

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Vimal Kothari
University of Houston Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
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UQ: This is the oral history interview of Vimal Kothari at his office on August the 17th, 2011. Interviewers name is Uzma Quraishi. Alright you can begin by briefly telling about yourself: who you are, background.

VK: Okay name is Vimal Kothari. I came to the United States in 1979 from Bombay and I grew up in Bombay and did my bachelors in electrical engineering from VJTI in Bombay. That was in 1977. I worked a couple of years in India and then decided to pursue my higher education. So I came here to do my Master's in electrical engineering at the University of Houston. So I came here as students in '79 did my bachelors... my Master's in 81. So '79 through '81 and then took my first job in 1981 and then got a green card and all that good stuff. So here we are sitting in my office since I've been doing this, which is running a business since 1988 and so we build industrial computers and but... so that's what I do.

UQ: But your background is not in computer science or anything like that?

VK: It's actually in electrical engineering.

UQ: So how did you branch off into...?

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VK: I really didn't branch off because we are still using, I mean we build hardware. We really don't do the software part of it. So we build hardware we do electronic packaging if you will. What had happened is I was doing consulting work in '88, designing boards, writing software for my clients. Then in '93 I felt that there was a need for my clients in particular that they needed solutions like electronic packaging for what we were doing. You know this is all special stuff. So I saw an opportunity to do, begin the products side of it. And for six years I did consulting work and I figured that it's time to move on to something else. So I began the product side of it in '93/'94 and it turned out to be a good niche market for me. So...

UQ: Okay. How big is your company?

VK: We have about 70 people here. So it's a small company but we serve the defense industry. We also serve oil field service companies and we have for process controls. And we sell all over the U.S. basically. Now we are branching into international markets. So do what you can.

UQ: Okay and where specifically internationally? Where are you branching out?

VK: First is Canada. We've signed a representative in Canada and now the next will be probably Australia, Brazil and then Asian countries following. And from what I read most companies—at least the bigger companies have 50% to 60% of their sales come from international markets. So I figure we have a long way to go.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So that's in brief what I do.

UQ: Okay so this interview will focus on when you first arrived in Houston, 1979, if you can sort of capture that time again in your mind. We are going to focus on

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relationships that the Indian community had with other groups here in Houston as well as your background in India.

VK: Okay.

UQ: To begin with if you had to label yourself for demographic purposes what label would you use, how would you describe yourself?

VK: Well I guess I'm a Hindu by religion and here is just Asian American I guess is the term that I use. That's about it.

UQ: Okay when... well we know when, but why did you decide to settle in Houston.

Why U of H, why Houston?

VK: What had happened was I came here with my wife to be and you know I had admission in New York, actually Stevens Institute in New Jersey I would think and in Pennsylvania in a master's program and then in Houston. So I had admission at three places. First consideration was those two places were too cold. Living in Bombay you know New Jersey and Pennsylvania was really sounded really cold. And the second big consideration this was fairly inexpensive. At Stephen's Institute I think it was like \$100 something per credit hour and U of H was I think it was \$4 or \$40 or something. I think it was \$4 an hour. So that sounded like a great deal.

UQ: Okay. Had you heard anything about Houston before you came here?

VK: We had some friends in Houston so I not really, I didn't really know much about it actually. I knew that weather wise it will be great, so and it's a big city. Big city there are opportunities so that's generally what I was looking for and I knew for some weird reason that Texas Instruments was here so it was almost like, "Okay I'm going to be an electrical engineering, Texas Instruments was there so that seems like a good fit." Not

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considering any other things like, you know, "You don't have a green card..." just a very simplistic approach.

UQ: Okay.

VK: But that worked out.

UQ: So did you consider Houston to be a part of "the South" or sort of different from the South is typically?

VK: No at that time what we'd heard was Houston was booming. Even sitting in India with friends, we had some friends in Pittsburgh and they were saying that's the new 'West' if you will. Houston is booming, that's the right place to be, lots of opportunities. So we said weather wise, opportunities wise, education wise everything seems right. I was not caught up in, it's a state school, it's not an Ivy League school and all that kind of stuff. I just needed an opportunity to come out and pursue my master's degree.

UQ: What was your experience like when you did arrive at U of H? How did students treat you?

VK: Actually they were very friendly. They were very friendly. I had no issues whatsoever. The only issue that we had is that we were living about 15, 18 miles from campus because at that time University of Houston did not have a married dorm or something and the apartments there were not very attractive. So I ended up staying...

UQ: What do you mean by that?

VK: What?

UQ: Not very attractive.

VK: They were in run down conditions so, you know, I could not really stay there with my wife. So I said, "Okay we can't stay here. The only dorms they have are for singles.

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So that means you have to stay far away." Our friends were staying near Chimney Rock and 59 at the time so they would come and pick us up from the airport and all that so we just decided to stay in that neighborhood which now it turns out it's really a bad location. At that time too we had indications in 1980 that it was getting really bad out there.

UQ: What were those indications?

VK: In our apartment there was a gunshot from the neighbor. It came right through our closet one night.

UQ: Oh wow!

VK: Then so that was at like 3:00 in the morning. I went out to the door and the neighbor was saying, "No, no, no it was an accident please don't call the cops" so on and so forth. Then on another evening there was somebody, we heard a loud noise somebody had actually... I don't know with an ax or something they were trying to knock our door down, things like that. So it was, it was getting ugly.

UQ: So when you say it was sort of becoming a bad neighborhood you mean crime rate...

VK: Crime rate.

UQ: ...was going up.

VK: Primarily crime rate. But when we came in '79 you know we were far away, did not have any money, no transportation so we depend on a friend to drop us to school sometimes and try and take the bus back and things like that. So it was rough going for a while.

UQ: Okay. After you graduated with your Master's degree where did you move or did you stay in the same neighborhood? I'm assuming you moved.

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VK: We moved to Beechnut and Beltway 8 area.

UQ: How did you choose that area?

VK: That area we sort of... we chose that because it looked like newer apartments.

We wanted to get away from the Gulfton area where we were at, at Chimney Rock. This looked like it's a much better area. Still sort of, you know, it's not too far away from other activities and things like that. So we just decided to move there into an apartment near Beechnut. Also new apartments so at that time it looks all really good. So we did that and we stayed there for a while.

UQ: Did it end up being a good move? Did you find out that it was a safer neighborhood?

VK: Yeah, yeah that was not a problem. By then, that was back in '81 and we had started, we were both working and then we got our green cards so the next move was to move into a house. So we stayed there only for a year and a half maybe or something like that.

UQ: Okay. Has that, your original area that you lived in, Chimney Rock and 59, has that changed since then?

VK: I don't hear good things about it. So I mean there's no reason for me to back and check it out but I don't think it's a great area still. But you know the demographics sort of moved you know when we came, Sharpstown [Mall] was really nice place. We used to go eat waffles there and all of that but now it's kind of run down. I mean all the major [mall] tenants have kind of gone. They go to more upscale areas, either the Galleria or Town and Country, I guess Memorial City Mall or Town and Country Mall even West Oaks which is pretty close to where we live now that seems to be going down.

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UQ: I see.

VK: So the big demographic shifts happen and then there's not a whole lot that anybody can do about it.

UQ: So why do you think that that shift has taken place, for example in the area of 59 and Chimney Rock?

VK: I think what happens is that there's, there starts a little down trend and then the apartment complexes to keep their occupancy rates high, you know, they drop their rates and that allows, you know lower income folks maybe to move in and solve those. They may have a job, may not have a job and it just spirals downwards I think more than anything else. If the price of entry in a way is higher than you are going to attract the people in the middle class or the upper middle class then you have in the lower income groups then, not to say that that's where all the problems are but, you know, it does happen for whatever reason.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So...

UQ: What struggles do you remember facing after your arrival in the U.S.?

VK: Well the biggest trouble was we didn't have any transportation. The second biggest was we were working all the time. So we were working at school helping the professors out trying to earn some money.

UQ: Both you and your wife?

VK: Yeah both of us. And we were studying full time.

UQ: What was her major?

VK: Master's in electrical engineering.

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UQ: Same. So she was doing the exact same track as you?

VK: No, no, she was getting her MBA.

UQ: MBA okay.

VK: Yeah so both of us were studying, both of us were trying to earn some money and then transportation problems and I remember the first time we came here my dad had given me a check for the first tuition fee and we could not find the check. I remember staying up all night trying to find out where that check is because how are we going to pay the tuition and it was like a \$300 or \$400 check or something. But it was fairly significant. So that was a struggle. What I also found out that the master's program was tougher than I thought and so I ended up taking more under grad classes because I really wanted to learn. I didn't just want to complete a degree and not really know anything. So I ended up taking almost one or two semesters of undergrad work just so my foundation was stronger than what I thought it was. So... that was another deviation if you will. So the first semester was really tough because I could not figure out really what was going on. I thought I was fairly smart but it wasn't so.

UQ: Okay. What struggles (not struggles) I lost my train of thought. So it seems like you were very busy when you came. Between your transportation issues and the studies and the work did you find time to socialize?

VK: We found time, not a whole lot of time. We would hang out with some friends and go see some movies and things like that. The Indian population was there but not... I think it was kind of spread out. We were not actually hanging out with the school friends either because (again transportation issues) and we were far away and busy with life in general that we really did not have a college life if you will.

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UQ: I see.

VK: If you stayed in a dorm then you hang out with all your friends and you know you enjoy the part, the American experience if you will of college life. We really didn't have that. I mean it is what it is. So we don't have any regrets.

UQ: Sure.

VK: That's just where it was.

UQ: That was just that two year period.

VK: Yeah.

UQ: So when you did socialize who did you socialize with?

VK: We would socialize with some college, some college friends and some friends from back India that we knew here and apart from that because she was here already and then we would have family visiting things like that so between all of this we were... and I had a friend whom I, a friend from India that moved to Houston in the same time period that we were here. So he was a big help because he was already settled, he had cars, he had a house all this kind of stuff. So they stayed here for about a year, a year and a half. So we would socialize with them quite a bit. And they were living fairly close to where we were. I remember when we first bought a car I think it was March or April of 1979 and we were at school and there was a big thunderstorm that rolled into town and so they were saying, "Everybody needs to go home, needs to go home." We had the car for like two days and we were trying to go home and the car flipped or turned around 180 degrees skidded and I was facing the traffic on the freeway and so the next day and then somehow everything went okay. The next day I remember that we had the same thing, we were at school and they were saying, "You all need to go home because there is a big

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storm coming, a lot of rain." So I said, okay I'm not taking the freeway because of what happened yesterday." So we took the side streets, got lost, and the car got flooded finally. So in five days we had the car only for like 5 days or so 4 days or 5 days. And we ended up spending the night at some really friendly people in that neighborhood. I think we were in Montrose or some area. Some American family and they took in a lot of people like us. I think there were like 6 or 7 couples that ended up staying the night at this guy's house.

UQ: Total strangers.

VK: Total strangers. Total strangers. And this friend from India he came next day and he picked us up and by then the books were ruined, whatever I had in the car was ruined. So again we were without transportation. So it was... it's challenging. But we were too young, too naive to really know that we are struggling.

UQ: Yeah.

VK: I think that's the beauty of it.

UQ: It's all a part of the adventure at that point.

VK: It's all about the adventure yeah.

UQ: In what ways did being a new immigrant affect your relationships with Houstonians?

VK: It really didn't. It really didn't. Growing up in Bombay which in a way is fairly cosmopolitan I guess and you know, having a good grasp of the language at least so that was not a... it was a culture shock only in the perspective that you don't see anybody on the roads, you know everybody is driving. There's no... nobody walking on the roads and growing up in Bombay it's, I mean you know, people everywhere on the streets

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whether it's 3:00 in the morning, midday, whatever. You know you have hundreds and thousands of people on the road all day long. So that is a bit of a culture shock when you come here for the first time. That was the first international I mean we've never been abroad before this. So we came here and it's like, "Wow what is this?" The other part of it is I guess a little bit of a disconnect was that everybody just seemed so busy. We were also very busy but when you stand back for a second and say, because you won't come home until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. Then we are trying to figure out food and all that. So... and plus we came in January of '79 it was cold. Not used to the cold. So these are all things that kind of sort of hit you. But because you are so busy in your day to day stuff that you kind of forget all these other things. So at first it strikes you that this is different, this is different. You know going to the mall for the first time was a, "Wow what is this place?" you know or going to the grocery store for the first time was like, "Wow!"

UQ: Sure.

VK: "This is incredible!" So we are trying to go to the grocery store and we are trying to bring the cart back because how are you going to lift all that, we don't have cars. So I remember we did that once. I think we actually brought the cart back to the apartment. It was across the street or something. So I said, "Oh we can just take the cart." We are not really supposed to do that...

UQ: Right.

VK: But.

UQ: You don't know.

VK: So those are new experiences. Driving was a new experience. I remember trying to get my driver's license. I didn't want to bother other people right. Everybody is so

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busy. So you had to go take your written exam and all of that right? So I remember it took me 5 hours by bus to go to the driver's license office. You have to go downtown, change buses and go to the driver's license office, take the test, go come back. It took me 5, 6 hours just to do this round trip by bus. So you are not used to things like that.

UQ: Yeah those kinds of changes.

VK: Then when I had to borrow, to request a friend, "Can we take your car so I can take my driver's test and all that." So he agreed and we got the license. Then when I bought the car I had never been on the freeway before. So, "Okay here we go." I went straight on the freeway because I had to go to school. So there was nobody to tell me how to do all that. There was nobody who sat with me and said, "Okay this is how you drive." I had driven in Bombay so I was using that experience to drive here. But the driving in Bombay is very different. You know, it is very aggressive driving and here everybody maintains their lanes, you let people go so you have to sort of relearn all these things.

UQ: Sure.

VK: But it was... I think it was interesting.

UQ: Since it was the first time that you left India. It was the first time that I'm assuming that you came into contact with some of the different groups here, for example Latino Americans, African Americans, Chinese...

VK: Absolutely.

UQ: How was your interaction with those groups?

VK: What I found and maybe it's Houston maybe it's all over the U.S. I think it's pretty much all over the U.S.A. the people are very friendly. Especially in Houston they are very friendly, they understand. I remember I was at an office somewhere, my

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professor had sent me somewhere and the guy said, "He would you like some coffee?" and there was no coffee machine at that office. I said, "Sure." So he went and bought me some coffee and he brought it over. I didn't even think about saying, "Hey how much?" because the American system is, "Hey you spent \$2 on me so here's \$2." "So thank you" and I took the coffee and he's probably but he didn't say anything that you owe me \$2 or whatever it was. So it was very friendly, very receptive. I felt people were very receptive. I did not have any issues. Later on I met some people from Nigeria. The only trouble I had was the accent was very heavy and it's hard to understand what they are saying. That was the only problem. I met through my children's schooling I met people from Ireland and I can't really understand them. On the phone it is impossible to understand them. Face to face, it's a little bit easier but you still really have to concentrate and see what they are saying. So those are some challenges.

UQ: Okay.

VK: But I really didn't have any issues. The only other issue would be that we ran into was I remember one time in the first few months my dad had sent me a wire transfer. I think it was \$1,000 and it never reached the bank. It never reached my account. And so I talked to the manager and all of that and they were saying, "Well you have taken the money out." I said, "What do you mean I did not take the money out?" So both of us had to go through a lie detector test back then; this was four or five months after coming into the country. And finally we found out that the cashier had actually taken the money and stolen the money. So that was an odd ball but that was an exception really it was not a normal part but it was another experience if you will.

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UQ: During those early years even though you didn't have a lot of time to socialize you must have known Indian community...

VK: Yes.

UQ: ... Been familiar with some of the people there. How many of them did you find were marrying outside of Indian community? How many were marrying non Indians?

VK: I just knew of a couple of people in that time frame that married outside the Indian community and I know at least one maybe two cases where they were doing so because of the visa problems. I don't know... I know one guy who married an African American and he was telling me in Hindi that I'm marrying her because I need a green card. Once I get my green card then whatever happens, happens.

UQ: I see.

VK: So I felt. I didn't feel very good about that. But I mean you know it's his decision what he did.

UQ: And the other person?

VK: The other person also married an African American but he had no other ulterior motives.

UQ: I see.

VK: I think he really loved her and he did the right thing I think. The first person did not. I do not think he had the right intentions.

UQ: Sure.

VK: That's the only thing that I think that I was not very comfortable with.

UQ: Do you know if they remained married?

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VK: I've lost touch with both of them actually. I don't know. One of them moved to Oklahoma I know he moved to Oklahoma I don't what happened after that. The first guy I have lost touch with.

UQ: Okay. How do you, how did in your impression, how do you think the Indian community reacted to those kinds of relationships, those kinds of marriages?

VK: I don't think there are any prejudices. I really don't think so. In fact the other guy I know he's still married to a white American lady. They have beautiful children and they have been... I met them in 1980 and they are still together and really a very loving family and he went off into a business and he's done phenomenally well but last 30, 40 years... some 30, 32 years that we've known them they have done really well and even back then there was no... I mean she was accepted very easily, even when you have like an Indian party or something. Only difficulty was that she doesn't speak the local language. By that I mean the Indian language. That was the only... so if you have, you feel bad if you have some inside jokes or then you have to translate for her but she was really cool about the whole thing.

UQ: Do you think that there might have been or even today might be greater acceptance of her because she was a white American as opposed to African American or any other group?

VK: Yeah I think somehow and I think this is how we are programmed like this. The kids born here are not programmed. They don't have this programming. But people born in India and all they have some certain, whether they admit it or not, there are certain prejudices biases. So I would think, I would agree that the white Americans are more easily accepted than some of the other races.

UQ: Why?

VK: Its part of the mental makeup I think. Somehow India has a big caste system for example. Now those biases are going away but they're still...so what happens is you grow up with that. You grow up with those biases. It's kind of programmed in you whether you think about it or you don't think about it. I remember back in India growing up in India the lady who would come and clean our toilets generally what would happen is they would open the door and the lady is coming in. "Okay just do what you need to do" kind of stuff. I don't want to interact with you. So those, you grow up with those and I always feel. Personally I will always feel very hard because whether I understood or not I always felt, "Hey that's another human being!" But people around me would treat them differently so you see those bias and they, whether it's your parents your uncles or relatives, they have also grown up with those bias. And then it becomes part of the normal make up. I've seen people hit their servants, shout and yell at their servants and there are plenty of servants in India. I always felt that that's not the right thing to do. So somehow, you know, even though I saw it all my life (not in my particular house) but in other houses and the way they treat people I always felt that somehow it did not connect. To me it did not connect. So I think what happens is that the people they may go to U.S., they may go to Canada, they may go to America but they bring their biases with them. You make a fresh start but mentally you are not making a fresh start, spiritually you are not making a fresh start. So it's sort of, you take it along with you wherever you are and then you sort of, in a way, discriminate sometimes whether you admit it or not.

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UQ: So you saw the sort of mistreatment of servant class which more than likely is lower caste as well.

VK: Yes.

UQ: Did you see the opposite kind of the preferential treatment for Caucasians in Bombay?

VK: Yeah. Yes I did, I did because I remember we were part of I think there was an Indo-American chamber or something and I had taken some public speaking classes when I was in high school. Then as part of this whole thing we were meeting I think it was a cruise ship or something that some Americans had come or some Europeans or Americans I forget who they were. Not having seen them before or not really used to having one-on-one interaction with them people were I mean I found the behavior bizarre in a way. They were trying to act, these people that I knew in that particular chamber and back at that time, they were trying to act very western. I remember distinctly one guy trying to pinch an American lady because he felt that was the accepted way of doing things. And maybe I didn't know any better but it...

UQ: Was he an Indian guy?

VK: Indian guy.

UQ: Okay.

VK: Indian guy so he was acting. He was trying to act. He felt that's how Americans act. I don't know where he got that impression from. I didn't even really see that in movies or something. So I'm not sure where he got that impression from, maybe from a fiction novel or something. I don't know. So and even back here in Houston I remember. Now things have changed quite a bit but I remember that we had gone to an

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Indian restaurant and there was an American couple waiting in line and the Indian guy that was also waiting in line or something he was all over the American couple and talking about Indian food and you know going over there and explaining to them and all that. He was probably ignoring his wife while he was trying to do all this. I just... these things, these events or these incidents kind of stick out and say, "Okay there is something wrong here." Even back then some of the restaurant owners would do the same thing. You know if there are Americans they would give them preferential treatment. If it's Indian customers or Pakistani customers they are like second class citizens. But I don't see that anymore. That, that definitely happened in the early 80's and I guess maybe because people are also trying to let... I mean they were new at it. Maybe they had just moved from wherever Bangladesh where ever they moved from and they didn't know how to act maybe. So they were not letting their conscience drive what they need to do they were, you know perceptions, mental makeup biases, prejudices they were driving that. So somehow the Caucasians were a better race than anybody else. And it's sort of kind of fits in with our caste systems in a way where you know you have caste of people like Brahmins are supposed to be the superior and then all of this, which doesn't make any sense at all, but that's the way it is and then they bring some of these things back here and then they apply it to the wrong things I feel.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So that's... I mean again these were exceptions. This was definitely not the rule. But I do remember these incidents because they did happen and they always struck me as, "This is just fundamentally wrong what's going wrong."

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UQ: Do you think there could possibly be a link between this kind of “pre programming” as you call it and colonial, British colonial presence in India?

VK: Absolutely, absolutely! Because you know that we were ruled for what a couple of hundred years or so and that is definitely a very strong link because they were considered, you know (in some people’s mind anyway) and of course India, Pakistan got their independence, kicked the Britishers out and all of that. But in some people’s mind that is definitely there. That, I don’t know where it was but I remember the... there was a British guy. I don’t know if it was in India or America that he’d walk into the office, the guy, the Indian guy he’d get up and make space for him and sit at his desk and all that. Like here comes an elite class of some sort. It just doesn’t make sense. But again, it’s hard for people to get away from that something is driving them to do it and it’s hard for them to get away from it I think.

UQ: Do you think that immigrants who come now still sort of perpetuate those kinds of ideas that they are still there at some level?

VK: Less so. Definitely less so I think. There is, there is still some amount of... But you know the communication is opening up. When we came in 1979 there was no email. The phone calls cost \$7 an hour—\$7 a minute sorry; \$7 a minute to call India, it was \$7 a minute. We used to write these aerograms you know the cost I forgot what the cost was 30 cents, 40 cents something to write a letter and send it to my parents. Even when my brother’s daughter was born we didn’t call because it was too expensive to call. That was in 1980 so we sent an aerogram and all that. So it’s, it was pretty archaic. But for that time, you know it was what it was. Now you go to India, Pakistan and the people are carrying iPhones, they are always on the internet, Facebook, I mean you know it’s really

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a virtual world. They take pictures and five minutes through, watch the app on the iPhone, they will send you pictures with something that happened 3 minutes ago.

UQ: So how do you think that has changed?

VK: So they are more aware of what's going on in the world basically. They are away of you know when they are visiting. They will say, "I want this particular brand." They are very brand conscious. Over here people don't really care. So they know what's going on. They travel very frequently with the boom in India you know people are traveling. All the flights in India, even business class flights are full to European countries, Middle East wherever you want they are all full because people have wealth. So they have traveled. In my own family my mom has been here 6 or 7 times you know. My wife's cousins they come once, twice a year. They stay a couple of months and they have been doing that for years. So there's nothing new. There's no... probably no place that they haven't been to. So the middle class, upper middle class they have traveled really extensively. We were in South America recently there was a family, two families from India they were traveling South America for 25 days. They were going to some really exotic places and they were staying in the best places. So they have seen what was back in 1979 where travel was not as frequent. It was new back then. Now it's common place.

UQ: Okay so let me probe you just a little bit more. So you are saying that the familiarity with the world and the people of the world that has led to kind of changing perceptions; whereas back then because the wide majority of Indians did not interact with say, British presence in India because it was somewhat unfamiliar that they elevated them to a higher status perhaps?

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VK: Yeah, something new right? Growing up I don't think I had met a single American or Britisher.

UQ: Had your parents?

VK: My parents? Well actually that's not true because my dad's very good friend's wife was a Britisher so we would interact... but I remember even when she came we were very kind of uncomfortable because and then we've known her growing up. So she was not distant or anything, but still something different. So that is probably the only British lady growing up I think. So they almost always seemed and they were also very affluent. So maybe that's part of the equation but they always seemed like, you know, they are moving in the higher society if you will. So we were never very... they were very nice people but we were never very comfortable and my mom would interact with her just fine. My mom doesn't speak English and that lady never spoke the Indian language. And yet they could spend hours together. But my mom did not have any such... even though she doesn't have any education, she never had any social reservations at all, "Oh, Mrs. Thelma is coming over or something or the other, it was just fine!"

But somehow we were or me in particular I guess I would attribute it more to the lack of interactions with foreigners in a way, if you are just passed by as foreigners; all my friends were Indian. Everybody we interacted with were Indians so really we did not have that... but then when you come here and you interact with all these people then they are just human beings like you. There's no difference. So then that awe, if you will growing up that lessons that diminishes. And now with people traveling so much that you know

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even my nephew who is here now even before he came to study he had visited the country two or three times.

UQ: I see.

VK: Went to Middle East, went to New Zealand and so that, what happens is when we first came here that was actually it was my first plane ride for that matter. I had never been on a plane before. So it was like, you know so I remember wearing a suit and all that and it's like, "Wow I'm going to America and I have to feel very important about it."

Now it's like hey I'd rather go in shorts but the plane is too cold so I don't go in shorts.

But you know you just want to be comfortable. Slippers I'd rather be in slippers than all these suits and shoes and ties and all that and be uncomfortable for 24 hours. Now it's like... you know so I think all this has changed and the younger generation now (especially in India) they are like that because they have been... a lot of them have been all over the world. So I think it's just when you travel so much and you are exposed to so much and especially the communication the way it is now that here's nothing new.

UQ: It breaks down those barriers.

VK: It breaks down those barriers absolutely.

UQ: Okay. When I say the words... do you need to take a break? Would you like to stop, are you alright?

VK: I'm fine.

UQ: When I say the words "American South" what comes to your mind?

VK: American South now really there's not too much difference but back then it was like cowboys and Indians. That what was the wild, wild west. An area which is maybe not as sophisticated as maybe the places like New York. That's what I initially thought

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of. But then when you come to Houston, well and still people living in New York will still tell you that Houston or the South or Texas in general is a backward place. Some of them will tell you that. They feel like that. It's not so.

UQ: Do you think there are places like that in the South today?

VK: I guess some of the smaller places might be, may not have, because I remember like in 1981, roughly '81, '82 time frame that the job I was at, the first job I was at, and this company is only a small company, maybe five people. So he was moving to Springfield Missouri and he was taking the company with him. So he asked whether I would like to move there. I said, "We'd like to come visit the place." He said, "I just want to warn you that it's a little different." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You come and you'll see for yourself." "Okay." So going from Houston with a population at that time maybe 2 million maybe or something like that. So me and my wife went to Springfield, Missouri the next day at breakfast, the mayor of the time came to visit with us. I was like, "Wow!" because we stood out like a sore thumb. The town was 99% white. It was the international headquarters of Assembly of God. They were opening the second mall so when you have the perspective of living in Houston for two years and you go to a small place like that with a population of I don't know maybe not even 100,000 I was like, "Wow! I don't care if we don't have a job but we are not moving here!" So that's what I mean, that...you know a place like Houston even though it may not have all the cultural things like a New York might have, a place like New York might have but it's a great melting pot. You don't stand out because you look different. That's the beauty of a place like this. You go to a smaller place, again it might have less cultural

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programs opportunities whatever, but you tend, especially as an Asian, you tend to stand out less here than in a place over there.

UQ: Was that the case even in 1979?

VK: Absolutely! 1979 I mean we met so many people there was no issue as far as, yeah they are curious over in India and all of that. And yeah even today people tell you, "Oh where were you born?" because they know you were not born here. But obviously we are not trying to change that but it is what it is. So that's not an issue. But here, especially in a bigger city like this because even in my own company we have people from Taiwan, we have people from Vietnam we have people the Spanish, Mexico... people of all kinds that work in a small company like this. A lot of people from China so it becomes, you know... from Pakistan, from India. So I love that aspect of it. That you know there is so much diversity but at the same time there is so much unity in that diversity. You know people are free to do what they want to do and not get persecuted by it. Or you know you always have to explain yourself or something. You don't have to explain who you are or what you do, how you do it because it doesn't really matter. It's your business.

UQ: Okay.

VK: In a place like Houston also the bigger cities there is no such problem. But I would still think that even if you go to a smaller place, a much smaller place you might face some of that. Not that I personally have but I'm just guessing. We had opportunities to move to El Paso for example and just did not appeal to me. We had an opportunity to move to California back then but some of the offers in Houston were always better than California. So California it would have been the same thing. Like

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L.A., San Francisco... there are so many, so much diversity there that you don't really stand out.

UQ: Okay are there... no let me rephrase that. You've touched upon the diversity that's in Houston. You've touched upon sort of this open opportunity atmosphere that the city has. Are there groups in the U.S. that are discriminated against?

VK: I would think that probably that get discriminated against is probably the Islamic faith because of perceptions what has happened with 9/11 and things like that, you know. Maybe not openly but I would think, that's just my perception, it may not be true at all but it's just my perception that they are still on guard basically. It's a very unfortunate situation.

UQ: Okay so I guess I should be more specific or ask you to be more specific in what ways is that group discriminated against?

VK: Because somehow (and again it's the ignorance more than anything else) in general I feel (not personally) but I feel in general that people feel that oh they somehow get linked with terrorism. The whole faith gets linked with terrorism which is ignorance at its peak and it's not that. And because of that everybody becomes... not everybody but in general they become suspect. Not... suspect is too strong of a word but people are wary maybe. I don't see that in Houston. There are plenty of mosques actually and this belt is a religious belt if you know that. In a way in that there are mosques, temples, Buddhist temples all within two or three miles of here. So it's great because great vibrations. But I feel that you know people are in general. I remember even when Obama was running for president this lady on T.V. she's asking John McCain, "I hear that Obama is an Arab! Is he an Arab?" or something. Where is this coming from you know?

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So those are the kinds of perceptions which are I don't know what it requires to change those perceptions but something really needs to happen because it's just foolish.

UQ: Okay. What about in terms of housing or hiring and job practices, any groups discriminated against there?

VK: I don't think so. I think that has been and I feel across the board in the companies that I deal with I don't see that. I don't see that. Because some of our vendors are Pakistani, some are from Bangladesh and then I talk with them often enough. We have people from Pakistan that work here. That what they look for is people that will help the company that they add value to what they are doing. That's what I look for and I think that is the most important thing. That as long as the person is capable of doing and helping and adding value then you don't worry about where they are, what the race is, sexual preference anything I mean everything is okay as long... because everybody has a personal life. Let them put their personal life be their personal life. They are here to do a job and as long as they are doing that then there is no problem.

UQ: Can you think of any occasion when you thought you were treated unfairly because of your Indian origins?

VK: I don't think so.

UQ: Okay.

VK: I don't think so. The only time when I felt was and surprisingly I felt that from an Indian not from an American. I had gone to an interview back when I just graduated back in 1980 and this was a big company I was interviewing with I think it was N.E.C. and the interview was going fine and then this one Indian guy comes up and he was working there and he says, "What visa are you on?" or something he asked me. I said,

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“Well I’m on a student visa.” “Ahh he said.” After that it was a good interview became bad I never heard from the company again. So I don’t know what exactly happened but it was not because of my Indian origin but it was more because of concerns of the Visas and things like that. But apart from that I’ve had no issues whatsoever.

UQ: Okay. In your opinion is there any kind of discrimination that exists between the different groups of India? Different Indian communities whether Punjabi versus Hyderabadi versus Keralites or whatever.

VK: No I don’t think so. I really don’t think. I think they coexist quite well because there is a lot of religious faiths in Houston and Houston seems to be the capital of religious the number of temples and the number of Mosques and the number of church that seem to come from, originate from India is just amazing. I think they have like over 100 religious organizations over here. Now people are I mean I don’t think there is any problem. If they are from Kerala or if they are from Punjab they all seem to be doing just fine and I meet with groups of friends who are from all different parts of India and we really have a good time together and there is no differences as far as that is concerned. But in their own way people are aggressive. So you see like even in a religious organization you will see people that are arguing or in one case maybe fighting over something and it doesn’t jive well. Because you are working as a volunteer in an religious organization. There is a need to why do you have an agenda? Why do you need to have power or whatever it is that they are seeking? So sometimes you see flashes of that but within the own organization. Whatever the religious organization is or spiritual organization is. You see some flashes sometimes once in a while but yeah I’ve learned to ignore that because human beings are... they made it to the U.S.A. 10,000 miles away

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with nothing in their pockets so there is an aggressive trend in them anyway and that surfaces wherever you go sometimes. So whether it is a religious organization or others they want to be, that "I'm the person who needs to be in charge or something."

UQ: Okay.

VK: That could be... but apart from that they really do a great job of coexisting and they are really at peace with each other.

UQ: Okay you mentioned that there are many Indian organizations here. Which ones do you consider yourself a member of?

VK: Actually we go to a spiritual group so we really don't go to a temple but we go for spirituality, it's Satya Sai Baba. Sai Baba, so that's the organization that we fall under and that we have been going for the last 18 years or so.

UQ: Oh wow okay. Any other ones any language groups or cultural groups?

VK: Gujaratis we are Gujaratis so we... there is another temple right here called VPSS, that we go to once in a while. My wife is a Jain so we sometimes go to the Jain temple. Jain Center actually.

UQ: Okay.

VK: But those are those are ones maybe every 3, 4 months maybe whereas the Sai Baba it's like every week.

UQ: Okay what about other both of these temples or the spiritual center, aside from those are there any cultural organizations that you are a member of?

VK: Not really, not really. I mean we focus we have not been part of any charitable organizations all the stuff that is going on in Houston. We actually have our own nonprofit organization so we concentrate on that.

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UQ: What is that group?

VK: It's called Prema Foundation.

UQ: P-r-e-m-a?

VK: Prema like love, divine love.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So that's the... that's the nonprofit that we started. But because I, both of us feel that you need to support what you really believe in. So the Satya Sai organization we really believe in that so we support the Satya Sai organization they do massive work so whatever little we can do we support that in its fullest. Then we do some work, a little bit of work for the Lighthouse for the Blind and the Star of Hope so we support that too to some extent.

UQ: Okay.

VK: But now we are trying to get a little bit more involved in local service if you will. Because not only in India but here locally that needs help and I would like to focus more on the children maybe. So those are things that we are looking at now.

UQ: Okay do you have children yourself?

VK: Yeah we have three kids.

UQ: Can you talk a little bit about them?

VK: So the oldest one, all were born here. All are vegetarians like Hansa and I, not that we force them to be but they somehow gravitated to that I guess. So the oldest is 27. He finished his MBA at Rice recently and he is working at Continental Air. My second child is my daughter she was at... she finished her bachelor's in NYU. So she was there for five years and she worked there for a year or so and then we got her to move to Texas

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luckily. She is doing her law at UT So she is a second year student at UT. And my third child, she is a senior in high school. So that's the makeup.

UQ: Where does she go to school the youngest?

VK: She goes to Saint Agnes.

UQ: Private school.

VK: Yeah private school.

UQ: Okay how did you choose that school for her?

VK: The older kids also went to my daughter went to Saint Agnes and my son went to Strake Jesuit so all three went to these schools and we were looking at a school that would have a value based [education] even though that's the Jesuit education we felt that they were old enough, old enough to discriminate... not discriminate but to know the difference between what they were born into, the families they were born into, and another faith basically and also to appreciate another faith. So that's how it sort of worked out. They have gone through four years of theology and all of that and the idea was not to convert them into something that they are not but just to appreciate, understand other religions, other faiths. That's what Satya Sai talks about, is unity of all faiths. There's only one religion the religion of love that's his main message. So it really doesn't matter in that respect. If tomorrow he says, "Hey I want to give up Hinduism and become a Catholic" or something I know it's not going to happen but I'd be open if that what makes you happy then so be it.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So in that respect... so it was learning for us too because I'm not much into ritualism and the Catholic faith as Hinduism has a lot of ritualistic practices that I just

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don't understand and I don't really enjoy much. So we went to a fair amount of Mass and all that but I really don't understand but I'd rather look at the values. I'd rather look at the spiritual part of things, what makes you a better person? How do you improve yourself?

UQ: Did your children always go to those private schools or did they ever go to public schools in your area?

VK: No they have always been to private schools and the high school is when they went to these Jesuit the elementary and middle schools they were in non-denominational schools but they were private schools so all along all of them have gone to private schools.

UQ: So why did you choose private over public in the very beginning?

VK: That was, what happens is when you start with one kid you've got to sort of promulgate that for all of them whether it's right or wrong. So there's nothing wrong with public school but at that time back in 1989 when my son was 5 years old I felt that the public schools you hear a lot of problems with drugs and you know and just some bad elements, you know some gang related stuff whether it is true or not I just heard that and said, "Hey maybe we should just look at this." And my friends kids were going to that one particular school, they seemed to be doing well so we sort of kind of the blind leading the blind syndrome.

UQ: So what was the school that you, your son was zoned to at that time?

VK: He was zoned... when he was born we were at this house. Yeah he was zoned to a school in Katy.

UQ: Katy.

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VK: Yeah.

UQ: Okay.

VK: We are not really in Katy but we are zoned to Katy so that is a bit of a... that was one more thing you know that I would have to drive and go there.

UQ: I'm sure you don't mean that there were gang problems at the elementary school level obviously these are 5 and 6 year olds.

VK: These are just things that you... perceptions.

UQ: Okay.

VK: That in general if you go to public schools and sometime later in life the quality of education is better in private versus public... again perceptions. I know many, many kids that have done extremely well and they have gone to Ivy League schools and all of that. It's just perceptions.

UQ: Okay.

VK: But again education is such an important part of the Asian culture, not only just in India but Pakistan, Bangladesh, China it is very important, education is very important. Even as youngsters I would be telling them, "Hey you've got to do at least your Master's." Okay and it's programmed in me that's what Hansa did, that's what I did and education is what is going to make you successful. You've got to have values so again spirituality, education if you have those two factors covered then it's a given. It's not a question whether they are going to do high school, whether they are going to go to college, it's not even a question. In all my friends I don't know a single kid that hasn't been to college. I mean it's a given. That's the make up again. You've got to... and not just any, now it's like a lot of them end up in Ivy colleges, Ivy League colleges. So it's

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just that mental framework I think more than anything else you've got to do well. That's an aggressive streak if you consider, whatever it is you say, "You've got to go to the best colleges." So along those lines you've got to go to the best possible schools that you can go to.

UQ: Okay.

VK: Whether it makes sense or not.

UQ: Did it concern you that at these private schools that there weren't too many Indians or were there?

VK: There were quite a few Indians.

UQ: There were? Okay.

VK: Again everybody's the mental frame work is, "Hey whatever I can afford then I'm going to spend towards my kids." So there were a large number of foreigners I mean they are all Americans but from different ethnicity, different immigrants. A lot of Britishers were there.

UQ: What were the larger immigrant groups in the schools?

VK: Probably Britishers and Indians. Britishers because of the expats, you know Houston being an Oil town a lot of people coming from Ireland, from U.K. and along with that this was one of the schools that was recommended by the consulate of the companies or whatever. So there's a fair amount of those people there.

UQ: Okay. Now Katy schools, even now are considered good schools.

VK: Very good schools.

UQ: They are still very well respected are you still living in that area?

VK: I'm still living in that area yeah.

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UQ: Yeah.

VK: And she is still going to Saint Agnes and that's because we asked her if she would like if she wanted to go to a public school and she said, "Dad I just want to be comfortable all my friends are going here" once you introduce a kid to a particular system it's hard for them to change.

UQ: Right.

VK: So, "Okay I'm not going to deny you this. We've done this with the other two kids" so you've got to sort of follow what's going on.

UQ: Yeah. Alright so you are from Bombay but originally your family is from Gujarat?

VK: That's correct.

UQ: Do you go back to Gujarat does anyone?

VK: No.

UQ: No everyone moved to Bombay?

VK: Everyone moved to Bombay.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So even before I was born my parents had moved many years before that to Bombay. So I've never been to I don't even think all my uncles, aunts everybody is in Bombay so there was no reason for us to go back to Gujarat. I mean we visited and stuff like that but there is no attraction there.

UQ: Okay. I don't know if you are familiar with but I'd like to know if you have ever heard of Africans, people of African origin in Gujarat?

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VK: Oh yeah, yeah. And some of my best friends in college were from Africa actually they spoke Gujarati because they were from Gujarat originally moved to Africa and they came back to college to study. So I'm very familiar with that group.

UQ: Okay.

VK: They have done exceedingly well you know some that moved to Uganda had problems when Idi Amin uprooted all the Asians and all that. But my friends were from Zambia. Zambia, Rhodesia—Zimbabwe Now I guess. And they were really... they spoke fairly. I mean Gujarati, their way of speaking Gujarati was different then what we did but still they were pretty good at it.

UQ: Okay.

VK: So then they and this one he's in Florida right now and even though he had his own apartment in Bombay he would come and stay with us for months on end. So his whole family brother, sister, parents I knew all of them very, very well.

UQ: Okay. Growing up in India you, obviously there was television so you were exposed to media and from other interviews I've already learned that people were pretty familiar, Indians were pretty familiar with international happenings, including the Civil Rights Movement that took place here. Were you familiar with kind of the narrative of Martin Luther King or...

VK: Not really because that happened when, in the...

UQ: That was in the 60s.

VK: That was in the 60s, yeah I was like 10 years old, 8 years, 10 years old. I remember JFK getting assassinated. I remember Jawaharlal Nehru in '63 but apart from that not much about MLK at that time.

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UQ: Had you heard of him?

VK: I had heard of him but didn't really know about it. I just know, "I had a dream" that kind of stuff but not really much familiarity with that.

UQ: Okay.

VK: TV was first introduced in Bombay anyway back I think I was in the 10th or 11th grade at the time. So it was... growing up we didn't have TV.

UQ: Alright just a few more questions and we'll wrap it up.

VK: Sure!

UQ: And these are just very direct questions that I think you will be confident enough to answer. I don't ask them of everyone but I think you will be able to do these alright.

VK: Okay.

UQ: First question does skin color mean anything to people in India? By skin color I mean sort of shade.

VK: Yes it does.

UQ: Okay, can you explain?

VK: Even today there is this notion that you have to be fair. The darker you are it's somehow undesirable. I mean I'm being very honest about it. They still feel that. My niece, you know she won't drink tea because she feels that will make her darker. So that's very important.

UQ: Why?

VK: Well she's not married I mean she's only 20, 21. But she feels that the fairer you are the more chances you have of success whether it's marriage or finding the right husband or in a family which is very affluent.

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UQ: Do you think there's some truth to her?

VK: Yeah because a lot of people think like that. A lot of people think like that. The eligible bachelors think like that whether it's the men or the women they think like that. And that is pretty dominant. The skin color is extremely important.

UQ: Is there some overlap between skin color and caste?

VK: I think skin color probably there... sometimes there is a strong parallel but skin color may be sometimes even more... like for example a Punjabi or a Gujarati or a Maharashtrians they might marry a Maharashtrian if the guy is really handsome and has the right skin color or is really fair or the other vice versa. So but still there is still a lot of arranged marriage. Generally the parents won't allow that. They want to marry within their own caste and things like that. But that is still very favorably looked upon you know the skin color.

UQ: Why do you think that is?

VK: Perception. It's more beautiful. Somehow it's more beautiful. It's very appealing. So what is very appealing they want to sort of... you know growing up they see some starlet maybe Aishwarya Rai, oh look at her eyes. "Look how beautiful she is and look how fair she is." Fair is very commonly used. So then you want to become like that.

UQ: Was it the same with your parents' generation?

VK: I think so.

UQ: What about your grandparents if you had to wager a guess?

VK: I would think so. I think it's come down from generations.

UQ: Nothing new and not changed?

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VK: It hasn't changed. It has not changed.

UQ: Okay. Do you think we have a race problem in America today?

VK: Yeah. We still have a race problem. People won't admit it but there's a race problem I think. Again, I think it is definitely lessened in what it was. It's not as prevalent as what it was 40, 50, 60 years ago. But there is, there is still definitely a race problem.

UQ: Okay who are the main actors in that race problem? Who is the racism directed toward mainly?

VK: They are directed at different groups I think. Sometimes it's African Americans; sometimes at the Spanish population; sometimes religious organizations or faiths. So I think it varies depending on, these are perceptions.

UQ: Sure.

VK: They are just perceptions. They may feel that this one class is just not you know very intelligent or whatever the thing is. So they would dismiss that whole... generally dismiss the whole thing and say, "Ah, if you are from this particular thing then you are not worth anything." So those are the kind of, it's not just the skin color.

UQ: Okay.

VK: I think it is people's perception there are different things. First it used to be the skin color. If you're black then you are urban; in Hitler's time, if you were Jewish, so what. But now it is it's in a way it's kind of mixed and you don't see it in a day to day situation but you hear it pop up once in a while in a conversation or something. I can't really be specific about it but in general I see it. Different groups it will come up. It's like, "Hmm." Then you try and see whether it fits the stereotypical format. "So are you

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saying this whole, whether it is faith or caste or whatever, if the whole thing is like that because of what you saw?" Then they step back and say, "No, no that's not true." But something prompted them to make that statement. Why did they make it? Because there is some bias in their mind.

UQ: Okay.

VK: That that particular whatever they are directing their frustration, anger, whatever is that. They are directing it towards something that's in their subconscious if you will. And it comes up and when you question them they are like, "Yeah that's not true. I guess it must be that individual whatever that person did." Whether it's a football player, whoever it is. So you don't... in a way it's a bit more complicated than it used to be. It was wrong then, it's wrong now. But you see flashes of this I think come up.

UQ: Okay so when you see these flashes come up, who is doing the flashing so to speak? Who is the one making these stereotypical judgments?

VK: Sometimes I've seen people that are visiting from India. Sometimes I've seen people, Americans make statements that don't...

UQ: By Americans you mean white Americans?

VK: White Americans yeah. They make statements and I say, "Wait what does that mean?"

UQ: Okay.

VK: And in Texas you know you are really I have met a fair amount of what you call rednecks, very opinionated and very Republican and all that. It doesn't matter to me whether they are Republican or Democrat, Independent whatever it is fine. But you cannot just take that frustration out on whole gang, group of people. Yeah one individual

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may not be doing what he or she is supposed to do but that doesn't mean that the whole Republican Party, the whole Democratic Party is useless. So that's why I'm saying it. I see it in different forms. It just, it just pervades and then you look at an individual and say, "Okay I know where that's coming from I'm not even going to go there. Let it be. Let it just slide." Because you know they will make some statement. Even at work I see it sometimes. Somebody will make a statement on a coffee break or whatever. And they make a statement, "Okay just let it slide. Don't go there."

UQ: Do you ever hear Indians who have been here for some time make those kinds of statement?

VK: Less so. But I definitely heard statements. I've heard comments, maybe an email or something and... it doesn't fit well, it doesn't fit well. I mean they are just general observations nothing specific. But in general to answer your question, I do see that.

UQ: Okay how do you think this can be solved?

VK: More understanding, more understanding of different faiths. I wish in a way there was a way where you know for example I would know more about Christianity or I would know more about Islamic faith, or Jewish or anything, even the Gurudwar or Sikhism or Jainism then you have more understanding what happens is that some of the notion that you have, the preconceived notions that, "Oh this is such and such..." then you understand, you see the beauty in these faiths, religious faiths. You see the meaning the values that it's all aimed at the same thing which is peace, love and peace. When you break those barriers down then you have no reason to feel the way you do. So I don't know how you go about doing that but the more you work together towards a common cause whether it's to feed the homeless whether it is to help homeless children or starving

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children or starving people whatever. If you come together not as just one religious sect or just one group of people but you open it up. You know you have so many different groups and different religions, you go and you work towards a common cause. Then you will not see all these differences. The problem is, because you see differences. Actually there is no difference.

UQ: Go ahead who did you mainly socialize with?

VK: When we graduated then we had kids so we ended up socializing a lot with other parents with similar aged kids and as it turns out it became a big group of people and we still have, we are still very good friends. All the kids are grown up and things like that but we still have this big group that we go with. Then also what happened back in '93 when we joined the Satya Sai Center then we were socializing with those devotees but more on a spiritual basis. They had devotional singing sessions. They have retreats. You know you go out of town on retreats, mini retreats, other activities that go on throughout the year. So that's generally what and even today that's generally what happens.

UQ: Okay what about your neighbors? Do you socialize with them?

VK: Not a whole lot because we've been there 17 years but they have moved. So we have new neighbors now but we are probably moving to Sugar Land now so again that's much incentive to go socialize and make small talk and make friends and then you are going to move anyway.

UQ: Even then when you first.

VK: When we first moved but most of those neighbors are gone.

UQ: I guess the question is when they were there...

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VK: Yes.

UQ: At any time...

VK: Yeah, yeah across the street we were socializing with this family I think he was from Britain and she was from South America. Their child was the same age as my youngest daughter. So we ended up socializing with them but then they moved to... I don't know where they are now, just South America.

UQ: Okay.

VK: This one side of us they moved, the other guys are there but they are much older, there's not much in common with them. And the community we live in is much older people anyway. The houses are old. They were built in like '79, '75 maybe. So they are older houses and they are older people live there. They are retired. The neighbor across the street has retired many years ago. So we don't have that much in common then.

UQ: Okay you are saying you want to move to Sugar Land, why?

VK: Proximity to work. Most of our friends live in Sugar Land so there's no reason really to live where we are now. Kids have all moved away anyway so it takes us 25 to 30 minutes to commute back here. Highway 6 is a mess a lot of accidents on Highway 6. So it makes more sense to move here, close here.

UQ: You wouldn't think about moving kind of in the city, West University?

VK: We did look at houses in the without not so much West University but more in the Memorial area but didn't really find anything that was appealing. So Sugar Land looked and lots of friends having, including Pradeep and they are all here they live in Sugar Land. So why fight the trend just move here.

UQ: What attracted you to Memorial?

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VK: It was proximity to that first school, the school that my son went to. So we didn't want to move. We looked at Sugar Land back then but then said, "That's too far from that school." We wanted to go to that school. So then we started looking at houses and we found one which is like 10 minutes away so that was back in '93 so we've been there every since, 18 years we've been in that house. So... and of course it's a nice neighborhood, quiet neighborhood you know it's a fairly decent neighborhood and especially with some of our experiences at Gulfton and so you kind of spot the trend that this neighborhood doesn't look like it's going to decline, right or wrong.

UQ: You mean housing values?

VK: Down in values, down in living standards, safety, crime rates all that kind of stuff. You sort of have a mental makeup saying, "Okay this looks like a good neighborhood I think it will be good for the next 10, 15 years." And it is... it has been like that. It has not really, there has been crime, yes absolutely. But overall it's still a fairly decent neighborhood. Of course the now the houses are much older so along with that you kind of have other problems.

UQ: Okay I think that wraps it up is there anything else you'd like to add before we close it up?

VK: No I think this was good I just hope it was useful.

UQ: I think it was, definitely. Thank you.

End of Interview