

Interviewee: Mehta, Pradip

Interview Date: October 8, 2011

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Pradip Mehta
University of Houston Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
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Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Rice University

UQ: This is the oral history interview of Pradip Mehta on October 8, 2011 at Rice University. Interviewer's name is Uzma Quraishi. Alright you can begin by telling a little bit about yourself, your background and your childhood.

PM: Okay so I grew up in Bombay. I did my schooling over there, also first year science over there in Bombay. The name of the school was Fellowship High School. Name of the college for the first year science was Jaihind College.

UQ: Can you spell it?

PM: Yeah Jaihind is J-a-i-h-i-n-d. And after that I went to Kanpur to study at Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur. So I spent five years over there doing chemical engineering and then I came abroad, over here to USA so came to USA in 1974, finished a Ph.D. in '78, and then went to Connecticut to work for a company called Fradel Corporation and then in 1984 I went to work for a company called Celanese Chemicals in Corpus Christi, Texas and actually I'm still with that company and I was moved from Corpus Christi area to here in 2006 to Houston. So we've been in Houston since then. Got married in '81, I met my wife at University of Houston and we have two children so

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one of them is in Dallas studying; she is doing her Ph.D. in communications disorders

and I've got a son he is studying for Master's at Texas A & M Kingsville in chemistry.

UQ: Okay tell me a little bit about your parents and what they did and where they were from, where they were raised?

PM: Okay, so my father was born and raised in Bombay and our family is basically what is called in our language Kapoor caste and I've got, I have five uncles and two aunts on the father's side. Mother is from a city called Bhavanagar

UQ: Can you spell it?

PM: Yeah B-h-a-v-a-n-a-g-a-r. It's in Gujarat in Saurashtra. And on mother's side I've got, I had four uncles and four aunts.

UQ: Okay, what did your father work as?

PM: My father started out working with his brother, so my uncle had metallurgical engineering background and he was one of the first metallurgical engineers in India and my father helped him with his business, until about 1975. After that he started his own business and he grew that business pretty well and then that business what was mostly with Russia and affiliated countries in those days so when Russian empire collapsed his business collapsed, also. So after that he has not been doing much of a business, but he's been trying and even today he does go to the office at the age of 86 years.

UQ: Oh my, okay.

PM: Mother has passed away.

UQ: Okay, so do you still have siblings?

PM: I have a sister

UQ: Okay.

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PM: She's in India and...

UQ: In Bombay?

PM: In Bombay, pretty close to where my father lives. She's got two kids and they are both studying. One is in Canada and one is in USA.

UQ: Okay, what about your grandfather what did he do?

PM: My grandfather was an unsuccessful lawyer. Unsuccessful, because he was a Gandhian and he would not lie and so most of the cases he would not take and once he took it he did not do very well. So, but a little family income from that side.

UQ: That was your father's side?

PM: Father's father.

UQ: Paternal grandfather, okay.

PM: Mother's father had done some businesses and he relied my...on his eldest son, my eldest uncle and my eldest uncle died prematurely so that business fell apart and he came to Bombay. He lived with us a little bit and he sold insurance to go on living. Of course he had grown old at that time and so he kind of later on was devoted to religion and other things and that's about all he did.

UQ: Okay. At your school Jaihind College, what was the language medium?

PM: Okay, so Fellowship High school it was a Gujarati medium, until Eighth Standard, after Eighth Standard we started in the English medium instructions. So it was a difficult transition.

UQ: Was there no English language instruction prior to eighth?

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PM: We learned English as a language from 5th standard but it was just limited to learning English. But then in Eighth Standard everything turned over to English. So this was kind of an experiment in first batch that they did that and then it continued after that.

UQ: Okay what other languages do you speak?

PM: I understand Marathi a little bit, and Hindi I know how to speak as well as understand, and English. I can interpret German a little bit, and I can interpret Chinese a little bit but not much. So my wife is actually Chinese origin.

UQ: I see.

PH: She came from Hong Kong to study here in the University of Houston.

UQ: I see. Can you describe the... you grew up in Bombay so you know what Bombay is kind of your neighborhood what was that like?

PH: Yeah, so I lived in an area called Tardeo, which is T-a-r-d-e-o I think. Where I lived there was it was a colony around us around the building I stayed in. There were a lot of houses or apartment houses is what we have in Bombay usually. So there were a lot of Parsees around us. The building I stayed in didn't have Parsees but around us there were a lot of Parsees in that area.

UQ: Did Parsees tend to live in the same buildings together, is that...

PM: Yeah so most of the buildings had Parsees over there so and right behind us was a Parsee crematorium in our building. So that's the kind of atmosphere that we had. Like most kids in Bombay we grew up on streets basically playing cricket and all this kind of things yeah.

UQ: Okay your neighborhood so it was mainly Parsee and Hindu, Jain?

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PM: Mixture yeah. In our building there were two buildings that were non-Parsee buildings.

UQ: Okay.

PM: So we had all kind of people in there. Most, not necessarily even Gujaratis or Marathis I mean we had mixtures of people from the front area.

UQ: Okay let's talk about your expectations regarding America before you ever came here. So what did you sort of know about the US?

PM: Okay so I had read about America a little bit earlier. I had seen movies and other things so there were some impressions from the movies. I knew about the movements in the Civil Rights area and...

UQ: How did you know about that?

PM: Just reading through newspapers and other things.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Yeah, I knew that American universities were well regarded of. In addition, IIT Kanpur, so I'll go into a little bit. When Indian government decided to establish IITs as the premier schools over there in India they had kind of collaborated with different countries so, IIT Bombay who was established in collaboration with Russian scientists and Russian institutes, IIT Madras was with German, IIT Kanpur was in collaboration with nine American universities things like that, Princeton, Cal Tech and Carnegie Mellon and all these other. So we actually had professors that came and taught in Kanpur but before my time. When I went to Kanpur in '69 and at that time most, all... almost, probably one or two left from abroad but most of them were Indian professors by that time. So there was a strong connection between the professors and in my school in IIT

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Kanpur versus the professors over here. And it was a very common practice for almost all students to apply for scholarships at these institutions and other institutions.

UQ: These meaning the U.S. affiliated?

PM: The universities affiliates in America. Hardly anybody from my school went to any other countries than U.S. and so because of these personal connections the professors would write recommendation letters. You had to do well in the school. I mean we had GPA system like here and our system was a scale of zero to ten not zero to four but it's very, very similar to here. Because it was really kind of an off-shoot of American universities in that regards, the systems that were established, so and you had to get GREs and all this kind of exams. So we kind of did it, it was kind of... everybody did it and I did that and I got accepted at University of Houston and a couple of other schools; got scholarships. And then, I looked at what University of Houston was: it was a growing school, chemical engineering department was fairly strong. So I decided to come over here and I think that was a good decision.

UQ: Okay, had you heard anything about the history of the United States did you know anything about it? I know you didn't study it as a subject.

PM: No, no I did not. I did know a little bit about history of United States not nearly enough to pass 8th grade over here.

UQ: Sure.

PM: But I did know what kind of democracy it was and how it differed from Indian democracy and things along that line, general knowledge.

UQ: Okay.

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PM: Not a whole lot more. When I was a kid my dad took a very active role in developing kids in the area where we were living. So we would meet, all the kids would meet with him and we would discuss topics of general knowledge in particular and because different kids came from different families they brought different things. This was every Tuesday evening we would meet at my place, 10, 15 kids would come and we would just discuss.

UQ: Why would your father do this?

PM: He just wanted to expand our horizons a little bit. He had a vision of making sure that kids were knowledgeable and they would grow, probably he wanted to incentivize us a little bit for gathering knowledge, more knowledge.

UQ: Was it both boys and girls?

PM: Yeah, both boys and girls yeah.

UQ: Okay.

PM: But from the buildings around, just a few buildings around.

UQ: I see okay. Did you know about, you said the Civil Rights Movement, you knew about that from the newspapers you said?

PM: Yeah just reading about things.

UQ: Okay.

PM: I read comics and I read books and novels.

UQ: Okay. Television?

PM: No, there was no television in my days.

UQ: Okay.

PM: So the first television I saw was in IIT Kanpur.

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UQ: Okay.

PM: There was radio but that was not very informative; there was mostly songs in those days. There was some news but not very much.

UQ: So your major news source?

PM: Mostly local news and...

UQ: And the newspapers?

PM: Well in India.

UQ: Is where you got most of the...

PM: Yeah some newspapers and reading books would be my...novels and stuff like that.

UQ: Okay did you know that there... did you know kind of that there had occurred a Civil War here, the history of slavery?

PM: That I knew, a Civil War I knew.

UQ: Slavery?

PM: Yeah, slavery I knew yes; those kinds of things I knew.

UQ: Okay did you know that there were Asians... other people of Asian descent here like Chinese, Japanese?

PM: One of my uncles studied here, actually two of my uncles studied here; so one at Michigan and other one at Michigan State University. One of them, when I was in Kanpur one of them was here working for a company some drug companies, medical companies, pharmaceutical companies. When I finished in Kanpur he came back permanently. So I knew from them also considerable amount talking with them also.

UQ: Okay. Did you know that there were Hispanic Americans here?

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PM: That I was not too familiar with. I knew obviously Mexico was very close to the United States but I was not too familiar with the culture or anything along that line at that time.

UQ: Alright. Were you... well were you in any way concerned about coming to the U.S. since it was kind of...the Civil Rights Movement had just passed and desegregation...?

PM: No I was not.

UQ: ...had just happened. It wasn't a concern for you at all?

PM: No, I think ignorance was bliss.

UQ: Okay.

PM: In that regard.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Yeah I had heard about things like KKK and other from reading books and other stuff. I kind of decided to ignore those things because a lot of kids from my institute, Kanpur, had come over here and you get news from professors. They say "these guys are doing this" this kind of study. So I wasn't too concerned.

UQ: Okay what kind of books did you read? Novels or?

PM: Novels or scientific books and just general knowledge books. We used to read things like even Dale Carnegies and other things in those days,.

UQ: And where did you get these books from?

PM: Well it's amazing I used to there was a little book store that I would go to around where I lived and they had everything from comics to Dale Carnegie books or some of

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the big authors Agatha Christies and you pay them 25 paisas [Indian small currency] you get a book and you go back and they will give you the money back...

UQ: Oh!

PM: Some money back and then you put more money to the next book and so on and so forth.

UQ: I see. That's interesting. So it was affordable.

PM: It was very affordable to me.

UQ: And slightly profitable for them as well.

PM: And profitable for them yeah. The reading of a book was like I could read a book in 10 paisas or something like that. It was very, very interesting looking back at it. Well I mean today kids can read things at least the older books they can get it free.

UQ: Right.

PM: They can download those things free.

UQ: And there are libraries as well.

PM: And these are used books, very poor conditions. But the content was there so you just read it during your vacations and other things.

UQ: It sounds like you were an avid reader.

PM: I was, I did read a little bit. But not I wouldn't consider myself an avid reader, no.

UQ: Okay. So what was your first impression of America?

PM: When I came in it was a little bit of a culture shock. There were Indian students that I came and actually lived with a couple of Indian students from my same department for about 10, 15 days when I came. So it was very kind of them to invite me to stay with them. I didn't have much money with me when I came in because of currency

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regulations that we had. And I had a scholarship, which was one of the reasons I chose University of Houston and considering those days that was a pretty good amount of money. I was getting \$300 a month in '74 that was enough to get by. So we did that and then I went into dorms and lived in the dorms for about a year and then I went and roomed with Pankaj for a year and then we had a third roommate and we kind of moved away from campus and had apartments in different areas of Houston that we lived in.

UQ: So then you had to have a car to get to campus?

PM: So we had a car each of us had a car actually.

UQ: Oh!

PM: We hardly spent much money other than food, so we could accumulate, and cars were affordable in the sense that we bought used cars, very used cars it was this...gas was cheap.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Again it was we could do that but this was after a couple of years that we did this.

UQ: Alright what was your first impression of Houston?

PM: Well, so I was expecting a lot of cowboy hats and guns on the street and did not find that. I was amazed at the freeway system that we had over here that was really an eye opener for me. When I went to the campus I was a little bit disappointed in the sense that I think international community over there of students had very strong ways in the sense that they had good interactions but outside of that and University of Houston is not a domicile kind of university; it is more of people come in and go kind of a thing but there was very little interaction between international students and other American kids in those days.

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UQ: Why do you think that was?

PM: It was just... I really don't know but I mean there were some international students that would go and venture into fraternities and things like that but not much and graduate students of course in a given department they... they were very free, freely interacting, exchanging thoughts and ideas and other things but not so... I was... for a year I was in the Quadrangle in the University of Houston. And even when I go out and sit on for lunch or dinner or something like that most of the kids would not... were not very talkative to us so we would sit and it just so happened that international students would sit in the same table and talk with each other but the other kids would not join them some did but not all.

UQ: Okay.

PM: So that was kind of a little bit of a disappointment for me at that time. Other than that there was a program that was a very nice program by the University of Houston there was a host family program and each of us had a host family that we went and interacted with, got to know them a little bit better and that was a very nice program.

UQ: Okay, you had a host family of your own as well?

PM: Yeah.

UQ: Okay.

PM: And by the same token later on in my life we hosted kid for a year in our house also from China.

UQ: Oh really okay.

PM: So that kind of...

UQ: So the tradition still continues.

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PM: Yeah and we would still do that if we had the right person coming in.

UQ: What was your first impression of the other Indian students since you didn't know any of them I'm assuming or?

PM: Some of them you meet them and we had an Indian society at University of Houston. I was actively participating in it at one point I was a secretary so I knew quite a few just meeting people and you have to understand I mean graduate school, you are a graduate student and so there is time constraint, you've got to get grades and you have to do your research so we did those kinds of things. We got around. We knew most of the students at University of Houston.

UQ: Did you have a sense that they were fairly well organized when you arrived?

PM: Not so well organized, no. No, so each of these so the international community was fairly well organized and there was an organization for International Student Organizations that is very well organized. Both Pankaj and I were quite active in that. We participated in a lot of things so that was our extracurricular activities. And each of the national organizations were connected to them and so we were... we would interact with most of these Indian. We had Indian friends, Pakistani friends, friends from Jordan, friends from South America; so yes at that time I knew a little more about the Latin influence and other things in Houston.

UQ: Okay.

PM: But that was then, not before.

UQ: What about your impression of Texas kind of outside of Houston did you have a chance to tour a little bit and leave the city?

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PM: Afterwards... so, 1976 my father had left the business with his brother and he was in the midst of doing nothing he was trying to develop a new business so he came over here and I took them around; both my mom and dad came over here. We took them around. We went around for a tour for a month in different parts of...

UQ: Of the U.S. or just Texas?

PM: Of the U.S. yeah so we went very extensively we went around. Before that we had not gone around and after that I have not gone around that was one month of vacation that I did take.

UQ: Okay so prior to that you didn't go to Austin or San Antonio or anything like that?

PM: No, I did not go to these places before this yeah no.

UQ: What was your parents' impression?

PM: Of the United States?

UQ: Yeah.

PM: Well they were, since I was the one taking them around I was the one who was driving around.

UQ: Just the three of you, you and your parents?

PM: Just the three of us. They really enjoyed it. They talked about it and they still talk about it, my dad still talks about it even today. We did quite a bit of touring. We went to New York area, Washington and all these places... Pennsylvania, we went to Buffalo to see Niagara Falls, we went to Chicago, Wisconsin, Saint Louis area.

UQ: Oh my goodness!

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PM: We went to Salt Lake City, we went to Yellowstone, went around the Buffalo Bill's Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Denver came back so all of these things I was driving.

UQ: I see.

PM: Los Angeles, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas?

UQ: Wow! Was there a place that they... they went to a lot of interesting places was there a place that they didn't like at all?

PM: No, they enjoyed everything.

UQ: All of it.

PM: Yeah, they really enjoyed the tour quite a bit.

UQ: Alright. What was your impression of your first impression of Hispanic Americans; you'd never met them before? I don't mean, I guess Latinos I guess from Latin America who were international students but people who were raised here.

PM: I didn't have much interactions with them.

UQ: Okay.

PM: No, not much. I've been you see them in the grocery stores but I mean there was no interaction, interaction as such.

UQ: Okay.

PM: So I did not know much when I went to Corpus we had a lot of interactions with Hispanics, both in my work and outside of work but not before that.

UQ: Not earlier, what about African Americans?

PM: African Americans we started when we came over here we started hearing some stories that were not very flattering stories for them.

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UQ: Who did you hear the stories from?

PM: From other students, from media all these kind of things. So I had a poor impression of African Americans but then I started meeting people at U of H, kids, football players. Actually some of the football players there is one guy in particular that used to come and sit with me at lunch, dinners so that impression that I had I understood that five fingers are not equal anywhere and so that went away.

UQ: Okay. What kind of stories did you hear?

PM: Usually it was crime related stories and media is very good at portraying crimes they are very descriptive also the televisions and things so that led to a very poor impression at that time. But then as I say it turned around afterwards.

UQ: Okay the stories you heard you heard here you hadn't heard anything like that prior to coming?

PM: Not much. No.

UQ: To the U.S.?

PM: Not much.

UQ: Well you said not much so you heard a little bit?

PM: Maybe a little bit from movies and books that I read but not really something that would materialize as an impression much like you see in human beings have a way of filtering things in their minds so that had not filtered through before I came here.

UQ: Okay who were your earliest, closest friends in Houston?

PM: Well Pankaj and I knew each other very well so surely we were close. There was another kid, Parsee kid who would also study with us; so the three of us were fairly close

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in terms of day to day. There was a Persian girl that was in our department that used to be quite working with us closely so. So...

UQ: Do you remember their names the Parsee...?

PM: Yeah, the Parsee's name was Mahyar Bilmoria and the girl was Fazel Majlesi and then there was also I started getting involved in International Students Organization and there was a couple that was very active in this international student organization their name is Tom and Diane Lawrence. Tom has passed away, Diane is still doing a lot of work, abroad as a missionary and they developed a group of international students from all over the world that got fairly close so we had a small group of people that we knew very well. I met my wife in that group also.

UQ: Okay part of this group...

PM: Yes, part of this group.

UQ: ...that they organized.

PM: Yeah right.

UQ: What kind of activities did you guys do?

PM: We went around camping sometimes or movies and just meeting and you know cooking whatever else. We were fairly close knit group.

UQ: So you said he was a missionary or is a missionary was that part of that group's focus?

PM: It had a little bit of religious focus on it but not much. They knew that people from other religions were in this group of people and they did not, we had an option of going to church or other things but most of the time we would not. There were people that do, out of this group that did, and there were people that did not attend.

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UQ: Did you find that that Hindus you know who're from India, they had an interest in some of the Christian doctrine or did you find that in general they...?

PM: Most of the Hindus would not have an interest. There are Christians, Christians that come from India, also, they obviously went to churches on a regular basis. I just from a point of you know studying what the religion was about I did go to a few ceremonies at the churches.

UQ: But conversation was not something that you saw amongst people that...?

PM: No, there was not, not in this group no. I would have very high respect for both Tom and Diane and its very open people even though they are very religious people they, they are very open to other religions; so no. When Diane comes back to Houston she will still contact us, me and my wife.

UQ: Alright. What struggles do you remember facing after arriving in the U.S.?

PM: You know I wouldn't call anything that I really had to struggle with. Obviously, the thesis, of when you do the Ph.D. research and even the courses, University of Houston Chemical Engineering department at that time was a very strong department. We had scholars coming from other universities to teach the courses over here. And so the courses were fairly difficult for most people but I think if you kept at it, it was not impossible. I don't see that as a struggle in the research part there is a little bit of a struggle to get started. So you are given a problem and you have no clues of how to get around, go around solving that problem other than what you have learned but what you have learned in the classes is a very structured methodology especially in engineering schools. Engineering schools are very structured, very conservative in their teachings and when you do a research you need "ah ha moment" to get to something different and

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because if it was already part of the structure it's not something... it's not a research topic anymore. It's something very "Okay you can do this, this way" and there is an algorithm whatever it is. So to come to that "ah ha moment" there is a struggle. So that's kind of a struggle that I had.

UQ: Okay what about the ways that perhaps your being an immigrant affected your life in the U.S.?

PM: Well I had an advantage over some other kids who had stayed with a family in India. So I had left my family five years before I came over here and I learned to do things on my own, think on my own and develop relationships on my own and other things. And IIT prepared you really well in those areas. You are very independent by the time you are done with IITs. So I had no problems at all coming in from that angle.

UQ: How do you feel that the Americans treated you?

PM: I didn't get treated badly as such. I was just surprised that they were not interested in talking to us too much to get to know us because they would have learned something different. But...

UQ: When you say "us," [do you mean] the international students?

PM: International students in general.

UQ: Oh so, it's not just from India?

PM: Yeah.

UQ: All international students?

PM: Yeah, but whenever I did talk with them I initiated conversations with them, I got good responses but they were courteous responses I did not develop deep relationships with Americans until I went into work in the workforce and then I did quite a bit.

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UQ: Okay. After you graduated that was in what year?

PM: I graduated in '78.

UQ: '78?

PM: I did my, finished my Ph.D. in '78.

UQ: And your first job was where after '78?

PM: In Connecticut.

UQ: So you immediately went to Connecticut?

PM: Yeah, I went to Connecticut.

UQ: How did you find that job?

PM: Well that job was one of the most interesting things I did, you know in all honesty. I had the pleasure of working with a very bright individual from Israel; he is a professor over there at that time. He had this idea of developing a machine in a certain way and that development was a very interesting development. We had quite a few international engineers over there also. We had a Greek guy, we had a Chinese guy over there, a guy from Lebanon, and American kids also and it was a very nice group of people that worked together well to develop this machine that we were trying to develop. And this individual was a friend of my advisor over here at University of Houston and that's how I got the job.

UQ: Okay.

PM: The guy recommended me.

UQ: Oh I see, I see.

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PM: Yeah and later on this individual went to become the Dean of Engineering and the President of the Technion. So he is a well known individual that I just really enjoyed working with him.

UQ: Alright where did you live in Connecticut?

PM: I lived very close to New Haven, Connecticut and developed a little bit of liking for the area also because it has... weather wise other than the winters, everything else was good.

UQ: Okay, okay... how would you compare (other than the winters) Houston to New Haven?

PM: Yeah it was a much nicer city than Houston is.

UQ: In what ways?

PM: I would probably prefer living in New Haven other than winters. Winters were very difficult for me because I was just not used to winters. It was very also depressing because you get up in the morning and its dark when you go to work and you get out of work and its dark in winters.

UQ: Yeah.

PM: So what I used to do I had a car, a new car by that time, I had a car with a sun roof and so I would go out if it was nice and sunny at lunch time and I would go out and sit in the car and read a book or something just keep my sun roof off, sunshine so that part I didn't enjoy is the winters. Other than that I enjoyed everything about Connecticut.

UQ: So how are the people in Connecticut different than the Houstonians?

PM: Houstonians and Texans in general are a lot more friendly than North. North are very as a matter of kind of people and they have no, the dealings are not very... I mean

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once you make friends of course they are very good friends, but the dealings are mostly business dealings. But here, and especially in Corpus people were extremely friendly and like to go out of their way to make friends with you. So that's the difference.

UQ: Why do you think you didn't get that sense of warmth on the college campus?

PM: I don't know. I wouldn't say I didn't get the sense of warmth in college. I had sense of warmth from those I knew.

UQ: Right but I guess from the...

PM: In the department, with the international student organization I think just kids that came from maybe commuting that just... I just didn't click with them I guess I don't know.

UQ: Maybe just a lack of sense of community because they are commuting.

PM: I didn't have a common language with them. You know not English language but I'm saying I didn't know much about football I didn't...I mean I didn't have the same interests probably other than a few people that I did develop friendship with.

UQ: When did you talk with your football friend?

PM: He talked about football that's how I learned. He was a good guy I liked to talk to him but he was academically very... not very well.

UQ: He was an undergraduate?

PM: He was there for a long time, undergraduate. He was there for a long time, but he was a very nice kid.

UQ: But he mainly talked about football; that was his interest?

PM: He used to talk about other things but that's how I came to learn about new things.

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UQ: Okay. You left Houston in 1978 when you graduated...?

PM: '79 yes. I graduated... I finished my thesis at the end of '78.

UQ: Okay and you left at the beginning of '79?

PM: In the last 5 days of '78 I was in Connecticut.

UQ: Ah okay.

PM: And I was there from '79 to '84, mid '84.

UQ: Okay how did you meet your wife in '81 or get married in '81; you met her prior to...

PM: I met her here. We dated over here.

UQ: Okay.

PM: And we even broke up in between. We had a lot of family pressures and other things. And then we got back together and she actually came to see me, to get me set up over there. She was a student in Optometry over here and she had not finished so she had to finish. She went and finished her degree, her bachelor's degree and then went to Optometry school and she finished Optometry school in '80, in 1980. She worked for a year and then we got married. But she would come back and forth or I would come back and forth.

UQ: She was here without her family, right?

PM: She has two brothers over here.

UQ: Even at that time?

PM: Even at that time yeah. So that's why family pressure.

UQ: I see.

PM: From her side. Of course my family would not like me to marry...

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UQ: So what kinds of things was her family saying?

PM: Her family was just simply refused to acknowledge me.

UQ: Okay!

PM: Her brothers when they would talk with me but it was not, not what they wanted.

UQ: Okay.

PM: There was a lot of arguments between them and her.

UQ: They would have preferred someone from?

PM: They preferred someone that's Chinese something like that obviously, yeah.

UQ: And that was their basic disagreement? Okay and similarly your family?

PM: My family didn't know much. I did write to them about Susie and it was then they said, "Okay." But they did not think it would lead to anything at that point. Then obviously it led to more things. So then they said, "Okay if you like this girl so much why don't you marry her?" My mom didn't like it but she doesn't have much voice in the family. My dad has most of the voice.

UQ: I see. Okay.

PM: So then we got married in '81.

UQ: When you came here in '74 you probably didn't come with the intention to marry someone here?

PM: No.

UQ: You came to study did you plan to go back to India, after completing?

PM: Well there was a dual feeling that I had. I knew that what I studied the kinds of things I studied would not be very useful in India because I had worked during the

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summers, during three summers I had worked at different places, different chemical plants in India.

UQ: While you were at IIT?

PM: While I was studying at IIT but summers side I had done that.

UQ: Right.

PM: And I knew how these factories worked and performed and other things so the kind of knowledge that I was getting here was not the right level for India. So I knew if I go back I would have to deal with and in all honesty I did not like the bureaucracies in India and I knew I had to deal with that.

UQ: So even as you were in graduate school here...

PM: I had..

UQ: ... suspicion that you.. I may not go back?

PM: I may not go back. But the other side of that coin my families had businesses factories and I knew if I go back I would take charge of one of those companies from my uncle or whatever I will join the family business groups. My dad wanted me to come back also so there was this dual feeling. Then when I went to Connecticut then I said, "No, I don't want to go back to India." I wanted to do research at that time. So I went into research area and I knew that I would not even come close in India to the kind of research I was doing over here. Then I married Susie and I knew at that time that now she would have difficult time in India for sure. So then at that time I decided to stay. As a matter of fact that's the time I applied for permanent residency when I decided to get married to Susie because then that makes lot more sense to stay here then to go back to either India or Hong Kong.

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UQ: So typically when students come here for higher education from India they marry people from back home?

PM: Most of them do go back and marry.

UQ: Right. And usually it's sort of a joint decision the families are also involved.

PM: Correct.

UQ: So when it was time for you to seriously consider your marriage partner, did it cross your mind that perhaps you should consider someone from India that that would have lessened the sort of the cultural conflict that your family was?

PM: That's what was advised to me by my family side. My father is a very logical guy and he said, "Okay let's look at pluses and minuses and this analysis and other things."

And we did that and I had no intention at that time to... by that time I was involved with Susie and I had no intention of marrying somebody from India at that time.

UQ: It seems like it just so happened that without really planning you know what kind of person you're going to marry, who you are going to marry... things just evolved.

PM: The only difficulty was that the families were against us and I met her mother one time when she had come to visit and she just looked at me and she didn't speak English and you know her father introduced and she said, "No!" like that and so we, we were...

UQ: This was after you were married?

PM: No before.

UQ: Before? Where any of the parents able to come to the wedding?

PM: Well her brothers came to the wedding yeah.

UQ: Okay and you married here in Houston?

PM: No we married in Connecticut. My folks had come from India also.

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UQ: Oh they did?

PM: Yeah.

UQ: Alright.

PM: And some of the relatives that we have over here in the U.S.

UQ: They also attended. So by that time it seems that people, family members had accepted the fact that it's happening and they welcomed her?

PM: Yeah.

UQ: Okay.

PM: And even her mother welcomed me afterwards but after a little while so now she's here, she lives here and now there is no... I mean she likes me actually.

UQ: Okay you won her over huh?

PM: I don't know that I won her over or not. It's like a family now.

UQ: Okay and does she speak English now?

PM: No, she doesn't not speak English yet. So that's very difficult, still very difficult for her but we have communicated quite a bit because when the kids were born there were times she would come and stay with us she and my father in law, who had passed away, but they would come to Corpus Christi and we had to communicate and there were times I had to communicate directly with her signs and all those kinds of things. And it worked, it works. She knows a few English words I mean it's not... since she's living here she knows a little bit of English, so it works out alright.

UQ: Did you make any particular effort to learn to speak, what do they speak Mandarin, Cantonese?

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PM: Yes, I did. There was a school that was started by the Chinese community in Corpus and I went to that school and it was kind of a strange combination I was the only one that was more than 30 years old the rest of the kids were less than 10 years old. So it didn't quite work out very well. They were learning much faster then I was learning. I felt very stupid and I got out of the class.

UQ: So you made that attempt.

PM: I did make that attempt.

UQ: Okay maybe not the best setting to make the attempt.

PM: No!

UQ: Well you tried. So you really didn't... well I guess I want to know how much you interacted with Indians off of campus so we know that there was an Indian Students Association and that was active.

PM: Yeah there was a few family that I had known that I would contact over there, very few just a couple of them that I knew here in Houston.

UQ: Okay.

PM: And they would invite me from time to time to come to their place have dinner, that kind of thing and I did that.

UQ: Okay. We'll come back to that question. A lot of these questions are focused on, on marriage and how people choose to marry who they are going to marry but with you it was a little different from the typical interviewee. So I'm going to skip that whole section. Let's talk about neighborhoods. Let's talk about where you lived when you moved off campus from the quadrangle and you said you lived with Pankaj.

PM: Yeah so we had a small apartment off campus but very close to campus.

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UQ: Walking distance?

PM: It would... you could walk but it was probably a mile away so driving is what we did most of the time, all the time as a matter of fact.

UQ: Okay.

PM: So the two of us lived in a little apartment and kitchen, a little living room and a bedroom.

UQ: How did you choose that apartment complex because there must have been other ones around?

PM: The other kids that were staying over there.

UQ: Other Indians students or international students?

PM: Indians, non-Indians, as a matter of fact the two Indian students that let me live with them for 10 days were living there before.

UQ: Okay so word of mouth you kind of knew...

PM: Yeah I knew.

UW: This was the place to be. Okay what was that neighborhood like?

PM: I mean most of the apartment complexes around U of H were not in good conditions. They were run down there was maintenance being done. Ours was a little better. We paid a little more. There is a couple of apartment complexes there called Cougar's Apartments that used to be around there and they were really poorly maintained. I mean the roof would leak and they would not repair it in a timely fashion or air condition would go out we decided to not live to stay there so we decided to... and you have to understand we were getting good money compared to these other students

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that had to earn money. So we were in a much better shape, Pankaj and I, we were in much better shape than an average Indian students.

UQ: How safe was your neighborhood?

PM: We didn't have any burglaries in our apartment. I had heard of some around that area, that were and I did not want to come across but at that time I was afraid of blacks until I kind of got to know them a little bit better. But, so that was a black community in that area, quite a large community over there. So there were burglaries there. Judging from the TV reports and other things there were you know mostly blacks that were caught with these burglaries but again this, I just took it as a common fact of life. This was part of life kind of a thing. It didn't bother me very much.

UQ: You felt safe enough that you chose to remain in that?

PM: Yeah as I said ignorance is bliss sometimes. Unless you are affected directly you don't, you don't feel intimidated that much at least I didn't.

UQ: Okay did you have the opportunity to interact with your neighbors very much?

PM: Not much, no, I mean most of them were students in that apartment complex, a small complex about 20 apartments or so. So yeah we would say hi to each other but didn't know them that well. Now one of them we knew because he was also from IIT Kanpur, this guy. So we were all close enough we would go out together and things like that yeah.

UQ: Did you feel like by the time you left Houston at the end of '78 that you knew the city pretty well? How well would you say you knew the city?

PM: See we went out of that neighborhood, we went and lived in Timmons Lane around Greenbriar area, pretty close by over here.

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UQ: How would you compare those two areas?

PM: Very different.

UQ: Really in what ways?

PM: Well this Timmins Lane was a little bit more upscale, quiet neighborhood and people around were friendly and they were mostly working people around us. Then we went into an apartment on South Main near Stella Link and that was even a better apartment. It was much better then and newer in those days.

UQ: Was it safer as well?

PM: Yeah there was not much of a problem over there either. So...

UQ: What was the demographic makeup of that area roughly?

PM: Mostly working people in that apartment complex.

UQ: So by working people you mean?

PM: I mean I think most of the people were working in this medical area at that time.

UQ: Okay so professional.

PM: Mostly professional people in that area I think. So there was no, no fear of break-ins or anything like that. I mean somebody could have easily. I don't know how much we had to take from our apartment either.

UQ: And Timmons was also mostly professional or what was it?

PM: Yeah it was mostly professional people over there also. I mean there were some, some students that I knew from... there was one Indonesian guy and his family was staying there so that's why we went over there. So we would talk to each other often and go back and forth a little bit.

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UQ: And the neighborhood where you were in near U of H that was not professional, you wouldn't characterize it?

PM: Where?

UQ: Near U of H the apartments.

PM: No most of them were students in those apartments.

UQ: And the surrounding neighborhood those were also students?

PM: No probably I never got to know them. We were in what you call McGregor Road that road had some very nice houses and the story was that when the crimes started increasing the owners of those homes just left and that area kind of ran down but the houses were still pretty nice over there. So I don't know much about that area. I can't... we lived there for about a year. Another year we lived at Timmons Lane and another year we lived over here. So those were the four years. One year I lived in the dorms over there.

UQ: Okay. When your, when your father came did he by any chance write any of his impressions; is he that kind of a person who enjoys writing?

PM: No.

UQ: Nothing like that?

PM: No.

UQ: Okay.

PM: He has a good memory though.

UQ: Oh, I see.

PM: He remembers almost all things we did together.

UQ: Does he? Would you like to take a break or are you okay?

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PM: I am okay.

UQ: I wanted to ask some questions about that are I guess more contemporary.

PM: Okay.

UQ: So first question are there any groups here in the U.S. who are discriminated against in your opinion?

PM: Yes I think there is very, there is divisions, each ethnic group is being viewed differently and even the media today I think increases that awareness of different ethnic groups. So yes America is a melting pot but even in Connecticut when I went over there so you had Italians over there, you had Greeks over there, here you have Latinos, blacks, Asians, Indians and they are all being viewed with a certain lens in my opinion. But individuals within these groups sometimes they do things that are beyond the lens and then people recognize that hey there is a melting pot over here. So at work place I don't see so much of ethnicity driven issues at least not in the company that I work for. When I go to places like restaurants and other things do normal things I don't see that. People are treated fairly, evenly in my opinion.

UQ: Okay.

PM: But in the especially in the media I see some very strong opinions, talk radios and other things that are very detrimental in my opinion. Now I have worked with operators and mechanics and other things in my work place and sometimes some strong opinions come from them but I am suspecting that a lot of those opinions are reflections of what they hear in the radios and TVs and those are kind of biased, prejudiced opinions, extreme opinions sometimes. I do hear those.

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UQ: Could you perhaps flip it and say that what you hear on the radio is a reflection of what already exists?

PM: Could be, could be.

UQ: Or that perhaps they feed each other?

PM: Yeah but it's human nature I think more or less I think. People are different. So I am not I am not been on the receiving end of a whole lot but I would say to some extent that in my company until about recently, until last 5, 10 years Indians didn't they didn't rise up as well. Today I see they are being brought from outside. Indians are being brought from outside at very high levels now in the company. So I am kind of, of the opinion and this is an opinion only so I don't have hard data, is that there was a glass ceiling over last 20 years or so and that over last 5, 7 years that ceiling is kind of removed now.

UQ: Okay. Outside of the work place and how long have you worked in this company that you are in?

PM: 37 years.

UQ: You are still working for the company?

PM: I still work for the company yeah.

UQ: Outside of the company in your other spheres of activity whether grocery stores, restaurants, have you ever felt that you were treated unfairly because of your immigration status?

PM: Not really no. No I wouldn't. I travel as I told you earlier. So every now and then we have plants in remote locations.

UQ: Of the U.S.?

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PM: Of the U.S. yeah of other parts of the world also. So in those remote locations I do find either people staring at you kind of a thing but not much.

UQ: Staring at you I mean, I guess because you are an...?

PM: Kind of strange looking kind of thing.

UQ: Yeah different.

PM: Different yeah. But again these are very small towns there are no Indians in those towns, these are not towns, little villages kind of thing. Because a plant, a chemical plant we try to keep them away from populations.

UQ: Right.

PM: We have a plant in Kentucky—Paducah, Kentucky. It's very small place. I bet there is no Indians in the immediate vicinity of that plant. There is probably no Indian in that plant. So I'm just using an example over there.

UQ: Okay. In your experience have you seen that there is discrimination, not even discrimination I guess just really sort of prejudicial ideas within the Indian community about other Indians? So for example Punjabi versus Keralite or?

PM: I saw that when I was the secretary of Indian, Indian Association at U of H. There were lots of different groups and other things. I bet it exists today I'm just not exposed to it. Even in Corpus I saw that a little bit it was a smaller community, Indian community over there so I would have expected. There are a lot more cohesive and they are a lot more cohesive in that regard. Everybody knows everybody else. But there were fractions, ethnic fractions.

UQ: What other kinds of ideas that circulate about different groups?

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PM: It's not ideas that circulate they just tend to do things together in different groups. They just meet very often but not have same kind of meeting that other people from other groups.

UQ: I see.

PM: But that's probably because they know each other well. Maybe they had become friends. They are a lot more concentrated so Gujaratis or Marathis or South Indians or all of them have their own.

UQ: Okay. Can you remember the existence of people of other ancestry in India? For example people of African ancestry meaning with...?

PM: Parsees are of Zoroastrian ancestry so yeah they came from Persia.

UQ: Right.

PM: And I knew some in the area where I lived.

UQ: Jews as well?

PM: There was... the factory that my uncle had was founded by jointly by my uncle and a Jew that was an Indian Jew but of course he had roots in Israel at that time. So I came to know him... he was very knowledgeable guy and I got very positive impressions of him.

UQ: When you say he was an Indian Jew with roots in Israel, Israel was formed in ...?

PM: By that time it was formed yeah. So he had a house in Israel.

UQ: Okay did he come from Israel and settle in India?

PM: I don't know, I don't know his history no.

UQ: You don't know...do you remember his name?

PM: Yeah Elijah.

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UQ: Okay so he didn't have an Indian name?

PM: No, no.

UQ: Okay. What about people of African ancestry there is a group there they are called Siddhis have you heard of them?

PM: I had no contact with them.

UQ: Have you heard of them at all?

PM: Group called?

UQ: Siddhis.

PM: Siddhis?

UQ: S-I-D-D-H-I. Siddhi.

PM: No I never heard of them no.

UQ: Okay. If I... I wanted to show you...

PM: Now I knew some Patels that came from Africa.

UQ: Kenya and Uganda

PM: Kenya and other places.

UQ: No I have actually met people who came to...

PM: Of African descent.

UQ: Generations ago.

PM: No.

UQ: No, okay. If I show you this map the states are there but you can sort of you don't have to worry about the states or the cities. I'm wondering if you ignored the state boundaries that are political boundaries could you make larger regions that you think sort

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of fit together well in India? For example a lot of people will say Western India is one region they have a lot of similarities and they are different from another part.

PM: Yes. Yeah you can do that. I mean if I was asked to do that if you would if you would want to draw regions by similarities then I would probably...

UQ: Go ahead and draw.

PM: ...draw that area. I would probably draw that area. There are lots of similarities like that. I would draw that area. I would probably draw an area that goes over here; an area that goes like that including probably part of the Madhya Pradesh goes to Bihar. I would draw this area and this area from similarity point of view. [Mr. Mehta proceeded to cluster the states by region: northern, western, southern, central, and eastern].

UQ: Right, similarities.

PM: These are like... that's what I would draw.

UQ: Okay tell me what is similar about this area for example?

PM: I think the food habits are similar, the religious devotions are similar. The religious structure is very similar, the dresses are similar and things along that line.

UQ: Okay alright, anything in particular about this region? And what I was wondering is this one region?

PM: Yeah we kind of drew that yeah.

UQ: That's actually this whole thing?

PM: Yeah. So here I see similarities in the way that people think about businesses, most of these, especially these two areas, are very highly focused on businesses. That is filtered into Maharashtra as well because of Mumbai. So again religious are kind of

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similarities, there are similar religious activities over there to me. The thinking is similar to me I think.

UQ: Thinking about?

PM: Even political thinking is similar to some extent from what... Again I'm going back. I mean today's world is probably different.

UQ: Yeah I'm not asking about today so this works out. Then last region I'm wondering about is here? What's here?

PM: This region was always kind of I never knew anything about this region [far eastern India].

UQ: I also have no...know little about that region compared to the rest.

PM: As compared to the rest of the region so it was kind of a secluded region to me so I drew it together all of these has because totally secluded from my old knowledge. Then I came, a couple of good friends from the Assam, that I came to know a little more about Assam from them but that's all I know.

UQ: What did you find as far similarities or differences between your friends and the other Indians that you know?

PM: In all honesty if I compare the entire India with the rest of the world I can't say that I can differentiate the regions that much. They are that much different from the Western world. So they are a lot more similarities between this regions that I drew then differences.

UQ: Sure, sure.

PM: Okay from region point of view, from dresses point of view, from food point of view so if I go to a restaurant that is owned by an Assamese guy I'll still call it an Indian

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food or a Kashmiri guy I'll still call it an Indian food. As a matter of fact this region is that way different because if I go and eat food from a restaurant that's from a South Indian it is different from the other region from that angle. Also I think if I look at Hindu, knowledge of Hindu scriptures, people from this region have a lot more knowledge than the rest of these that at least that's my impression at this point because I've talked to people and that is the impression I get.

UQ: Okay. If you were to compare Bombay with Houston back in the '70s what were the main similarities and differences?

PM: Well there were a lot of differences. Houston was a lot more advanced than Bombay in terms of physical things like freeways and cars and...

UQ: Infrastructure.

PM: Infrastructures, in terms of availability of TV's and other modern amenities you might call. So that way it was very different. Houston was trying to at that time to be more cosmopolitan and Bombay was already cosmopolitan at least from a regional point of view. Houston had blacks, Hispanics...

UQ: Okay.

PM: Even people from north used to come to Houston for jobs so it was quite cosmopolitan. Bombay even in those days were extremely cosmopolitan.

UQ: What do you mean by cosmopolitan? What does that mean to you?

PM; Cosmopolitan to me means people of different regions and ethnic backgrounds come together and live in the same area.

UQ: So do you think Houston could now compare to Bombay?

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PM: I would probably say more than Bombay because now Houston has a lot of international population, Bombay does not.

UQ: But it has people from all over India?

PM: It has people from all over India of course and it had in those days too.

UQ: So is that why you mean by cosmopolitan back then for Bombay because they came from all over India?

PM: They came from all over India, different ethnic backgrounds. They were living together, they had problems, here we have problems, too.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Okay so but they were still... in the end they ended up living together yeah.

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

PM: When you say South in America, Houston is kind of to me is in a boundary. I think south, typical south to me is Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, that to me is South at least from the impression I have from everything I've heard of.

UQ: Sure. Texas is not... part of that?

PM: Texas is... Texas is Texas.

UQ: It's its own region?

PM: It's its own region.

UQ: Alright so within Texas...

PM: It's very different. It's very different from anything else.

UQ: Okay what are the features of the South that make it the South?

PM: History is very different. If you look at housing, housing is different from Texas.

The tax incentive is different for people, foods are different. I mean you can get

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Louisiana food over here and you can get Mississippi food over here in Houston but you go outside of Houston you won't find those foods.

UQ: Okay what do you mean by housing?

PM: Housing structures, colonial housing you will find them much more in south then you will find it in Houston.

UQ: Okay.

PM: I'm sure that there are houses that are colonial over here but they are not overwhelming. You go to a cemetery in Louisiana and you won't see that kind of cemetery in Houston but you will see it in Mississippi.

UQ: Okay and so you mentioned that in Houston you can get all these foods from so many places but in Texas...

PM: Outside of Houston not so much.

UQ: ...outside of Houston not as much so I guess the question is sort of how is Houston... no not how is Houston different; really what are the features of the other places in Texas that differ from Houston?

PM: I lived in Corpus Christi and that is South Texas, per se. People are different. People are a lot more relaxed than in Houston, for example. There is a lot more Latino influence in South Texas then in Houston. Houston has a Latino region but influence South Texas is huge compared to here in San Antonio go to Corpus Christi. People's attitudes are much more Latino attitudes then over here.

UQ: Okay. Do you find that Latinos, the lifestyle of Latinos has something in common with Indian lifestyle? Do you find similarities there?

PM: Maybe there may be some but not much, no.

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UQ: Okay what some would you think that there are?

PM: They are more family oriented people, so there is large families.

UQ: Okay.

PM: They try to help each other out when people have issues. They will try to promote each other in business or you know talk about each other, "Hey why don't you go to go to this shop, I know the owner kind of thing." Those are similarities.

UQ: Okay, alright.

PM: But there are a lot of differences too between the two.

UQ: Like what?

PM: Foods are different, religions are different.

UQ: Sure.

PM: The way they think are different.

UQ: Okay.

PM: I mean a number of differences.

UQ: Okay. Do you think Houston has a counterpart in other cities in the U.S.? Is there some place that you think is similar to Houston? Since Corpus Christi is obviously quite different from what you are saying, other places outside of Texas that are similar?

PM: Outside of Texas?

UQ: Outside of Texas that are similar to Houston.

PM: Connecticut is very different.

UQ: Well no I guess cities that are similar to Houston in the U.S.?

PM: Maybe Chicago might be similar; that would be my guess. I don't know enough about it.

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UQ: Okay.

PM: New York is very different from Houston. San Francisco and Los Angeles are very different. So I can't...

UQ: Is it because Chicago has a large Indian population maybe?

PM: No not because of that. Chicago has similar demographic makeup maybe I don't know. I don't know. It just I don't know enough about Chicago but I mean but the first answer would be that Chicago could be similar.

UQ: I kind of think the same thing. So I can see what you are saying. What do you miss about Bombay?

PM: Well my family, sometimes the food. I don't miss the crowds.

UQ: No?

PM: No. No I don't like crowds when I go back it's just very crowded place now I don't like it. Mostly family, family members.

UQ: So you don't miss the place so much, Bombay as a city?

PM: No.

UQ: Do you go back frequently to Bombay?

PM: I try to whenever I can. I have a dad that is fairly old so I want to make the most of it when I can.

UQ: So on average you go back how often?

PM: One and a half years or so I try to at least or my dad comes over here but now I think he's getting to the point I don't think he'll come.

UQ: Long travel is difficult. How has Bombay changed since when you were a kid?

PM: Crowded.

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UQ: The crowds have increased?

PM: Huge, huge difference yeah. It's definitely a lot more modern. America is increased. People are a lot more in congruence with the rest of the world. When I was there nobody talked much about America or Europe. People were focused on India and maybe Pakistan and China, maybe Sri Lanka; I mean that was the world at that time. Now they are much more congruence with the rest of the world now. A lot of people are working for companies outside in Europe and America. So it's become a lot more fashionable, Western style. That's the differences I see.

UQ: And the people, have you something that I experience when I go back to Pakistan which is not very frequently but I do notice that people are very welcoming, very warm and I still notice that when I go back. Maybe it's...

PM: The family is definitely very warm. People that you don't know are not.

UQ: No they are not very warm at all, I agree.

PM: No not in Bombay.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Not in Bombay. Bombay is like any other big city.

UQ: But your family still welcomes you the same way?

PM: Oh yeah absolutely.

UQ: Even all the extended cousins and the aunts?

PM: Cousins, aunts, yeah whenever I go we definitely we meet.

UQ: And when you say you miss family...

PM: And friends.

UQ: ...do you mean the whole family?

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PM: Yeah.

UQ: Or really you're talking about your father and your?

PM: No to extended family.

UQ: Everyone?

PM: Yeah everyone, yeah both sides, father's side, mother's side. We will try to meet everybody.

UQ: And friends do you still have friends you keep in touch with?

PM: We still have friends over there yeah.

UQ: From?

PM: From my childhood from IIT Kanpur from Fellowship School yeah.

UQ: And how do they receive you when you go?

PM: We are like old buddies yeah. One of my friends just come for a visit over here he is a medical doctor from my childhood days.

UQ: Okay. Do you ever think about moving back to Gujarat, not Gujarat, Bombay, perhaps retiring there?

PM: Oh... I would probably put it to less than 10% chance.

UQ: So it's somewhere back there a little bit.

PM: Maybe, maybe... obviously I... my wife cannot handle that. She has knee problems, ankle problems she can't walk as much. In India it would be very difficult for her not just that other things.

UQ: Okay why would you consider it? Not saying that you will do it but what is it that makes you think that it might even be an option.

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PM: I just don't know I might say one time today, "This is where I grew up" kind of a thing.

UQ: I see, kind of nostalgia.

PM: Yeah a nostalgia kind of thing.

UQ: Okay, today do you mainly socialize with Indian immigrants in your free time on the weekends, evenings?

PM: In Houston I don't have that many friends as such, now. So the friends I have are friends like Pankaj others that I have known from past, so I socialize with them. We also have some Chinese friends from the past that we'll socialize with them. But we live on this side of town and most of those people are on the other side of town.

UQ: I see...

PM: So that's there has been a distance problem for us also and we have family also so we definitely are with the family all weekends every now and then. Susie's mom is like 78 now so obviously she wants to meet with her often also.

UQ: Okay. So you said that most of the Indians live in another part of town. Do you mean, which part of town, which region?

PM: Sugar Land area.

UQ: And you live in Northwest?

PM: We live in League City near NASA.

UQ: Oh okay so that is a distance.

PM: Very much a distance.

UQ: Okay, your children are both studying in other places. How often do they come back?

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PM: Not enough!

UQ: By your standard not enough! Probably to them too much!

PM: They don't come back that often. Whenever... big holidays they come.

UQ: Okay.

PM: The good thing about for me is we have a plant owner in Kingsville area near Kingsville so sometimes I get to go there. We have a headquarters in Dallas so I go there a lot of times so I get to meet my kids.

UQ: Okay.

PM: But my wife doesn't get to meet them as often. Now this summer my son came and he had internship over here. So that was, that was very good for our sanity.

UQ: Okay to have them close by.

PM: Yes.

UQ: Alright a few questions about current events.

PM: Okay.

UQ: Again I'm going to ask you would you like to take a break?

PM: Yeah let's take a 5 minute I go to bathroom and come back.

UQ: Alright we're ready go ahead.

PM: Sit in the same place?

UQ: Alright so I was going to ask you about some current event topics.

PM: Okay.

UQ: How can you explain why there is more violent crime within the city of Houston versus in the suburbs of Houston?

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PM: Well crimes happen to me when people see disparities. People have wants and desires and they don't have it and they see other people have it. When they become desperate enough to understand that "I cannot get there" they are going to try to find it, the same things that they want with what they have, the abilities that they have and that leads to crime. So when you have a group of people that are confined in a certain area with a high number of people with poor skills you will find some crimes. Houston probably has a large number of people that do not have the skills to live comfortably and so they turn to crime for my view point mostly for that reason. Sometimes it might be as simple as, "I need to get food for my kids" kind of thing too. Sometimes its kids that have nothing else to do and so that will lead to crime and that happens in all parts of the world.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Either here or somewhere else.

UQ: Okay how would you define the American dream? We hear that phrase a lot.

PM: My idea of American dream is to achieve the best you can with as little road blocks to achieve that in front of you. There are going to be road blocks but America probably has the least compared to some other parts of the world.

UQ: Okay what kind of road blocks?

PM: Road blocks to progress further towards your goals could be anything from government imposed methods, bureaucracies to societal road blocks to ability to finance, to number of possibilities... ability to educate yourself and so on and so forth. Here I think, I think the possibilities are a lot there are a lot more available resources compared to a lot of other parts to the world to get that for a person who doesn't have anything.

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UQ: Okay when you say ability to finance education can possibly be road blocks for people, does that mean that some people will not be able to get the financing they need or be able to obtain the education that's needed?

PM: That's correct I mean think of a person in slums of India, okay? Chances of that person going to a university and getting a Ph.D. are much less than the chances of somebody from a middle or class even an affluent class of India.

UQ: Okay.

PM: My dad didn't entail the resources to send me abroad but he had the sources to send me to Kanpur okay once I went to Kanpur and he encouraged me. People in the slums of India they beat their kids up because they want their kids to work on the street so whatever. So there is this huge disparity. I don't say that doesn't exist in America but if I look at proportional populations there is less of it. So people don't have to struggle for food over here. They can go to a food kitchen to get food. India there is no such thing. The families are struggling for food. So why do they send their kids to school?

UQ: Right if there...if their stomach is not filled then...

PM: There is a huge difference, there is a huge difference over there.

UQ: Okay. So you compared kind of the people in the slums of India let's continue with that sort of hypothetical scenario if you were to give a family in the slums of India money for education for their children to go or it's covered, do you think that's all it takes?

PM: No, I think the family needs to have food to eat first before you give them anything for the education of kids because if they don't have food to eat there is no such thing.

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UQ: Okay so if they are given food and funding for education then?

PM: Then there will be some of them that will have the sense to send their kids to the schools. Some of them will not have the sense because they have never... it doesn't occur to them that if I don't send the kid to school it is... it just... the vision isn't there.

UQ: Okay. Can you think of...

PM: At least in my days today it might be different. Today it's probably a little bit different.

UQ: Okay well let's find the counterpart to that here in the U.S. that you are talking about.

PM: Same thing in ghettos for example that you had. Even today you have, it's the same situation but I'm saying that the proportions of these ghettos is much smaller here.

UQ: Smaller.

PM: Compared to that in India.

UQ: But the situation is the same meaning that...

PM: The situation in that regard is very similar.

UQ: Even if you gave them food and the funding there still needs to be that vision?

PM: Yeah that needs to be that vision.

UQ: Okay and that vision also doesn't exist here, in smaller portion but...?

PM: It does to some extent. Now we probably in most of the places because now the media and people like Bill Gates and others are trying to promote these kind of things and so yeah it's a lot different than the days that I was born and raised.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Obviously.

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UQ: Okay. How does the caste system work in India?

PM: Okay is this a general question or is this related to what I think?

UQ: Both so you can answer it both ways first general and then to what you think?

PM: Caste system in India was, it originated from essentially it was division of labor.

That's what originated the caste system. And the philosophy was at that time that kids that were born in a business family they will learn about business much more easily than they will learn about farming. So the kids of business people became business people.

Kids of farmers became farmers. Kids of warriors became warriors. Then it became kind of more rooted in religion. Once it became rooted in religion it became much more rigid in the structure and so the intent was people who were very knowledgeable could teach, for example. They would be Brahmins okay. Today I might be an engineer or I might be a professor teaching engineering but I cannot become a Brahmins because I'm born in a business caste. Alright? So the original intent is lost in my thinking. Caste system became rigid and then it became very protective of itself. So all the things that came about that we would probably classify them as evil today; the evils of the caste system today came about from this fear and protective nature of this caste. Anything that tries to destroy this fundamental rights quote and unquote entitlements now were feared against and so they came, to me they came to be people's kind of took steps that, to even to criminal extent that protected the caste system.

UQ: Okay tell me kind of when you are talking about on a time line when did that sort of protectionist sensibility?

PM: That came about probably in the middle centuries would be my guess I don't know from...what little knowledge I have.

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UQ: You're talking about the distant, distant past?

PM: Distant past yeah and then it became pretty firm and well rooted. And then there were castes that were very disadvantaged and then there castes that were very advantaged especially in South. So this is another thing that is common to the South a lot more than to the North or to the Western side.

UQ: So it's more apparent in the South?

PM: I would think so. South is very strong caste.

UQ: In caste recognition?

PM: Recognition over there. Brahmins they... southern Brahmins today they are very well knit with each other. They will not allow their kids to associate with other castes and things along that line. Of course it's probably changing now I mean this modern days. But there was especially the Scheduled Class of Pariyars they got the brunt end of the stick if you may call that and it doesn't mean that they are not smart people in that caste, they probably are but they will never be given a opportunity to rise.

UQ: How can you tell if someone belongs to a particular caste? Can you tell?

PM: It depends upon how they behave in India.

UQ: In India?

PM: Here it's pretty apparent that you can't tell any difference; difficult to tell. But in India you can probably tell by behaviors to some extent.

UQ: By behaviors you mean?

PM: By professions that they choose, by the attitude that they have when they talk with you, all those things tell you.

UQ: So would you say caste is still real when you visit Bombay can you still?

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PM: Bombay it's tough to see. Bombay's cosmopolitan. You can see it. I mean you know people who are sweeping the roads and you know the Brahmins that are placed in the temple, yeah you can tell.

UQ: Okay.

PM: But you can't tell if you just met, if you had somebody dressed up and came across, you probably cannot in Bombay.

UQ: So it's really, still occupation based in a city like Bombay?

PM: Probably.

UQ: But if you were to leave Bombay?

PM: In the villages probably it's pretty well known that this person is this caste this person is this caste and so it's a lot more prevalent in villages.

UQ: Even today?

PM: I would probably think so.

UQ: Yeah okay, alright. What do you think about the wide spread use of skin lighteners in India?

PM: Skin lighteners?

UQ: Skin lighteners?

PM: What is skin lightener?

UQ: Lightener meaning creams that are applied to lighten the skin?

PM: Oh I don't know anything about that.

UQ: No?

PM: No, wrong person to ask.

UQ: Okay.

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PM: Now if there is, if we go into that business from our company then I'd probably know a little bit more about it.

UQ: Oh I see.

PM: But I wouldn't have a clue.

UQ: Well, it's very commonly marketed to Asian countries, India included.

PM: I bet it is.

UQ: It is.

PM: I wouldn't know much about it.

UQ: Okay.

PM: So wrong person to ask.

UQ: Okay well what about the whole concept of lighter skin being more attractive because essentially that's what the use of them...is suggested.

PM: I think that may be a little bit of remnant of I mean historical you know lighter skins were always the rulers. So rulers came from Persia. Rulers came from Mongol, rulers came from Europe. They were all lighter skins. They were all revered...maybe.

UQ: You think that's possible?

PM: That's a possibly explanation. I don't know.

UQ: Okay.

PM: I chose my wife that's also lighter skinned but I don't think skin played any role in that. I don't think at least.

UQ: Okay. We hear a lot about immigration in the news today. Immigration to the U.S. what are your views on immigration debate?

PM: Okay you are talking of my views?

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UQ: Yes.

PM: I think any society that closes the doors to getting people in diversity is doomed to failure. The reason America has succeeded is because of open door policies. You had Greeks, you had Italians, you had Polish, you had Germans... in the old days that came. These people provided, to me, a fuel to think differently and when you start thinking differently innovation takes place. American has been the innovation of the world in all honestly. I mean you talk about Yankee ingenuity and all kind of devices people came to the modern day technology, these Apples and computers and other things. It all came because of immigrants. So to me, I'll tell you a story, I mean at my work there is a chemist and she is normal with us but I got to talk to her. She told me that she is a wetback. I knew the word because I lived in South Texas and she openly told me she's a wetback. When she came in with her parents she was nine years old. Well guess what she has done? She has gone from she was from a Mexican village she has gone from that village to become a Ph.D. chemist, right? Who is contributing not only to the company but to the society, to the taxes that the government collects and in general she is enhancing this country. So if this country wants to keep its dominance in technology and in economy and other prosperity it needs to have immigrants. Okay on the other side I see these immigrants that come and do menial work that is also needed in this society. So if you open it up completely I can understand that everybody would want to come and criminals would want to come. So there needs to be a process to filter immigrants but I think we should invite immigrants with open arms. I may be prejudice but I think if I look at it from a Darwinian point of view "diversity is what is at the root of survival" to me.

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UQ: Okay.

PM: So from that angle I think immigration should be revered not opposed.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Only people with closed minds to me the jobs will increase not decrease if you allow immigration with open arms because it will increase the activity in technology and other areas that will provide more jobs to people.

UQ: Okay what do you think are the most important criteria for allowing immigrants into the U.S.? You said there should be some kind of a process.

PM: There should be a process and you should have avenues for people that are, that are depends on what basis do you want to come, to immigrate? I don't think that people should be calling... so this is one of the things that I'm against is okay I'm here now I can apply for my cousin to come here and work and stay with me or I can apply for my uncle to come. That to me is not the right way to immigrate people. That is actually the wrong way to get. I think people should come here and we should accept people in different areas that we think need growth. So we need people to help with farms okay, develop criteria of who will come to the farm, give them a means to come and work over here. Give them a means for them stay here and be part of the society okay? As long as they are willing to work in that area because that's what we need. That's my view.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Same thing with somebody who comes to do a Ph.D. and then become a contributing person in the industry in that particular industry.

UQ: Okay. Do you agree or disagree with affirmative action?

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PM: If you open up the immigration like I said then I disagree with affirmative action.

I think affirmative action's roots are divisive to me very divisive. To me if you want to help people that are disadvantaged, help them at the roots of the disadvantage not because they are blacks they should get this job because if they don't perform I don't want to have a medical doctor working on my appendix that doesn't know how to remove the appendix just because he is he's disadvantaged or she is disadvantaged and she became a medical doctor no that's not right. To me people should rise on their merits whether they are in business field or in technology field or even on working on a farm we should help people that are working in different areas. And based on that merit they get paid accordingly. That to me is fine. Affirmative action actually discourages that very strongly and to me that's wrong.

UQ: Okay did it ever have any value? Did you think it was sort of an ill conceived project from the beginning?

PM: I saw it in India. I saw it here and I think we are trying to put a band aid on an exploding situation and that's not the way you go and take out the cancer if you need to take out the cancer. That's what you need to do as a society.

UQ: Okay.

PM: And there is cancer. There's no question about that?

UQ: What is this cancer?

PM: Well I'm talking about people that are disadvantaged.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Like we discussed before the guy if there is the guy in the ghetto that doesn't have the vision to send this kid to school. There is a problem there. Solve that problem not

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because he's white or black or Asian or something else. Solve that problem to me that's...

UQ: So instead of affirmative action there should be...?

PM: There should be action for there should be activities to promote education to promote diversities and things along that line to make things happen that would not have happened otherwise.

UQ: Okay alright. I think this is the last couple of questions and then we are going to wrap it up.

PM: Okay.

UQ: So what would you say are the strongest, most admirable qualities of the Indian community in Houston?

PM: Indian community, Indians have done well because they are mostly in the professional fields and with the professional fields they have been contributing members of society, probably a large block of tax payers which helps the economy and they have outreached. So when I was in Corpus to give you an example, Indian community participated in Operation Paint Brush in Houston. So every year we would come over and take a house belonging to an elderly poor person, house is in shambles. I wouldn't want to live in that house it's like slum in India and we would make it into a much nicer house. We would clean it up; we would replace the woods that are rotting. We would paint it and Indian community did those things. So they are active outside areas outside their community. That to me helps them establish themselves. But on the other side of the coin Indian community is pretty cohesive and they are not mixing as much as they should. They are not becoming the melting pot in my generation. The kids' generation,

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your generation is probably doing much more of that. So that would help in the long run I think.

UQ: Okay but as far as qualities to sort of emulate other groups can look at Indians and...?

PM: Indians have been good in educating the kids. They have been professional folks so people want to look up to them to some extent.

UQ: Okay, what about qualities that others can emulate of the Hispanic community?

PM: Hispanic community has, first of all it's a much larger community so the diversity of that is much larger.

UQ: Right.

PM: I know of Hispanics that are very educated, very successful, one of the presidents of the divisions at my company that I work for used to be a Hispanic gentleman, so some of them have really achieved success. Some of them are doing things that nobody really cares about too. So you can't really compare the two from my view point.

UQ: Okay.

PM: Hispanic community has grown and it's a big community right now so there are people that you want to emulate and people that you don't want to emulate. I mean there is a large fraction of Hispanic community that are doing menial work like yards and other things too. So there is... it's like any other community.

UQ: Alright. Of the ones, the part of that community that you think could be perceived as role models in some way what kind of things would you emulate or not you but advocate emulating?

PM: Well they work hard.

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UQ: So strong work ethic.

PM: Strong work and those people who have succeeded if you go back to their roots they really work hard at getting what they want to get.

UQ: Okay alright. Same question, different group, African Americans.

PM: Same thing. There are people that have established themselves that have worked hard they have succeeded. There are some that probably didn't and succeeded but as long as there is a statistical chance, right? You throw your dice and you get somewhere that's now what I'm talking about.

UQ: Alright what characteristics do you think Indians as a community need to improve?

PM: I think Indians first of all they need to be more active than they are in politics especially. They don't have a voice today. There are some, you've got governor of Louisiana, governor of Carolinas but okay so they are doing that now. But that's the direction that they need to focus on.

UQ: Okay.

PM: The second thing that I don't see is an impact. If I look at a total population of U.S.A. and I look at the Indians in U.S.A. if they came together and started doing social work that an average American does if Indians started doing that they would be much more revered and they would contribute a lot more to this society that they live in compared to what they are. They have a lot more capable people. An average, just to give an average American if I talk to them how much do you give for charity work for example usually the answer is 5% to 10% of their salary. You talk to an Indian nowhere

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close to that and whatever the Indian gives usually goes back to their own group of religious voice or anything else rather to society in general. To me that's wrong.

UQ: Okay. What characteristics do you think African Americans should improve?

PM: African Americans in this country should... they think about themselves as disadvantaged people. The moment you think about yourself being disadvantaged that tells me that I am inferior to the rest of them and I'm a victim. I think that needs to go away. If they want to come out of that, that is the first thing they need to shed.

UQ: Okay and this is the last question of our interview, what characteristics do you think Hispanics should improve?

PM: Hispanics to me also cohesiveness like Indians. They mostly deal mostly with Hispanics only so that needs to go away, I think in the long run.

UQ: Okay so kind of more integration into.

PM: More open to the...

UQ: Broader culture?

PM: Broader culture.

UQ: Okay alright is there anything else you'd like to add that I didn't cover that you think is important?

PM: No.

UQ: No, all done? Alright well thank you very much for your interview.

PM: You are absolutely welcome.

End of interview