in Czarist Russia?

UQ: Yep.

PA: These are the kinds of things that I feel bad about African Americans that people don't recognize, have the ability to recognize the good from the not so good. How do you create the right image? Not just the right image it has to be true. I'm not talking about creating a false image. But at least recognize reality of what the individual is. And again coming back to what I said earlier in terms of prejudice, people make assumptions to make life easier because that is built into us. We recognize patterns. The important thing, not too many people are out there saying that I won't recognize patterns. They will recognize a pattern and use it and the more they use it and the more self fulfilling it becomes, the harder it becomes for them to change.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Does that help you, am I rambling?

UQ: No you're fine, you're fine.

PA: Okay.

UQ: I'll tell you what I need when I get to it but it is all background for some of the, I mean obviously my interest is specifically in race and in prejudice, discrimination. What about discrimination within the Indian community towards other groups? Because we've talked about the main stream culture and its discrimination against others.

PA: Indians are one of the most prejudice people you can find. It's not just…

UQ: Against who?

PA: Against themselves. There is no such thing as an Indian.

UQ: Right.

PA: Okay, they are usually… if you talk to an Indian they will typically say that they are from one particular state or the other. The concept of being Indian is a Western [one].

So there are situations where you do feel the prejudice within the Indian community, skin color being just one aspect of it, but also different parts of India. There are certain parts of India that people are prejudiced other parts of India.

UQ: Can you be specific?

PA: Can I be specific? Listen I have friends from all over the country but I can tell you that there are certain people… no I can't be specific.

UQ: I mean it's not what you think but I guess what you, in your experience in interacting with other people from all parts of India, what kinds of…of distinctions do other Indians make?

PA: Oh there's so much. How much time do you have? You have to observe these things. Okay…

UQ: When we look in India you know, India is divided up in the states right?

PA: Yeah.

UQ: So if you looked at India and wanted to create bigger regions, like in the South, you know how we have 50 states in the U.S. we still have specific, we have regions like the South, the Southwest, the West (as you said), North. If you looked at India could you do the same thing and are there features that…

PA: Yeah four southern states. They are what I call the Dravidian states.

UQ: That's one region?

PA: That's one region.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Then the West, Gujarat and Maharashtra and some parts of Rajasthan, if you will. But Gujarat and Maharashtra, culturally very different [from the other regions]. South

four states, culturally very different. Even the architecture is very different. Then you get into the east: Orissa, Bengal, Assam. Then you've got the Punjabis, Haryana, and Western UP. And then you've got UP in parts of Hindi speaking Madhya Pradesh, that becomes central, kind of central in India. Those are the different… because of the diversity, you can go 100 miles in India and things are different. Because of the diversity in India and the lack of transportation and mingling people started moving in India only after they built railroads. Otherwise people didn't go more than 24 hours by willow cart. That's it. That's why we have so many regional cuisines and all these, they were all village and whatever was available locally. So the entire country's economy was built on being local completely. So you do have these prejudices in terms of caste system, languages.

UQ: The caste system I understand that there was prejudices between people of different casts but language prejudice?

PA: Oh absolutely. The language, I will just use language as a method. The prejudice would be… if you look at Bollywood movies you will find that the Bollywood heroes, if you will, except for Shahrukh Khan, but most of them typically would look more Middle Eastern.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Okay they look a little more European, Middle Eastern, Punjabi, Pathan, I mean more… actually, Afghani, stock.

UQ: And by that you say more Middle Eastern do you mean?

PA: They are more European looking.

UQ: Tell me what that means.

PA: What that means is basically tall, fair, white guy. Okay?

UQ: What about the women?

PA: The women are usually not. It's very rare, at least if you (again through the discussion I had with my wife) early 1940's and '50's the actresses were all from the same region but in the '50's all that began to change. The biggest actresses typically were from the southern part of India and then the eastern part and in the west. They are from… so basically it brought the concept in my mind that (and actually I read about again the evolutionary psychology) that there are more I would say, universal criteria for women looking beautiful in the sense that you can take women from around the globe, that's why you can have a Miss Universe but you can't have a Mr. Universe, except body muscle. But in the sense the characteristics of beauty amongst women can be dispersed across different regions. But in India that's the case. You see more [range] but when it comes to men it doesn't happen very much. So the stock [character] basically becomes that whether it is, but they all fall into the same category. Okay whether it is… I don't know how familiar you are with all these actors.

UQ: Fairly familiar.

PA: The Hrithik Roshan looks more like Elvis and a combination of Amir Khan and Saif Ali Khan. Except for Shahrukh, who looks different, all the others, they are fair, tall, that part of the world and even earlier, Raj Kapoor, Rishi Kapoor, all the Kapoors, even this new Shahid Kapoor, and there is a short Kapoor out there who I don't like but he's not doing well. What is this guy who made… Ranbir Kapoor. They are all kind of the same thing but the actresses are all from different places.

UQ: Back to Shahrukh Khan real quick. How does he look different from them? He's tall…

PA: He's not tall.

UQ: He's not that tall?

PA: He's a tiny guy.

UQ: Is he?

PA: He's not even good looking.

UQ: On the screen he looks taller, as tall as everybody else but I guess he's not?

PA: No, no, no I've met him.

UQ: So he's not…

PA: No. That Chunky Pandey at 6 feet 2 and all that. But they all have more Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Omar Sharif.

UQ: And Shahrukh Khan doesn't?

PA: Doesn't have that. He is a unique guy. He doesn't, he's dark also. He's not fair but all the other Khans, and Hrithik Roshan and all the other heroes, the Kapoors, they are all from the same part of the country.

UQ: Which is?

PA: It's between Punjab, actually Lahore, the stock goes all the way to Afghanistan.

UQ: Northwest.

PA: The northwestern part of India. Very rarely do you find, you know, Bollywood heroes now, Bollywood being kind of a common cultural thing. But in India you do have that so you can look at movies and see, "Okay, now who are the good looking guys." But when it comes to women they come from all over the country.

UQ: Okay.

PA: They are not, in fact, except for Preity Zinta who is no longer out there, none of the others are from… pick me some names. Aishwarya Rai is from the south, Madhuri Dixit is from the south. From Maharashtra. Who else? What are the actresses?

UQ: The Kapoor sisters.

PA: The Kapoor sisters are from the Northeast but I don't like them. Karisma is gone, Kareena is the only one left now.

UQ: Do you think that they look very different from each other? Do you think there is a standard (like you said) that there is a stock sort of physique that the male actors meet, what about the women do they all sort of look similar to you?

PA: Again Bollywood is a bad place to talk about that because besides the looks part of it, it's who you know that also plays an important role. If you are a Kapoor it's easy. Like Anil Kapoor's daughter now is a big star and Shashi Kapoor somebody. So there are some women who get in there because of that stock. Okay, they come from Drew Barrymore kind of thing. You belong to the family. But there are others who have all made it on their own. Amitabh Bachchan is not like that. But he does have that stock. But Amithab Bhachan's mother is a Sikh. But he managed it very well but now if you look at Abhishek he fits into that stock too. But Aishwarya Rai is not, she is from the south.

UQ: Okay, one could arguably still say that they are all very fair.

PA: Ahhh.

UQ: At least for the most part.

PA: No but Waheeda Rehman wasn't.

UQ: What year was she popular?

PA: '50's and '60's. But Waheeda, she was number one.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Hema Malini is fair but their features are very different is what I'm saying. It's not the fairness. The features, a Bengali feature is very different from a south Indian feature. The southern Indian features are pretty much large eyes. Okay, it's not just fairness.

UQ: Okay.

PA: They have actually… I'm talking about all the feminine features in terms of their eyes, their shape. They are a little more… they are well shaped. They are not necessarily buxom. Like once you go into the northwest they kind of spread out a little more but the south that isn't the case. In the east that isn't the case.

UQ: When you say the south of India.

PA: Four states…

UQ: How many of the actors and actresses in Bollywood (in the '50's and '60's as well as now) are speakers of Tamil or Malayalam?

PA: Hema Malini.

UQ: And she was very popular?

PA: Oh God! Vyjayanthimala: Tamil. Sridevi: Telugu. They are all… Madhuri Dixit: Marathi.

UQ: What about now?

PA: Now they are, the stock, the Kapur stock is there. Who are the other actresses now besides Aishwarya Rai? I'm trying to think of a few movies…. So okay Jessica what

is her name now? "No One Killed Jessica"…Kajol! Kajol's mother is Marathi, father is Bengali, Kajol's cousin I'm trying to remember her name. She's got light colored eyes, Bengali, she's Bengali [Rani Mukherjee].

UQ: So would you say that there has been a shift in… you said there is a shift for men.

PA: But it happened in the '50's.

UQ: Why did it happen?

PA: Men, no, it hasn't happened, is what I'm saying.

UQ: That has not happened okay. For the women it has?

PA: For the women it has happened. More women from other parts of the country are… interestingly enough Waheeda Rehman and Vyjayanthimala were the first two; both are from the South. Even though her name is Waheeda Rehman she was Tamil-speaking. Okay she grew up in Chingleput so here these are the kinds of details that… well for her name… but the other part of it is, this is also what I mean I love about India and Bombay. The Khans don't have to change their name to be popular. You know what I say? Nobody cares. The question they ask is, "Can you make money for me? Can you act?" You don't even have to act, are you good looking? But in general I find, like you said in your… I don't want to bring that up but the situation you mentioned earlier the rubber meets the road when you are engaged in matrimonial conversations.

UQ: Sure.

PA: That's when I discovered it. When you go through arranged marriage situations and you talk about it, but it happens when ignorance is a little higher.

UQ: Okay.

PA: But once you get into the educated class a little bit, people who have traveled around. I divide Indians into two groups. Very simply it makes my life a little easier. Are you a person who grew up in your own homestead or not? See if you're a Bengali who grows up in Bombay or Delhi or Madras or wherever, it is very different from a Bengali from Bengal because you have had no exposure to other cultures.

UQ: You've been displaced.

PA: Not…. Well, displaced and you learned to assimilate. You've learned other cultures. You know what other cultures are all about. You are forced into it. And they are very different. Even Tamilians who grew up in the south versus north, very different. So I find the ones that don't grow up in their original areas, a lot more open than the ones who have lived in their own areas, just my own… no studies, just my observation.

UQ: Tell me a little bit more about what you said regarding arranged marriages; that's when it comes out. Because that is also is what I have found is marriage is where the issues of color come into play.

PA: It's a big issue. I mean all you have to look at.

UQ: Matrimonials.

PA: Matrimonials, have you read that?

UQ: Yes.

PA: It shows up constantly. This whole issue about, it's not just about being faire skinned, this whole issue about colonialism and situations where someone from Europe or an Anglo-Saxon being considered superior instantly. Now it is turning to a point, sometimes it's poignant and sometimes it upsets you, now it's funny. Because it just shows me the ignorance of a lot of Indians. My brother in law has a story of how he went

to Delhi. He took… he's a very senior guy at a company and he took his American colleagues along to do business in India and he was at a meeting and everybody kept addressing the Americans as if they were the boss and not him because and he is very understated, very introverted. He just came back and said, "It's pathetic." It's happened to me in the Middle East.

UQ: It's happened to me here.

PA: It happens.

UQ: It happens.

PA: Okay and by Indians okay?

UQ: It happened to me by an Indian.

PA: Yeah and this is what I mean. The Indian on Indian or South Asian on South Asian prejudice bothers me a lot more than other prejudices because the ignorance is deeper and more deep rooted then just, not wanting to understand and that's what goes on between Indian communities and not just between casts. But just not wanting to understand where the other person is coming from is significant.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I mean it happens, it happens over and over and over. Again, I think it will disappear. Again I take a historical perspective. I think it will disappear as there is more migration and people see other places and things, you know, there is an assimilation of cultures and really you need to understand. We all need to understand the other people more than we know. We don't have all the answers and we can't keep taking short cuts, prejudicial short cuts. You have to have an open mind.

UQ: Okay we've been talking for a good long while, a little over an hour and a half, almost two hours.

PA: Are we done?

UQ: We're not done but would you like a break?

PA: I'm fine. How about you?

UQ: I'm fine.

PA: Are you sure?

UQ: Are you hungry?

PA: No I'm fine.

UQ: Lunch now? Alright, let me know.

PA: Is there a place we can go quickly?

UQ: There's…for lunch?

PA: Yeah.

UQ: There's a place across from the library, Salento, where your drink is from.

PA: Yeah, lets go there.

UQ: Want to go do that and then we can come back?

PA: We can come back here and continue.

UQ: Here we go. Alright let's do some direct questions. Now since we've got a lot of the contextual information already in the previous portion of the interview. But most directly do you think there is a race problem in America today? And you answered that by saying yes already.

PA: Yes.

UQ: Okay, describe it some more. Tell me what you mean when you say yes?

PA: Well I mean I put it in perspective, an absolute yes and no answer. Yes there is. But when I look at it from a global perspective the… I have to answer the question in terms of two ways to look at it. Even if there is a 10% problem and 90% of the population it's not a problem and there is a problem with 10%, it's still a problem. That's the way I look at it when I answered yes.

UQ: Okay.

PA: But when I look at the world in general, different places that I go through our problems seem miniscule compared to the other places. I have to qualify that. The… I put the race issue in three different categories. One is intolerance, the other is tolerance but tolerance itself is not good enough but the third part is celebration. To celebrate… it's not… I really don't care two hoots about tolerating differences. That doesn't mean anything it is celebrating the differences that is really the ideal condition that I would look for and that's what I look for. So to me until we reach that ideal state of celebrating our differences or celebrating each other's cultural richness, we will continue to have that problem. Now there is a great degree of intolerance but in the societies and circles that I move in I don't see that. I see a little bit of, a slight amount of intolerance, prejudice which when you compare it to intolerance I mean it pales. So there is a tremendous amount of tolerance that you see but now we are getting to the phase in the United States of not only moving from tolerance into celebration and that's where I feel very comfortable about where I am and I wish there was some way we could portray that in a much better light in a much effective manner to the rest of, I mean to ourselves and to the rest of the world that this is actually a pretty close, one of the leading societies in the world where being different is not a limitation in and of itself.

UQ: Okay.

PA: I mean think about it, that's the way that I think about it. There's three silos and you really need, you start at one end of that silo, then you will never get out of it but you've got to do all three simultaneously migrating people from one level to intolerance to tolerance to celebration. That's what constantly needs to happen. That's what we need to churn in our society. And it happens over generations. It doesn't happen overnight. But the changes that I have seen I've seen it occur faster over here then I could have ever imagined happening anywhere else.

UQ: So you would say that since you came in 1978 until now you have recognized a visible difference?

PA: Oh absolutely. I mean I saw the… I mean for all the hype and the anger that was expressed in certain sections of the media which got promoted I saw how the local community in Houston (I'm specific to Houston) responded immediately after 9/11. There were… the response was, it was the most important issue was let's get together as opposed to something that happened, let's say what happened after Gandhi's assassination in India. Very few… it's not even recorded historically and what happened to the Marathi Brahmins in Poona. Okay what kind of backlash they went through or what happened, let's say in Delhi after Indira Gandhi got assassinated. What happened to the Sikhs? All these things are massive backlashes. You didn't see those kind of backlashes over here. You saw different kinds. They probably didn't even happen to the United States, somebody else paid for it. But in this community, in the Houston community you didn't see that at all. I don't know what you think about it but that's the way I looked at it because I had worse situations to compare it to. Could it have been

better? Absolutely. That's why I say, intolerance, celebration, and tolerance as the three components. I've seen I've seen that change take place.

UQ: So regarding…

PA: See I was here when the Iranian Crisis took place. Okay, we had to wear T-shirts around U of H saying, "I'm not an Iranian." That's how ignorant people were.

UQ: Yeah.

PA: Okay and then now flash forward 25 years later ok you didn't have to do that.

UQ: Okay.

PA: It's different. I know it's a sensitive topic, Uzma, but I had to mention it.

UQ: No I'm glad you are mentioning it. You had… when you say tolerance, intolerance to tolerance to celebration of differences. Who are the groups that collectively, as Americans we have to work toward tolerating and then celebrating their differences?

PA: We need to celebrate everybody.

UQ: Who? Give me some examples.

PA: We must be celebrating the Hispanics. Understand what the Hispanics have gone through.

UQ: Okay.

PA: To celebrate you need to understand. And to understand you've got to educate yourself. Put yourself in situations. So multicultural situations is something we need to expose ourselves to. Okay you can't… the world is just too rich for us to expose ourselves to everything out there. It's difficult. I understand that. But when given opportunities, I think we should take advantage of it. Be… make ourselves aware of the

cultural depth and richness that exist in other cultures. It's only through that understanding that you will be able to appreciate other cultures.

UQ: Okay.

PA: You know still you are talking about… earlier you were talking about prejudice right? And you know very interesting that one of the guys that I know is actually a good friend and he started saying something about how Hispanic… Hispanics are actually bringing down the culture and the wealth of this country and you know and I said, "Why do you say that?" I challenged him. I said, "So give me some basis on why do you say that" and he had none. And this guy is a smart intelligent guy and he could be well read if he wanted to but people making these kinds of opinions, reaching these kinds of conclusions, I can't stand prejudice. If people have articulated basis for their conclusions, particularly such strong ones as classifying an entire community as something that, does not contribute to the economic wealth of a country, it requires a certain amount of thought. When you reach that conclusion but this was an Indian guy, smart, articulate. I mean he could have gone through and figured these things out but when I asked him there was nothing behind it. That's when I asked him, "Go find out a little more. What do you know about this culture? Have you even gone south of the border? Have you been to Mexico? Do you know what Mexico was before the United States came along?"

UQ: Or even read up on statistics on what wealth is generated by …

PA: Economics. I said, "Do the economics, do a history. Go educate yourself before you make this broad statement and you're not even running for an election. You're not a politician. Go find out. I mean who are you trying to impress in your audience?"

UQ: Okay earlier in the interview you mentioned that as Indians professionalize, as they have done over the past 20 years or so it makes it easier for the next generation to…

PA: Oh God, yes! Oh I'm so happy for the next generation. They will have it so different from their parents' generation.

UQ: My question is: as far as professionalizing and breaking barriers and breaking through glass ceilings we have a president who is African American, who identifies himself as African American. But you had mentioned that when African Americans walk in the door, before they even walk in the door for an interview there is already this whole discourse going on in the interviewers mind. Having a president who is African American, how does that impact that?

PA: It doesn't.

UQ: Why?

PA: Because there is also the shield of… here's the thing. I don't think Indians have a prejudice against somebody who has gone through a process and reached the top of any hierarchy; a pinnacle of any hierarchy where the selection process is very clear.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Okay they may be Democrats and once the Democratic Party picks somebody to be the nominee they will vote party line. I'm talking about the Democrats. It doesn't matter to them whether the guy is white, black, Jewish, whatever. It doesn't matter. So when it comes to the President of the United States I don't think that any of my Indian friends have any prejudice against him because he is African American. If they do have any prejudice it's the Republicans who said because he's a Democrat. Since it is more divided by political alliances rather than racial.

UQ: How does that impact the average person, the average African American?

PA: How does it? It doesn't that the problem.

UQ: So it's completely separate because he is a political figure it doesn't impact the racial…

PA: But there are so many good examples like these. Bill Cosby. Everybody says, "Yeah great guy…" okay and then you've got all the professors, people who are on PBS and different shows. Collectively this group has to, you know, climb up people's consciousness because of where they started with.

UQ: Okay so…

PA: That part is tough. But when it comes to, here it the very interesting thing… one of my friends told me and he was actually making a distinction between Democrats and Republicans. This is political. His comment was the Democrats may accept you as a race but might hate you as an individual. But on the other hand you have the Republicans who may not like you as a race because of whatever reason but they are much better at accepting you as an individual. I think we fall into that second category. So even though there may be a public perception overall generating perception but when it comes to individuals we make exceptions a lot faster. Because then you evaluate the individual on that individual's criteria on an individual basis as opposed to but to start with you start with a bias, before you enter the room. But once you enter the room and I'm sure it happens to me too, because of the particular way I look.

UQ: Sure.

PA: That's the way I am. Okay? But once the discourse starts whether it is in public or in private and the mind is open enough to change opinions and I think that's what

happens to people like Obama and all the other people out there. Once the discourse starts, then it's an open forum. And I've seen this happen. It is less, being prejudice is not mutually exclusive from being open minded. You can have a starting position. It's the degree to which they are able to stick to the position in the face of opposing facts. Are people willing to change their position? That is the issue. So Obama, even if people have a particular position once they have looked at the individual they say, "Yeah he's a good guy."

UQ: Okay I'm going to throw back a quote that you just made back at you and it's that collectively African Americans have to kind of climb beyond what their original station in this country was which was as enslaved peoples in order to change perceptions.

PA: It is not just from there. Again, I'm going to go back and do a little bit of Indian history too. I've seen what lack of opportunity does in different parts of India. People who were literally indentured, they are pretty close to being slaves.

UQ: Right.

PA: When people don't have opportunities it takes a lot of time to dig themselves out of it, an incredibly long time. When you see that happening over and over, you know and especially in a country in a place like the United States, I went to school in the U of H area. It was heartbreaking to see that in a country this rich that so many people are going through living in conditions, such deprived conditions. There are two parts to that. One is you help them and then once TSU, universities play a very, very big role, give them equal opportunity. The biggest thing is equal opportunity, certain advantages for education. Education is the number one thing that pulls people out. I mean that's the way we were brought out of that whole. I've seen poverty to the degree that is

unimaginable in the deepest parts of India and I've seen people pull themselves out of it too. But it is… slavery was such a big hole for African Americans, such a big hole that they were dropped into. It is going to take, it's only… when was it during World War II during World War II that African Americans really started getting into mainstream America, in terms of jobs.

UQ: Post-'65 yeah. Post Civil Rights Act.

PA: Post-Civil Rights Act came the second part. They were not even allowed to be pilots in the Air Force and stuff like that.

UQ: Right they had their own separate…

PA: Yeah there was a whole… Civil Rights Act kind of was like more of a foregone conclusion. You had to do that because they were already… because the United States economic needs they were already in plants. They were already in factories. They were already in all these places. It was just a matter of time that they were given; literally they could have asked for it and taken it. But they were in the main stream already. Okay it was more a foregone conclusion as far as I'm concerned. The Civil Rights Act just ratified something that should have been there and there were a few states that were reluctant to do that but the majority of them were ready to go. But that happened from within. But those rights should not have been… I mean think of it this way. First it was women in the suffrage movement and then came Civil Rights Act. I don't know who is next but the next ones are illegal immigrants. They are here in substantial numbers. How long are you going to ignore them? I mean they have to be ultimately allowed into the main stream because they're not going back and the more you impoverish the illegal immigrants, it's a very similar thing… the more you keep them below a particular equal

standard with other people, whether it's women, whether it's blacks, whether it's illegal immigrants or whoever you consider a second class, the longer you take, the harder it is for that society to grow. We have had those burdens along the way. Now where Hispanics and black (I'm talking now as a business person because this is what I tell my clients also) the earlier you recognize these as economic powers, the faster will be their growth. That is exactly what is happening. The number of Hispanic channels that are out there, Spanish channels, all these things that are out there. Now you are talking about, let's say taking the community seriously and bringing them out of that community into the main stream. Nobody thinks twice about a Hispanic mayor for Houston or Cisneros out of San Antonio because they are local. They are not different. But they need to become more and more of an economic power. Education and economic power are the two pieces that will bring them into the main stream.

UQ: You mentioned the Civil Rights Act. Did you have knowledge of it before you came here? What was the kind of sort of talk surrounding it in India and in Bombay?

PA: I was 15.

UQ: You were 15, okay. [Both laugh] Did it get talked about at home? No, too minor an issue for the pressing concerns there?

PA: No my parents were too busy trying to makes ends meet. I'm the guy who used to read the newspaper. So I knew about it; again having had relatives that lived in the United States. It shows up in the paper.

UQ: So Martin Luther King was in the paper?

PA: Yeah all that was there, Robert Kennedy.

UQ: Was the media spin on the movement? Was it viewed as positive, was it neutral…?

PA: What?

UQ: Civil Rights Movement as viewed?

PA: Oh huge because Gandhi was kind of the force… the inspiration behind it. So India took a lot of credit for that for what Gandhi did (undeservedly but they did.) Same thing in South Africa, but it's a very clear, in fact Nehru used to lecture to the Americans about their civil rights.

UQ: There's a lot of sort of collaboration and exchange during the Civil Rights Movement between African American leaders and Indian leaders.

PA: Yeah.

UQ: That happened throughout the century, throughout the entire 20th century that's been the case.

PA: Again, I think on the Indian end of it I think they have lost that idealistic edge while it still continues in the United States and other places. I don't think Indian leadership right now has that kind of edge. If there is one place where you can see that power corrupts absolutely then that's the place.

UQ: Alright, another very direct question.

PA: Go ahead. Am I giving you direct answers to your questions?

UQ: You are.

PA: Did I?

UQ: You did. So the question is how do Indians that you knew in the late '70's when you arrived here perceive African Americans, this was obviously well before any president was African American?

PA: Very poorly.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Very poorly, again, because of the environment we were in. We lived in the poorest neighborhood of Houston and that's all the exposure we had. The only other exposure we had to African Americans was Mohammad Ali, Sonny Liston, all the sports folks, Martin Luther King…. So it was either some form of protest or sports; that was it. But we all knew that there was a very strong what should I say, the African American community was impoverished.

UQ: You saw that with your own eyes?

PA: With my own eyes. We saw that. We lived it! I mean for years around… we lived in that neighborhood. But we also… I mean some of us even experienced the violence associated with it. I didn't. I mean, we got mugged and every person who gets mugged suddenly says, "Hey an African American did it to me" which means their reputation goes…[down the drain.

UQ: Did the South Asians who resided in Cougar Place socialize with their African American neighbors?

PA: Not at all.

UQ: Not even to exchange common courtesies of "Hi" and "Hello?"

PA: Not even that. The only exchange we had was when they asked us for money and we would very politely decline. Anyway, we didn't have much money to give. We were all

impoverished students. And they knew it. They didn't bother us much because they knew we had nothing of value that they could take.

Was there some shared sense of hardship since you all were in the same economic boat?

PA: Not at all. They viewed us as totally different. We just had nothing in common.

UQ: Do you think that if you lived in Mumbai's slums, since everyone shared the same general culture, that there could have been that shared sensibility?

PA: No, I don't think so. It's not a race thing. It's just that in a city like Mumbai, nobody cares where you're from or who you are. Everyone is from somewhere else. The only thing that matters in a neighborhood is "what can you do for me?"

UQ: Is there any difference between the poorest members of Indian society—say those of the lowest castes—and impoverished African Americans?

PA: Obviously but the biggest difference is the way they were brought here against their will…the conditions they have to rise from. It's very hard and it takes a long, long time.

UQ: How do you think they can "uplift" themselves?

PA: Well, first they need economic power. Do you know that despite all the wonderful music and literature they produced, blacks didn't receive the royalties from these huge cultural contributions? Langston Hughes and all of them, they got nothing. Their communities are not economically empowered. Next, they need to be part of the mainstream.

UQ: Mainstream what?

PA: Everything, mainstream politics, culture. I mean, they should have their own culture and all—those are the kinds of differences we should be celebrating. But also, look: do

you know what the figures are for children born out of wedlock in the African American community?

UQ: I don't know the exact figures but I know that they're very high.

PA: What about absentee fathers?

UQ: Also, very high. Do you know why that is? We can talk about it later, but I have good book about it if you're interested.

PA: Oh yes, I'm interested. I always want to more about them. But, these figures are so high because of one main thing. They lack the family structure. Family. Until they have fathers as role models, they can not, as a community lift themselves up. Some of them make it through, you know, Bill Cosby—he's a great guy. They say it takes three generations for immigrants to fully assimilate. Well, for African Americans, they don't even have one full generation if the father is absent. Look, I'll tell you a story. I was on a flight to Pittsburgh but I'll just make the story last 5 minutes instead of the whole three hours it took to get there. I was on this flight and got upgraded to business class. I travel a lot so I get upgrades sometimes. Next to me was this black guy with a fancy watch and necklace, you know a lot of bling. So I started a conversation with him. I said, "Nice watch." I'm always interested in talking to all kinds of people. I'm a curious guy. Anyway, he turned out to be the smartest guy. He was so intelligent. For a living, he bought foreclosed houses and renovated them and rented them out through the government. Umm, what is that called—

UQ: Section 8.

PA: Yes, Section 8. And you know what else? He was a convicted felon. Got picked up for drug possession and went to jail. He said to me, "Would you believe me if I told you

that I didn't do it? I was framed by a couple of other guys." And you know what, I believed him. The reason is because when I asked him what he missed the most after his conviction, he said, "voting. I miss the right to vote."][2] I asked them, "What are you doing in Houston?" "Oh one of these girls." He came to some girl invited him so he came over. Then I asked him, "Where are his children? "I have two 10 year olds, three 6 year olds." I said, "You have twins and triplets?" He said, "No they are from different mothers?" "So what are you doing in Houston?" He's got like 7 kids over there and he's in his early 30's. I said, "Do you know what you are doing?" I was close enough by the time we were landing in Pittsburgh he was talking about his next project which was doing some dress lines, designer clothes. I said, "Do you know what you are doing to your kids not having a father?"

UQ: What did he say?

PA: He had no answer. It was as if…"Why are you asking me this question? What role am I supposed to play?" So I asked him, "Did you ever grow up with your father?" He said, "No." There are no role models. But he is still a very fascinating guy for me in terms of how he has turned himself around and you know what? Every weekend he plays chess with a Mr. Patel who owns a grocery store next to him on the next corner. (Back to Simpsons again.) And that's why he surprised me probably. But I don't mind that kind of interaction. But the interaction occurred in a place where there was no economic disparity. It happened in an upgraded business class seat. I don't mind having that discussion. He is like any other guy. If he is a Nigerian or African or Australian it doesn't matter. So the first thing that needs to occur to eliminate and bring these guys is

[2] Bracketed section (pgs. 56-9) added immediately after interview, from memory.

the parent piece. Then one that economic, this guy brings himself out of into a better economic class, make sure that your kids have the same thing rather than having to rediscover, it's the chain that I talked about earlier. Parents taking care of parents and children, you know, that's what we all went through. Somehow we all have to break our cycles. We all come into this world with certain set of cycles, economic cycles, we have to break them and make it better for the next generation. If we don't…then you are like any other… That's what I feel, that's what I feel needs to happen. I don't know whether that is appropriate or not but really it depends on the parents wanting a better life for their children.

UQ: And the sacrifices the parents are willing to make toward that end.

PA: Absolutely. Whatever it be.

UQ: Alright going back to something you had said over lunch and that was your father wanted to marry your mother who was darker complexioned then he was and your grandmother being…

PA: Upset about it.

UQ: Displeased about this…

PA: It wasn't that. I think she was displeased even though we kid about her being darker. But she wanted to be part of the decision. Okay and I also mentioned that it wasn't just the color part of it but in the community that I come from the intelligence part of it is an absolute must. Because my father's side of the family everybody is incredibly educated. They are very accomplished. I mean, Ph.D.'s, Master's, professors in colleges and I mean all kinds of things. That's the driver and… in the community also there is, you know southern Indians are darker than northern Indians generally okay. But even

amongst them you would be surprised how many believe the color component comes in because many are of lighter skin. I'm not of lighter skin, my siblings are, tanned but they do have a… they are much lighter than me.

UQ: Did you see this kind of color consciousness in other discussion with, among you but just that you hear them I guess, other people discussing it. Did it ever come up in the context with family members or friends growing up?

PA: It's less from the perception that I see it's less for men then for women.

UQ: That it means less for men?

PA: In the Hindu mythology, the men are always darker, Krishna is dark, Rama is always portrayed as darker than Sita. Krishna and Radha, Radha is the fair one. So the mythology itself is built on… Shiva is dark okay in the mythology. He is really dark. So the male aspect of being, the color has always been dark. So that's with mythology standpoint. But in general, in the community itself (not just Indian community) but in general being a male darker person is not as bad as a woman having a darker skin. What I'm saying it's all relative in a sense. But a fairer male is better than a darker male and a fairer woman is better than a darker woman. So that's always been there when it comes particularly in arranged marriages. When you see ads in the Indian newspapers, you know, they always say (in fact this whole concept of wheat complexioned comes out from over there I read it all the time) and also fair is a common word and also of course caste and other things. Skin color plays a very important role in arranged marriages. It is not stated often verbally. But sometimes you see it in print.

UQ: Is it ever discussed by men, generally women do but do men ever?

PA: I've never heard of men say. It sounds almost… sexist but men I don't think in terms of fair versus dark and all that kind of stuff.

UQ: So do you think the system is perpetuated by women?

PA: I think a lot of the prejudices may exist because women are risk-averse. I mean it's very simple, again I'll go back to evolutionary psychology the women have only those many opportunities to procreate because one egg while men have the opportunity to procreate across many women. So whoever women pick as their partner it's for life and only so many situations of procreation. So women in general are risk-averse and so they will articulate. The other thing is women also talk about these things, men don't. So men may feel certain, my sense something unlike my friend who said something but most people won't even make that statement but women do. So I'm not going to say that women are more prejudice but they appear to be more prejudice because they talk more about it. But in reality they… I think women talk more about it then actual, I don't know if there are any actual studies done on that about these kinds of issues just to make sure that they are doing it right, men don't.

UQ: What about the children of immigrants? So I guess what I'm asking is young men here who are getting married here, are you aware of a preference that they may have for fair versus darker skin?

PA: No. What I've seen out here is that everybody is married incredibly later. They are marrying… My nephews, I've seen them marry… not really… let me see my immediate family, immediate friends, not too many are married. But one particular family that I'll let go I will make sure is unnamed, the wife is definitely prejudice against her daughter's marrying anyone who is even remotely of a darker shade but the mother

will come down like a ton of bricks on the daughter and say, "You are not going to marry that person" heavily prejudice against dark skinned.

UQ: Whereabouts are they from in India? Just northwest, south…

PA: It doesn't matter.

UQ: Do you think that same type of idea is replicated among different regions.

PA: Not much. No.

UQ: Is this person more extreme than others?

PA: This person is a little more…there is always a skewed curve (if you will) it's not necessarily Gaussian. She is probably in one extreme. But having gone through personally kind of an arranged marriage situation in the U.S. and India myself and my having been, having a darker tone of skin I can tell you there were situations where the parents would come back and say, "I don't think so because he's darker" and the daughters have shared that with me. The parents don't share it with you but the daughters do.

UQ: I see and the IIT credentials weren't able to override that?

PA: I don't think it has anything to do with that.

UQ: Education didn't…

PA: In hindsight I think they did the right thing because see what happens also is the previous generation, not everybody was educated. Typically I find, I find that the more educated; education opens up people's minds. Once that happens then all these kinds of prejudices have a tendency to go away. So in hindsight the people who actually made those kinds of statements one, had very little exposure, belonged to places where one culture was dominant and anybody, again, this was a risk aversion. Anybody who

belonged to any area or region of the country were eyed suspiciously. They, what should I say, the alliance to be with somebody from the same community. So that's where the, in hindsight that's what my takeaways were. It had more to do with the individuals themselves and their levels of education and openness and how exposed they were to the rest of the world. And actually they did me a favor.

UQ: Second generation. It's been remarked upon that the second generation here of South Asians marry, (at much higher rates then the parent's generation did) they marry outside the Indian community. You've naturally seen this among the people that you know and their children.

PA: Yes.

UQ: What groups are they marrying into most?

PA: Most of the ones that I know of are marrying WASP's, white Anglo Saxon Protestants, though one did marry Hispanic that I saw, very different wedding. It was more like an Indian wedding than an American wedding. But I've seen both. But mostly… I mean again it's a distribution of population of where these people come from.

UQ: Sure.

PA: But it's whites, and I would classify… and one of them actually is a mix between a white and a Hispanic and one is totally Hispanic. So it's all… I haven't seen any where the, I haven't been to one or any situation where it was between an Indian and a black.

UQ: What about with other Asians, Chinese, Vietnamese?

PA: Yeah, Japanese I haven't, but Chinese yes.

UQ: Japanese are so few in Houston anyways so it's probably why.

PA: Chinese I'm trying to remember if there is anyone here… no.

UQ: Vietnamese? No?

PA: Again it's a different generation.

UQ: That's not for shortage.

PA: Hispanic yes and I don't get invited to all the weddings so.

UQ: But you hear of them.

PA: But most of the weddings are between Indians. But the nice thing is communities. I always joke that… I joked with my sister when her son was born that 50% probability of your son marrying a Gujarati guess what it was 100% he did marry a Gujarati because in the Indian community that is one of the largest.

UQ: Do you see with the second generation that when they marry within the Indian community they are marrying within their language group or all over?

PA: It's all over the place.

UQ: It's all over, there's no Punjabi to Punjabi?

PA: It could be anything…

UQ: Really?

PA: Anything!

UQ: And there's no majority like if you had to just put out a conjecture that the majority of this Indian sub group is marrying within the same subgroup?

PA: I think it's more, again, it comes to the economic… that maybe for example one of the weddings that I recently attended was the two of them were doctors. Okay? They met while they were doing their residency in college or somewhere along the way. They ran into each other somewhere and I mean… I don't think they pay attention to all these differences. As far as they are concerned their roots in India are just roots.

UQ: I would almost want to say that even within your generation that people were marrying across these kinds of group lines because you grew up at a time when India was in a state of flux and it is growing. It's developing and people are moving all over the place and they are moving to cities. So interesting…

PA: I mentioned my siblings and me only one actually married within the community. We've got one, two, three, four, four different religions in our family.

UQ: Okay. Question about if you have heard of… I mentioned earlier but have you heard of Siddhis in India or Makranis?

PA: What are these?

UQ: People of African descent in India.

PA: Oh no.

UQ: Have you heard about this?

PA: No I read something about some group in Gujarat I read about them having their own culture but I really didn't know they existed.

UQ: Okay.

PA: A big group existed in Bombay or… we always had foreign students in India when my school had a lot of foreign students.

UQ: No these are people that have been there for hundreds of years it's not a new migration.

PA: No I've never heard of it.

UQ: They've been there since the 1500's onward.

PA: No clue, we always learn something new. I'll find out more about them now.

UQ: No? Alright. We may be coming to a close. Regarding people living in Sugarland, you've been in Sugar Land since 19—?

PA: '90.

UQ: '90. Sugarland does not have a high percentage of African Americans or even Hispanic Americans but certainly not African Americans they live largely in the city of Houston itself. Do you think that's a factor in why Sugarland also happens to have a high number of south Asians?

PA: No.

UQ: You don't think so?

PA: There's one reason why Sugarland has… schools. Good education system, Fort Bend ISD, Clements, Dulles, all the high schools. That's it. Nobody cares what anything else. It's education.

UQ: Okay how do people recognize these schools as good? What makes them good as opposed to other schools?

PA: Good students, good peers.

UQ: What makes them good?

PA: They get attracted to each other. I'll tell you I'll even give you an example of of even IITs. I always tell people that when it comes, what made IITs great was the fact that I had great peers. Because it was one of the few meritocratic systems in India, a couple hundred thousand right as an example and they picked the top 1500. That's it. You write one entrance example and you rank 1500 and you get interviewed kind of in the order and you get to choose where you go. That's it. So now you've got a bunch of peers that are very, very bright. That's exactly what happens in Sugar Land. You've got a bunch of

peers and now the standards are higher. The reputation goes up and very often the biggest influence, there's another social science study somewhere. The biggest influence in performing well in schools and in colleges is less to do with teachers as it has to do with peers. So competition helps, having the right peers help. Children are from a certain particular point in time learn more from their peers then they do from their parents habits so if you've got good kids with good habits next to you, you emulate them. So I think it's… the parents are mostly professionals and they are there because the schools are good. They are there because the peers are good, the neighbors are good so all of these kind of combinations fits into the overall environmental psyche so to speak of South Asians and that's why there are so many of them there.

UQ: Okay. I have I guess the final question. So I have a young son who has finished 7th grade he's going into 8th grade and we live in Houston and so the decision is to where to send him for high school. We are zoned to one of the best high schools in Texas, Bellaire, it's recognized as a good school. It's extremely competitive, extremely competitive. Meaning that getting a high class rank is very hard because you have that many students (it's also a very large school) you have that many students who are all competing for those same very high class ranks. If you graduate in the top 20% of your class, that's considered a huge accomplishment.

PA: Correct.

UQ: Because of the nature of the school. So we have a decision to make regarding our son. We can either send him there and the chances of him having an extremely high class rank are not there.

PA: Not there?

UQ: Not there. He's smart but there are that many more kids who are just as smart and who are harder working then he is. So there's that. The other option is to send him to a school that is a few blocks away from us, in the opposite direction. We are not zoned to it but we could get him in and it is largely African American like most of the schools in Houston. He would probably have a pretty high class rank. He would probably graduate in the top 10 kids in his class. What would you say about the decision? We haven't made the decision yet we don't know what we are going to do. How would you help make that decision?

PA: How would I make that decision? I could tell you the kind of decision I made. You know we had a very similar situation in the sense. We could have picked… when we moved into this area that we moved into. We could have picked any school that we wanted to and the choice isn't really as much as whether it is African American or not as much as it is what kind of neighborhood do you live in or as I mentioned success with peers. We picked Clements. Clements is an identical school like Bellaire. You know you could be in the top 25%, and be in 10% in any school in the rest of the state (perhaps except at Bellaire) but Clemens is a very similar school. Now the… for us it was important that our daughter go to a school that she was challenged, like your son okay. She did well. But we chose that because we did not want that top 10%, I know in Texas is a very important thing.

UQ: It is.

PA: It is very important. The… however the things that we invested in where the things to make sure that she got into a good college as opposed to doing it only by 10%. So those are the two balancing acts that I did rather than moving into an area or doing

something to put her in a school which allowed her to make it to… did it help her self-image? Oh you should meet her. She is as confident as ever and she is interning right now. She is a sophomore. I think my perspective is it's got less to do with whether it is an African American student or not. The most important issue is having good peers. Having good peers of equal or better caliber for children is very important, particularly until they reach the age of 18 or 19. And the reason, now going into neuroscience, that is when the brain is really exploding. After 18, 19, the brain starts shaving off synapses and making it very specific to what you are interested in. This is the time for growth and that is why you need good peers.

UQ: And by good peers do you mean competitive.

PA: Academically competitive peers who will move him up a notch…

UQ: Push the bar even higher…

PA: Even higher, constantly. I mean it's hard. It's hard on the kid and there's nothing wrong in being pushed at that particular age, nothing wrong with it. That's my answer to you. It has nothing to do with the kind of school. I'm more interested in the child and what is good for the child.

UQ: Okay.

PA: Did that help?

UQ: Yeah. Not that we have made our decision but yes.

PA: Yeah don't do that.

UQ: Alright, I think that I've asked everything that I wanted to ask. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

PA: I'd love to hear what your conclusions are.

UQ: When I get to them I'll let you know!

PA: Yeah this is very interesting.

End of interview