

Interviewees: Ajgaonkar, Vijaya & A.S. "Praful"

Interview Date: September 5, 2011

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**  
**ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Vijaya Ajgaonkar & A. S. (Praful) Ajgaonkar**  
**University of Houston Oral History Project**

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi  
Date: September 5, 2011  
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes  
Translated by: Uzma Quraishi  
Location: Ajgaonkars' home in Sugar Land, Texas

UQ: This is the oral history interview of Vijaya and Praful (A.S.) Ajgaonkar on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 2011. The interview is held at their home in Sugar Land, Texas.

Interviewer's name is Uzma Quraishi. You can begin by telling a little bit about yourself, your childhood, upbringing. [In Urdu] You can begin.

VA: After I come here?

AA: No, no, she wants to know where you were born and –

UQ: [In Urdu] First tell me about your childhood.

VA: I'm born in Mumbai. [In Urdu] We were six siblings. My older brother was born, then me, and then my three other brothers. The school was close-by, really close, next door. I studied there. Then high school was two blocks away.

UQ: When you were in India, were you in Bombay the whole time?

VA: Yes, in Mumbai. Parla.<sup>1</sup>

UQ: What did your parents do [for a living]?

VA: My parents. First, my father worked for the railway. After that he started his own business, a pharmaceutical business. We've been in Parla for more than 125 years. After that my parents moved near to Alibagh.

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UQ: You got married there as well?

VA: Yes, my wedding was also in Mumbai. [End Urdu]

UQ: And for you?

AA: For me life is simple. I have no siblings. I'm the only child. My mother was the only child, so I was the only grandkid, also. So I grew up in Parla which is near the airport area. I mean the old airport what it's called now Domestic Airport very close to that. Went to the school there.

UQ: Which school did you go to?

AA: Went for...up to what we used to call SSE which is 11<sup>th</sup> grade that was Parle Tilak Vidyalaya, so it was local school. Actually my mother also went to the same school.

UQ: So it was co-ed?

AA: It's a co-ed, yes. Typically our class would be 50 kids out of which 30 boys and 20 girls. That's typically...

UQ: And people from different backgrounds meaning you had Sikhs, Jains?

AA: Not too many, no not too many because this was in Marathi. I mean the language of the instructions was Marathi and because that's when the whole, everything my mother went to school, the same school but she was going in the English medium but by the time I went there it was all Marathi medium.

UQ: I see, did they teach English at all?

AA: Oh yeah, yeah. We studied English as a second language from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then when we go to college which I went a little further away in Mumbai but not in the same town and that thing was our medium of instruction in English so we had to switch

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English as a second language to English as a medium for instruction. So that was a thing.

Then of course I came here and I went to school at A & M.

UQ: You did your undergraduate here?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: Okay.

AA: I mean I did my undergraduate there and also here. I did Chemistry there and Chemical Engineering here. So I went to A & M and then being a Chemical Engineering, Houston is the town so I came to Houston, looked for a job got a job and stayed here.

UQ: So when did this happen? When did you leave Mumbai?

AA: Mumbai I left in '64, finished in two years so I was here in '66. So...

UQ: And you came to A & M in '66?

AA: '64.

UQ: Oh, you left there and only two years?

AA: Two years. But I just had to take the engineering classes. All the math, physics, chemistry was gone. I mean gone, meaning I had finished them.

UQ: I see, so then in '66 you came to Houston?

AA: Came to Houston.

UQ: Have you been here every since?

AA: Basically, ever since. We were in Dallas '67 to '69 for two years and then '72, we took a chance of going to India again and out of that I spent 6 months here with my company and so they stayed there for a year while I just spent 6 months over there and every since that I've been here.

UQ: Okay. [In Urdu] So when did you come?

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VA: I came here after I got married. I came in '67 for the first time. Then in '72 we went back [to India]. I had stayed here at least a year. He had been here 6 months longer for work. Then we returned in '73.

UQ: Were your children born here?

VA: My children were born here.

VA: My older son was born in 1968, in Dallas. We had lived in Dallas for two years so he was born in Dallas. And my [younger] son was born in Houston in 1970. So since 1970, we have been in Houston.

UQ: Why did you choose to come to A & M of all the universities in the world? 6.23

AA: Actually it's a funny story. My father was a lawyer and his clients were mostly business people and their kids used to go to most of the regular schools like Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Wisconsin that area. I was about to go there but then one of my friends had just come for working on his Ph.D. a year before I came and he was at A & M and so we decided that instead of going to the totally new place at least I know one person. So I end up at A & M otherwise this... I didn't even know the school existed if it were not for him.

UQ: I see. So when you came here was he really the only Indian student on campus was he?

AA: No, no, no, no, no....we had... A & M was a funny story. They were about 50 to 55 students Indian students and there was about same number of students from in those days what they used to call East Pakistan because they had some connection (I mean not connection) some collaboration with some university in Dhaka or something like that. So there were a lot of them so.

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UQ: Where there Pakistani students as well?

AA: West Pakistan I don't think there were that many but these were most, not most all of them were from what is today called Bangladesh.

UQ: Okay and the ones from India were they mostly engineering students?

AA: Mostly engineering. There were some who were like my friend were doing a Ph.D. in chemistry so there were a bunch of them were on the agriculture side of, not veterinary medicine but something related to the veterinary science or agriculture science or agriculture economics and things of that nature. But the majority I would say out of 55, 60 people we were probably 30, 35 were engineering.

UQ: Okay so how old were you when you left Mumbai?

AA: Twenty.

UQ: Twenty okay. And were your parents, were they concerned about you leaving, going so far?

AA: Oh yes.

UQ: Did they want you to go or was this your...?

AA: No, no, no my father was, you know, he wanted to be explorer. He himself likes to travel so... used to like it, he's passed away now. He visited here about 4 or 5 times. I mean after I settled in so. So no it was not just my decision. Actually we were thinking of going to England but my father said, "Oh all my friends' kids are going to U.S. so you should go to U.S. So...

UQ: Were you concerned at all about coming to Texas? Did you know anything about Texas?

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AA: The funny thing happened is you know like typical India I was leaving... I mean I was going to come here January '64 so in November '63 I went to visit my grandmother (my father's mother) and she was in a place near Goa I mean it's in Maharashtra but it's in Goa. So we went to see... so we stopped where my father had gone to college, you know in Kolhapur and there we are staying with one of our friends for two days and then we visited his old professor and as soon as my father said, "Yeah he's going to go to U.S." "Where are you going?" We said, "Texas" and that's the day Kennedy was assassinated. I mean, so we heard the news from him because when you're away you don't listen to the radio and all that. So that's how we heard and so everybody was scared. Everybody thought Texas was... everybody's carrying a gun and shoots anyone that don't listen, so to speak. So but I mean it was a cultural shock because all, our definition of U.S. was what we see in Hollywood films right. In those days if you recall the films were mostly shot in the New York as the background. You know they used to have this people used to live in the basement of the building or something like that. The basement had something to do with it you know. And I landed in College Station there and the first thing I'm shocked is that there is not a single high rise building there. I mean oddly you can say that some of the university buildings were three stories high that's all. They didn't even have anything beyond three stories. So all the buildings were two stories, one story like that. It was a big, huge campus but it's just different and everybody even in our apartment was a single story, run down house that three of us shared. You know we had three bedrooms so it was not a problem but it's... it was similar to what back home we had a servant's quarters, you know, we had a house and in my house we had a servant's quarter there it was something like that. There are no air

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conditioning, no central heat. We just had one big heater, gas heater that in the living room that used to give us the heat for everywhere. And in order to control the humidity we used to put a big pot of water on the top so that you still get some. Otherwise it was too dry! So it was always fun. And there were no telephones so we were the first one in that road. We got the telephone and we got the TV and I still remember buying the TV for \$5.

UQ: Wow!

AA: Black and white. You know the student was leaving so naturally when they graduate or something they want to get rid of the thing so they were advertised and so we went and we picked up for \$5. It was about that big. I mean the screen was only about 17 or 15 inch but it was so deep you know. You used to have those electronic tubes and all that.

UQ: So the majority of your interaction must have been with your roommates and the Indian, that community right?

AA: Yes.

UQ: You went on outings with them and socialized with them?

AA: Yeah there was a lot of locals you know being a typical southern town it was first of all it was... looking at somebody other than the Anglos was a cultural shock for them.

UQ: Did you sense that?

AA: Yeah you could but at the same time they were curious and right after the Kennedy assassination and all that stuff, many of them had different attitudes and all that. But they were also trying to convert people to Christianity. So they always used to invite you to the churches and I just went once and I said, "That's enough." Every time there is

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a... but there was some, some of my colleges I'll say one guy was a smart guy actually he was a Muslim guy but he was doing his Ph.D. he was a little older than we were and he's he became I don't know whether he became or not but he was going to the church every week because somebody used to pick him up and drop him off and all that. And they helped him get the nice assistantship in the college and everything. So he did well but somebody told me once he graduated and got his Ph.D. he forgot all about that church.

UQ: Okay.

AA: I mean it's just a funny story.

UQ: Yeah that's actually a very common to have churches active with international students and I found this even in the University of Houston the churches host a luncheon every week and all the international students come and the church ladies serve sandwiches and things like that. They have field trips away from campus...

AA: Yeah, I came to see Astrodome with one of those people because they said, "It's okay we're going to go see" the Astrodome was new and it was a novelty it was the eighth wonder of the world and all that kind of stuff. They said, "Okay we are going" so we, three or four of us after I came to one of their cars and they took us to Astrodome to listen to Billy Graham. We had no interest in Billy Graham but we were interested in looking at "what is this 8<sup>th</sup> wonder of the world?" Like little kids in the candy store just wondered around and looked at it. Okay [in Urdu] "this is all really weird."

UQ: It's exciting. So but you did feel that the underlying motive was to expose you to Christianity? It wasn't just to be nice?



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AA: Oh no, it was... that [Christianity] was there but it was subtle and it was not foreseen as any such thing as that. I mean if you don't join it there were no reprisals, no. It was okay. It was a civilized way of doing it.

UQ: Okay so aside from Indians did you get to socialize, go out with non Indians?

AA: We went with some of the locals. What happened is at that time A & M did not have, it was not co-ed school.

UQ: Really?!

AA: Yeah so it became co-ed about two years after I left (two or three years) it was around '69, '70 somewhere around there it became co-ed. So it was all of the students and most of them were associated with, undergraduates were associated with the ROTC program. So you walk into the campus and everyone is wearing this uniforms and all that and they had their own customs how to... you know especially the freshman were really, they would just go. You are walking, you don't know anybody, he will walk with you and say, "John! This is my name sir!" You just say something he will just walk with you and give you some story, "Yeah I'm a freshman. I'm a mechanical engineering student," this and that but that's the custom it was! So it was totally different things. We had, I mean we had different culture. That didn't even exist after it became a co-ed. So what happened what I was leading to is at Friday afternoon by twelve o'clock or one o'clock or whatever it was most of the kids would be going to Austin or Houston or Huntsville you know because they had a girlfriend there. So only foreign students were staying in the town on the weekend. So we came... all foreign students not just Indian there were people from, we had 4, 5 guys from England that we used to play cricket together. So we knew the Englishmen and we knew some of the people from Philippines, Indonesia, some

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were from Tunisia, all over the world. Some were from South America. But South America's used to go out with the other guys because they had a car and everything so they used to go somewhere. Some other Asians were basically staying there and with the street that we used to stay on that was basically the foreign students, you know.

UQ: I see so in the school the demographic makeup this was before desegregation?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: So that means that foreign students and white Americans?

AA: Yes there were no blacks.

UQ: Yes and no Mexican Americans?

AA: No there were maybe some Mexican Americans. Hispanic, no blacks, no African Americans.

UQ: Did you ever see African Americans?

AA: Oh yeah because you see it in the store or something like that. They were but not as a student and even as an athlete they didn't have any athletes in Southwest Conference at that time it was called Southwest Conference didn't have any Jerry LeVias was the first one for at SMU in '66 or '65 somewhere in there. So other schools didn't get anything until about '70.

UQ: What was your impression of Mexican Americans?

AA: There were not that many at that time.

UQ: Okay and you didn't really go into any neighborhoods where Mexican Americans lived predominantly?

AA: No, we basically lived on that international avenue so to speak.

UQ: Okay.

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AA: There was one where we used to walk from my apartment to the department was about one mile and we walked three times a day so I had plenty of exercise going back and forth.

UQ: What was your impression of the white Americans? How did they treat the foreign students in general?

AA: Some were... had the notion that they were foreigners were ignorant until they see your grades they, they were different but otherwise they had the feeling, you know, immigrants or foreigners I should say at that time they were basically illiterate or something like that. They didn't have a high opinion about... you know I had even the college professors ask me dumb questions like when I say I came from Bombay and I'll say population at that time was 3, 4 million people. They will still ask me dumb questions or something. "Do you have elephants on the street?" I mean this is coming from a college professor you know with a Ph.D. guy who has been around the world asking that type of question.

UQ: That's kind of subtle but you understand what's going on in the mind? So if the professor has these kinds of impressions what about the students? How did they treat you?

AA: They... I mean one on one, they were very friendly. One on one there's no such thing as we used to work on a projects together. We used to sit down and have a coffee together or things of that nature. That was not a problem.

UQ: It just seems as though...

AA: Just the attitude overall, *overall* attitude for a foreigner was one thing and *individual* for one foreigner is different.

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UQ: Okay did you face any kind of you know discrimination at all being a foreigner?

AA: In school not so much because you know you are just going to school and you are just attending the class and finishing the exam and go home so there's nothing. So you didn't notice that one. Once we got into the work environment that's a different story.

UQ: What about while you were a student outside of school maybe in the stores or exchanges with people?

AA: Well the people the local community they have this, they say "Hi" to everybody. So they used to say that and being a small town there were only 12,000 students and College Station was together so we used to go to the grocery store in Bryan, somebody used to take we didn't have cars but somebody would take and there was a washateria so we used to do everything at one time Saturday morning. But that way people used to look at us but at the same time they knew at college, at school there were a bunch of Asians, you know Indians or Indonesians or whatever they are. So they knew that these are different people but they didn't do anything bad or good anything like that.

UQ: So you were never approached by a group of people never insulted or anything like that?

AA: No, no, no... No such thing.

UQ: What was your impression of African Americans? That was the first time obviously you had been around them.

AA: Yeah we didn't meet too many there. They were just there in the stores or something like that. They were not a large population. There were no students. No student, no faculty. So anyways you just meet it when you go in a store, Sears Store, it was the only store in Bryan. If you go there yeah, there were some Africans. They used

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to be okay. I mean they didn't... for us it was not a big thing because until you come to Houston you don't see a big quantity.

UQ: How did you feel about or did you have an opinion about them not being allowed at A & M?

AA: When we first of all shocked that there were no girls first of all. I mean... there's no girls there. There is a, you know...

UQ: So is there are separate college for the girls in the area?

AA: No. That's why all the students used to go to Huntsville or Houston or Austin.

UQ: I see.

AA: So their girlfriends were at Sam Houston State College in Huntsville or they'll be at UT in Austin or in Houston.

UQ: If Sam Houston State allowed girls?

AA: Oh yes.

UQ: And University of Houston allowed girls and these places allowed girls, why didn't A & M allow girls?

AA: Because it was a military school.

UQ: Oh okay that makes sense.

AA: They call it ROTC school ROTC so yeah.

UQ: I see.

AA: So that's when they... they had just started allowing the women that were faculty members, daughter or wife. So there were like one of our Indian ladies were there. She was doing her Ph.D. she was probably the first woman Ph.D. from there. But... so there were like some but whole campus I'll say less than 10 out of 12,000.

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UQ: So you would talk about this amongst yourselves?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: Did you disagree with that idea or did you think "Well, it's a military school"?

AA: We just took it for granted once we know it we say, "Okay that's the way it is."

And we were young we didn't care. The principles didn't mean anything.

UQ: Okay and the same thing regarding African Americans?

AA: Yeah we did.

UQ: Accept it?

AA: We were wondering what is going on so. But there were not African Americans even in UT or U of H or anywhere like that so, Rice or anyplace.

UQ: Did you ever face someone else told a story about going up to the restroom and seeing the door of the sign for "colored" and the sign for "white." Did you recall?

AA: I've seen that but I didn't experience that one.

UQ: Okay.

AA: See because legally '64 the Civil Rights legislation was passed so legally that was not allowed, legally, but in the subtle way it was done, practiced so to speak. It's just even practiced today but it's now this way that time ago this so. No I don't think we had anything people still look at us. I know somebody who was... he was I think he was Rice or U of H student and he went to one of the downtown stores I forget what it was. He told me that he was told to not go to that restroom over there. So...

UQ: Which restroom would they have advised you guys to go to?

AA: Colored. For colored.

UQ: Really, why did they advise you to go to that one?

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AA: It was whites only and colored so there was only two.

UQ: And you could not be considered white?

AA: No.

UQ: No?

AA: I mean but I didn't experience that so I shouldn't say anything. But I have heard of one guy had it and he was told but it's once in a while. It was not I didn't ride a bus so I don't know whether they used to make you sit in the back or anything because we didn't ride a bus for two years we didn't go anywhere.

UQ: Okay was your house close to the campus?

AA: One mile exactly.

UQ: Oh so how did you get to campus?

AA: Walk.

UQ: Always walking?

AA: Six miles a day!

UQ: Wow, pretty healthy huh?

AA: Yes, I lost all my baby fat. First one month I lost all my fat.

UQ: Wow, okay.

AA: You know I couldn't wear... I had to buy a couple of pants because shirts you could wear but pants you can't. So it was tough.

UQ: You lost some weight I'm sure mother was...

AA: I'm the only one who lost weight. Most of the Indians who come here they gain weight. You know they come as a 100 pounder and within six months they are 110, 120 you know there I was I came it at about 130 and went down to 120.

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UQ: Okay. So you got married in '67?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: That was very soon after you graduated?

AA: Yeah for about 18 months and then...

UQ: You were pretty young. Your parents arranged the marriage?

AA: No, it was not arranged marriage but it was in that same mode. You know it's not like "you marry this one" but...

UQ: They asked you?

AA: They asked me and you see and all that kind of stuff.

UQ: Okay. [Begin Urdu, to VA] So, on your side, did your parents and his parents know each other from before?

VA: No. My... his... [End Urdu]

AA: My uncle...

VA: Uncle's wife.

AA: My aunt.

VA: *Chachi*. [a person's paternal uncle's wife]]

UQ: Okay.

VA: [Begin Urdu] His uncle's wife knew my mother [End Urdu]. She told my mother, "my nephew is was coming from America and..."

UQ: [Begin Urdu] So you two never met in your childhood?

VA: No, we never met.

UQ: So later, when they [your parents] said that there's this man...



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VA: Well, first we look at *patrika*, right? Astrology [Laughs]. Then, after that matched, they saw me.

UQ: At that time, you didn't look at each other's photographs?

VA: No, no photos.

AA: [AA, in English] We got married within what I was there for only 6 weeks.

VA: We got married within two weeks.

UQ: Oh! So you two met and ...

VA: We met, got engaged, then one week after the engagement, we got married. Then after one month we came to Dallas. [End Urdu]

UQ: Very quickly. [To AA] So were you interested in getting married or did your parents say, *chalo* [ok], it's time?

AA: I mean I didn't go for to get married no. I was a little younger or so.

UQ: You had no intention of getting married?

VA: [VA, in Urdu] No, he didn't go [to India] for marriage.

AA: No. Not that I was against it but I was not for it either. Nobody forced me, it just happened.

UQ: You were open to the idea.

AA: Yeah.

UQ: It was all of a sudden?

AA: Because all my friends were you know 4, 5 years older than me and they were just getting married. I was little kid for that.

UQ: Pretty young.

AA: So then I said okay.

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UQ: Did you have anything in mind regarding marriage like...?

AA: No.

UQ: You were pretty open?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: And you trusted your parents and their...

AA: Yeah, because that means its upbringing the same right? That's the whole thing.

The arranged marriage this way is basically same socio economic class; I mean nobody's too rich or too poor or any such thing.

UQ: [Begin Urdu] So, what did your parent's want? Meaning, when they wanted to get you married, what kind of young man were they looking for?

VA: They just wanted to get me married quickly.

UQ: Oh really, they wanted to get you married quickly?

VA: Yes, they did. So when my aunt told us [about him] and we said we'd look into it.

UQ: And did your parents consider other suitors or did they not?

VA: No

UQ: He was the first and last.

VA: We saw him and his aunt had told us about him, right? We knew he was from a good family. He's a nice boy, and he's a chemical engineer and everything. And then my parents said if I'm not interested in him then we'll look for other guys. But, there really wasn't an option to say no! [Laughs].

UQ: Right. So, your family wanted this, that his family be a good family, and the boy be educated?

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VA: Yeah

UQ: Did they want anything else?

VA: No, everything was fine.

UQ: When it was your children's turn to get married, meaning... you said your son is already married?

VA: My son married a white girl.

UQ: So you didn't arrange it, you didn't have much input.

AA: No

VA: They met in school.

UQ: Okay, on his own. That made it easier for you.

VA: Yeah, they got married here. [End Urdu]

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

AA: Well one guy, one Indian guy who was... what do you call... senior to me, he got here the year before I did so of course as usual anybody who came from College Station to Houston to live we all stayed at his place until we found a job. So I stayed with him for a couple of weeks found a job and then moved nearby.

UQ: Which company?

AA: I started with Fish Engineering which is now Techniq.

UQ: Fish like the animal?

AA: Fish... F-I yeah but it's nothing to do with fish. The guy's name was Fish so it was a Fish Engineering. It was a small company, 200 people. I was the only non-Anglo person working there. There were no Hispanic; there was no African, nothing like that. So, I was a novelty all the way from what do you call them... secretaries and

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receptionists to the vice president and everybody. I was a novelty they used to ask me funny questions, similar [questions]. But at the same time I used to get treated nice and a good example is we had a Christmas party in those days the company used to it was all free so company had a Christmas party and it was at the old Shamrock Hotel I don't know if you knew it or not. It's a huge ball room and everybody came and I was since everybody knew me knew me they knew me by face; some knew me by name and all that thing. Everybody was calling me to their table, you know introducing me to their spouses, you know. I was going from... that was...

UQ: You were the belle of the ball!

AA: Yes! You know in those days at all of those parties you had to wear a black suit and the girls wore the long evening gowns and it's not anything like what you see today.

UQ: It was a much more formal affair.

AA: Oh yeah, much more formal and even when we used to go to this Jones Hall was newly opened. So to go to the concert or anything you had to wear a black suit and you go to most of the restaurants they expected you to wear a jacket. You didn't go like this.

UQ: Yeah it's changed, huh?

AA: Oh yeah, it's changed.

UQ: So how did you, it sounds like people were interested in you as someone kind of exciting and different?

AA: Someone different, yes.

UQ: But they are also... you felt like they asked you sort of funny questions you said what kind of questions?

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AA: I experienced, I'll give you a good, not a good example but an example of how the subtle way that people used to treat us. I was living in a... once I had a job I was living in an apartment and I had one local Anglo friend. Friend I mean he was an accountant we were about the same age and so we used to go eat out and all that stuff. He had a girlfriend and he wanted to... I mean she was looking for an apartment because she was moving to one apartment to another. So she was telling me when he was tired he said, "It's okay you can go." He ask me "Can you go there with her?" "Okay I'll drive." It just we were talking about the whole lady and no more than two square miles in what is now Greenbriar/Shepherd or that area. So we went to one of the apartments and we pulled in and parked the car and you know how the girls are they want to walk around looking at this swimming pool and this and that. Well I'm one of those that goes straight to the manager's office. I go there and I said, "Do you have any apartments for rent?" She said, "No." I said, "Okay. My work is done. I'm back!" I'm starting to walk back and this girl was wandering around and this lady asked her, "Ma'am do you, are you looking for anything?" She said, "Yeah I'm looking for apartment." She says, "Come on in." I said, "You just told me no!" "Oh I didn't understand what you were saying!" What am I going to ask an apartment manager in her office that she has to say, "No." I mean and when I told her that to the girl she was embarrassed. She said, "Okay we don't want to look at it." So...

UQ: I see.

AA: But it's that type of thing existed. It's not like the officially they didn't say, "Colored people don't come" or any such things but they just acted the way they could because everywhere there were foreigners were there and we used to go. So once I

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learned that lesson when I had to change the apartment next time I just pulled a same one on them. I asked not my secretary but my boss's secretary to call and say, "Do you have apartment?" Once somebody said, "Yes" she would say, "My boss is coming to look at it." Once that is made they couldn't say no to me. And I pulled that to get two or three of my friends an apartment. Because I knew if they go it on their own they are going to be rejected. So...

UQ: So you weren't the only one who experienced that treatment?

AA: Oh no, it was...

UQ: Were your friends?

AA: I won't say it was 100% but it was pretty common.

UQ: I see. When would you say that changed that kind of treatment?

AA: It started changing in the 70's and the biggest thing was in '73 with this oil embargo, the oil industry boomed so there was a lot of employment and most of the engineers at our level were of the Indian subcontinent and that brought a lot of people here and once we started working even at work there were some people who wouldn't give you a chance and they would find faults with you, etc. etc. but once our group in the mid 70s, we started going, I mean that's what I always tell the younger ones this. If the boss says tonight, or today he says, "Okay I want you to go to Cleveland, Ohio tomorrow for two days" and this is the month of January or February which is the coldest months. Only us foreigners would say, "Yes, I will go." All others would say, "No I have a PTA arrangement, I have my daughter's softball game, this... my wife has to go somewhere and my car has to do...." So we started going and once we started going we started doing the work. The company finally they said, "Okay these guys do work" and then we started

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getting promoted. But when we started getting promoted there was a lot of backlash. I mean I'll give you an example in the about late 70s we were two Indians in our department and during that 4, 5 years I was there every project whenever there was a new project every project manager would say, "I want him or him." That was the request to the department manager. And when the department manager proposed all these local Anglo guys they say, "No, he's too lazy. He's too old. He doesn't work." You know they gave all the stuff. But when our boss quit and there was a time for a promotion so naturally the higher management said, "Okay we have to select one of you two" and they selected my colleague but as soon as he was selected the same guys who were asking for him or me on the project openly said, "Couldn't you find somebody else?"

UQ: Was your colleague also Indian?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: I see.

AA: I mean when they wanted somebody to work because see now all of the sudden he's a department manager so he's equal to them. Before that we used to work for them right? So work for them they wanted somebody that works and gets the job done but once they want to promote somebody to come up to equal they had... I mean this was you know... It's not there anymore, but it lasted until about early 80's, mid 80's maybe. Any promotion that anybody got everybody was looking at you know. "Why is he being promoted?" So...

UQ: Are you still working as an engineer?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: And now when?

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AA: Now, as you probably know in our industry the female employees are promoted more. I mean they are desperate to promote, because they had nobody for the last 40, 50, 100 years so they had to. I mean all the girls that were smart they used to be nurses or teachers. So nobody was an engineer, not that they were not smart they were as smart as they are today, but nobody gave them chance. There used to be maybe one engineer or something like that. So nowadays it's more... I mean, it's openly understood that if you are a female engineer you are going to go high up as much as you want if you want.

Same thing I have couple of my friends. I mean these are Anglos it's not like they are Indians or anything and they openly say this, "If we get laid off I will get laid off but not my wife." Both are engineers.

UQ: Is there backlash about that as well?

AA: No, there's not backlash. This is the thing, it's a social thing. During the late 70's and all that they were trying to promote African Americans. To some extent some Hispanics, not so much, but more African Americans and there was a tremendous backlash. But now that it is for the gender based because (and I'm not a sociologist) but I suspect what it is, is everybody has a mother or girlfriend a wife, sister somebody right. So what they are saying is, "Instead of me earning she's earning." It's not somebody that is living out on the railroad track.

UQ: Okay. So it's not someone who is so different from me, it's someone who's just a little different than me.

AA: Little different from me. So that's not much of a... I mean everybody jokes about it.

UQ: But you haven't heard that kind of whole opposition?



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AA: No. Other day we had somebody was being promoted I said, but the name was little not know to everybody. "Is that she?"

UQ: Okay.

AA: I mean our industry it's not so much in the banking or any other industry, no. This is our industry which had nobody there before they are really going out of their way to do it.

UQ: So you said there was backlash when there was an effort to promote African Americans and some extent Hispanics, what kind of backlash did you hear about those groups?

AA: Well always first of all nasty comments. They will always say, "Okay he doesn't know anything. He just got promoted because he's black."

UQ: What kind of places did these comments take place, like in the break room in the work room?

AA: Yeah anywhere everybody would yeah when there was other people.

UQ: So they weren't...

AA: No, no it's not somebody was sponsoring or in a meeting or any such thing.

UQ: No, but nobody's trying to hid the comment they just openly?

AA: No, they would just say. Yeah because let's say this department promoted some non white then later on these four people are standing having a coffee or lunch break or something and some subject comes up about that department. The first thing, "Oh yeah they got the new manager who is... (so and so)? That's how he got in." But at the same time in the 80s all of the sudden the people, most of the engineering accounting communities are non-union, so they always like to blame union for everything. So they

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always, you know, all the jobs, all the cars started Japanese or Koreans or whatever. So everybody was saying, "Yeah it's all because of the unions." So one time I made a statement I said, "Unions are probably true, but that's not only reason." I said, "In a few years we will lose our jobs and they will go..." (at that time I didn't say India) but I said "Japan or Korea will take." Everybody laughed at me and said, "There's no way our jobs are going to go." Now, 40% of our work is done in India or Philippines, everywhere. Every American company has an office over there and unless they do 40%, 50% of the work the rates are so high nobody wants to do any job.

UQ: How did you respond when you heard those kinds of comments against Indians in your company?

AA: I wouldn't say anything. I will just, because one thing I have followed all my life is politics and religion I do not talk in public, so there is no one way or the other.

UQ: Okay. [Begin Urdu] So, when you came to Houston... you came in '74, right?

AA: She was here in '70.

VA: I came to Houston in '70.

UQ: Oh yes, 1970.

VA: First we were in Dallas for two years.

UQ: Where did you live? In which area [of Houston]?

AA: In '70, we were in Alief. Oh yeah, yeah we were in apartment.

VA: In Alief. We lived in Alief for the first two months. 1970... [End Urdu]

AA: Oh, yeah, we were in an apartment, Beechnut... Beechnut and Bellaire.

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AA: And Bellaire. No 1970, when we first moved from Dallas we were in that apartment on Bellaire we had. That Long Elementary or whatever that school is on Bellaire and Hillcroft.

UQ: Oh I see.

AA: And then we moved we bought a house...

VA: We bought a house and then we were living in Hendon...

AA: Alief

UQ: That house, was that house in Alief?

VA: [In Urdu] It was in Alief.

UQ: So why did you live in Bellaire and Hillcroft?

AA: That's because first I moved from Dallas, we were in apartment.

UQ: So just whatever you could find?

AA: And yeah, that was a really nice area in those days!

UQ: Just not anymore? You don't...

AA: Oh no, no. Now it is...

VA: Alief school district was at top at that time.

AA: No, she's talking about the house.

UQ: The house.

AA: Apartment was nice. Most of the engineers used to live in Sharpstown.

UQ: Okay.

AA: Like now we live in Sugar Land or Katy or something like that. At that time it was Sharpstown. Then it was Alief. And Alief and Spring Branch were the two big

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school districts. Then after that, both of them have gone bad and everybody has gone to Sugar Land, Katy, or Cypress or whatever it is.

UQ: So what's happened to that area?

AA: That area has become...okay, so that's another story. You know in '80 what was it about '83, '84 somewhere there when the oil prices went down and the whole Texas and Oklahoma and Louisiana went bust you know there were stores that were closed, the houses were empty, boarded up and all that kind of stuff. At that time there were some apartments I still remember you know... Are you familiar with that where Chinatown is now Beechnut, Bellaire area? Okay, that area there. Now apartments were running before the bust most of the engineers used to, engineer, accountants I should say they used to come live there for about a year and then they used to buy a house in Alief usually or Sugar Land I mean not Sugar Land, Alief or Spring Branch or something. Apartment rents at that time were running about \$400 to \$500 which was a lot of money in those days, for two bedroom apartments. But when all the companies went down, went from 2,000 people to 200 people and all that all of the sudden apartments in those people were laid off so they left most, most of them left Houston went into other business in California or New York or whatever it is. So those apartments rates, apartments that paid \$450 a month went down within a year they went down to \$180.

UQ: Wow!

AA: And with all these things it's "one month free" and this and that. So all of the sudden that thing instead of being a typical educated white collar workers it became single parents or blue collar workers and all that stuff. Then once that happened then the school district went down and then everything went down. So it's a vicious circle that

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started that. If the oil prices had not gone down it would not have happened. But so we saw that also in Houston.

UQ: So is it still the same?

AA: Oh yeah, now that area once it has gone down it has gone down.

UQ: That's it!

AA: Now the Alief area is really... we lived there until what five years ago.

VA: Yeah, we just moved five years ago.

AA: But we didn't have any problems.

VA: Twenty six years we been living there, no problem.

UQ: Twenty six years!

VA: That house. Twenty six years.

AA: We had no problem but the area was getting bad.

VA: The area was bad so we just moved last five years in this house.

UQ: So how did the Alief area change? It used to be a lot of Indians?

AA: Oh yeah, yeah... Alief area was full of Indians and Chinese because everybody wanted their kids to go to the good school district, so like here your Bellaire High School same story.

UQ: So it was a better school district there then in the city of Houston?

AA: Yes. HISD was going down while these two school districts Spring Branch and Alief were really...

VA: Alief was the top.

UQ: How did you know it was a good school district like what?

AA: Oh, you read about it and all that.

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UQ: The newspaper?

AA: Yeah. There were no internet but... So that was a... it changed everything so.

VA: In 1970 at that time also...

Phone interrupting.

UQ: So the Alief area now or would you say it got so bad that you felt that you really had to leave?

AA: Yeah, I mean well we were... it was for multiple reasons. One is that our house was two story house and we wanted to move into a single story house. So that was one of the reasons. But I couldn't move in the same area single story house if the area was good but the area was... after 30 years I didn't make any money on that house. And I bought it at a premium. I bought it for \$90,000 back in 1980 that's like \$250,000 or \$200,000 now. I couldn't even sell it for that money.

UQ: Really? Were you able eventually to sell it?

AA: Not really I just gave it out to whatever those Cheap Houses people so you don't have to worry about it they just give you \$20,000 less than you walk out...

UQ: And it's off your hands.

AA: Yeah.

UQ: Okay. So how did your neighborhood change, your specific neighborhood?

AA: It changed because whoever was there first there are only on our street you know there are 20 houses right, 10 on each side. Out of that 20 there are only 2 people that are still there, everybody gone. And we would have even gone earlier if our kids were a little younger and they were in school. He would have left back then. But since they just got out of it around the time it was getting bad then we said, "It's okay school doesn't bother

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us." We didn't have any in the neighborhood we didn't have theft and all those other things. But every day you hear about it. Okay on that corner somebody shot somebody. At this gas station somebody shot somebody. So it's just like Houston now it's not anything different.

UQ: So what... all these people left your street. What kind of people moved in?

AA: Most of the people came in were either Hispanics or Africans.

VA: Hispanics and blacks.

UQ: Were they white collar workers or?

AA: I don't know. Most of them were not. Because those who were white collar workers they were moving to Sugar Land or Katy. So that's what happened is all the white collar workers were moving where the school districts were good so they were going to Katy or Sugar Land on this side, or Clearlake or wherever it was.

UQ: How did the school district change? What changed in the standard of the school district?

AA: Okay first of all the discipline became bad. There were, I mean I'll give you an example. My daughter when she was in college... she was in college and you know she had some favorite teachers when she was in high school. So she called one of her teachers one time. She had off there and school was on whatever it was. So she called her and she said, "It's okay Miss.(whatever her name was) if you are free we'll go for lunch" or "I'll come see you at lunch." You know what her teacher said? "I want to meet you, but don't come to the school, I will meet you whatever restaurant." When she went there she said, "You won't believe in two years or three years or whatever she was gone it has become really rowdy. The people they had to have metal detectors because

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people were bringing knives and guns and everything then there were druggie shoes. It just... just like that it went from a top school to the bottom school. It's really very different. I mean there are still some good smart students. I'm not saying that every student is bad that's not what I'm saying but as a group it became emphasis was not on schooling and learning and all that stuff.

UQ: Okay whereas before you would say that it was?

AA: Oh yes, before it was all because all the kids' parents were college educated people so naturally they expected their kids to do well in school. Now all of the sudden you've got the people who are either high school or high school drop-out so even though they may have a good feeling about it they were not able to enforce the kids to do.

Because the kids would say, "Well you didn't go to college. You're living here."

UQ: Okay. When your children were in school there by the time that they graduated everything was still...

AA: Yeah by the time they graduated it was getting little bad but not that bad. It was getting bad. I mean we could notice the difference when they were in middle school or up until about 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> grade or something. They were extremely good and then it started going down a little bit. But it was not bad. If it was bad we would have moved right then. Because I mean that's no way I would have asked them to go to that school. Either we would have stayed there and gone to private school or we would have moved out.

UQ: How did the neighbors who moved into the neighborhood, how did they treat you guys?



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VA: In 1970, the first house that neighborhood was very nice because mostly ladies were not working.

UQ: Okay.

VA: And the whole street had small children with my children and everybody. So after work, after dinner mostly everybody come, then children were bicycle or tricycle riding. Then all this big... people used to block the lane and playing volleyball on the street. Then we used to have the block party every once in a while. We're talking. Then one time the hurricane come, what the 19...?

AA: Somewhere '70 to '72 I don't remember.

VA: And whole street was flooding so everybody was just coming out we have this bread and jelly so we had sandwiches and we were very friendly. Then 1970, when my daughter born that, daughter born on 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend and our cars battery run down and actually she born 2 week before my...

UQ: Due date.

VA: Due date. So battery went down so he said, "I have to look at somebody to give me ride, to give the battery" and then my labor started. He was looking there and I said, "I don't know it's coming very faster."

UQ: She was your first?

AA: She was the second. Our first one was quick so that's why we...

VA: Yeah, because first one was 45 minutes only took so that's why. Then he just went to next door neighbor and she was... they were not there. Then he saw the across the street neighbor and he just pulled truck back and so he told that guy my wife has to go to the hospital and he said, "Oh, my wife took my car I have the truck is it okay?" We

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said, "Okay" and he just took us to the hospital at that time Southwest Memorial Hospital old one Hillcroft and...

AA: It was a small one story.

VA: Bellaire and Hillcroft that time. He took us then he took our car key and he fix our car. He brought it in my house key he took it and gave it to my next door neighbor because right after breakfast I just put them all the dishes there. She cleaned everything. She put the bed sheet on the baby's crib because and got everything ready and then she came to hospital. At that time people were more friendly, yeah.

AA: People were absolutely friendly.

VA: Absolutely. Until... I will say '75 they things started changing.

UQ: Why? What changed?

AA: Because mostly women started working so both the spouses were working so all naturally you come home...

UQ: And you're tired.

AA: You're tired and you have to cook, you know. There's no such thing. See like when I used to come home all the food was ready we used to eat by 6:00 we always ate. They either the kids and then we play outside. Now there is no such thing because everybody is working so maybe...

VA: We used to have the luncheon party and all with the white people everybody you know and it was nice. It's all of the sudden everything started changing. Now the neighbors just say, "Hi."

AA: And we don't even know the names.

VA: I don't know the name...

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AA: We know the face but we don't know the name.

VA: ...And also if you need we used to give a lot of stranger a ride because if somebody had a problem they just show the thumb and we used to give. But now we are afraid of giving anybody rides? Everything changes. Even when my daughter was born, even the black nurses were very nice, at that time you know. Because I told her I don't have family here, I don't know how to give the bath to baby. They brought the tub right there and with a doll they showed me how to give a bath to baby!

AA: You know the 70's are different from such point of view also.

UQ: Yeah, so you think that just the way people interact is different?

AA: Oh yeah people very friendly. Like the old style neighborhood everybody knew everybody and everybody helped each other.

VA: So afterwards because my neighbor I remember Don Strong, Maryanna they were very nice. Whenever I started cooking. "Oh Vijiya, what you cooking? It smells so good" and he just said, "Come on over, we'll having a party" Anytime he just coming in. For the first hurricane I don't know hurricane he's just rain and she said, "Vijiya pick up all the pot, plants because hurricane force..."

AA: Wind will blow it out.

VA: Yeah and she just told me to put the tape on the glass door and everything and I never know before that they were very...

UQ: So how would you describe relations with your neighbors now?

AA: Nowadays just... I mean they're nice.

VA: They just say, "Hi" because...

UQ: Just "Hi""Bye" relations?

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AA: Yeah just "Hi" "Bye" relations.

VA: Young on both sides. The across street is old lady and a couple of weeks back she took me to shopping.

UQ: The old lady across the street?

AA: She wanted to go. She wanted help to go.

UQ: Oh...

VA: Because she's walking with a walker so I told her I will take you. I will drive my car. But she said no she will take her car because she has a new car. She will drive I will just go...

UQ: She has a walker but she can drive?

VA: Yeah. I just went with her and then we had a lunch and Olive Garden and she... they're nice.

UQ: Okay. Where is she from the old lady?

VA: She's from Chicago.

UQ: Chicago okay.

VA: She's 80 year old.

UQ: She lives by herself?

AA: No. She has a son here.

VA: Her son live with her yeah.

UQ: Okay.

VA: So they invited us two, three times for their parties and Christmas parties and everything but other two I don't know, the telephone number I don't know.

AA: But they are nice.

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VA: They are very nice.

UQ: It's the same for me and my neighbor.

VA: They say, "Hi, how are you?" everything.

UQ: It's the same in our neighborhood really. I mean people we just say, "Hi" "Bye" that's it.

AA: That's it "Hi" "Bye."

UQ: They don't even want you to do more than that. It's not that they are not doing... they don't want you to do anything more. They just want to, "Hi" "Bye" you.

VA: But only when I go to vacation the people used to pick up my newspaper or sometime if I said, "Just water my plant" they used to do that. Now nobody...

UQ: So when you left Alief how was your relationship with your neighbors at that time?

AA: Over there?

UQ: At the time you left Alief yeah.

AA: Oh the two three that were the old ones, I still go there to visit...

VA: We went to go see him yesterday. He's over 80.

AA: He's about 85. He's moving to a retirement home actually.

VA: Yeah 85.

AA: See he was saying, "Okay I'll come see you before you move."

VA: Yeah three years back his wife died so he's all alone here and even when we were neighbor whenever he used to need the ride or anything I used to give him a ride to work or the hospital.

AA: If he has medical problems then we take him to the hospital.

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VA: I used to then he got a stroke, so he was in a nursing home. So then his wife couldn't drive so I used to take wife every day to nursing home.

UQ: So you obviously were very close with your original neighbors, the ones who were there for a long time.

VA: Yeah.

AA: Yes.

UQ: The new neighbors, the ones who started living there?

AA: No they were the same thing, "Hi" "Bye"

VA: Yeah "Hi" "Bye."

UQ: And you would say the reason is because...working again?

AA: They just...the work environment is more I think.

VA: I don't know because...

AA: We don't have anything in common.

VA: We cannot say because I am a 63 year old and they are so young and he's my son's age. He's 40 yeah.

UQ: And what about the new neighbors that moved in, you said they were more blue collars as well?

AA: Blue collars, yes.

UQ: Do you think that affects the way they behave?

AA: Oh yes. That also is. Because they... we don't have that much to talk about you know. So their interests are totally different. They are more interested in hunting or things of that nature which I have zilch interest. So it's really I mean they even watch the different types of movies then we do.

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UQ: Okay.

AA: I mean it's just different I mean we don't eat at the same places we go eat.

UQ: Where do they eat?

AA: They are mostly into this fast food.

VA: Yeah, fast food.

AA: Greasy, fatty food! I mean the places we go they don't even know they existed.

UQ: So you just don't find that there is a common ground?

AA: No there's nothing. Otherwise you... many times you go as neighbors, you go eat some place.

VA: Yeah.

AA: Everybody pays their own, but at least you go together.

UQ: Yeah why do you think blue collar workers have these kinds of different tastes?

AA: I don't know, it's probably the environment. Because money wise, they are not that bad off.

VA: Because you see the old house that across street the colored people move. He was a truck driver. See every day he...

AA: Yeah and big family, one was a truck driver...

VA: They have a bunch of people living together and someday they threw...somebody used to come once in a while. So loud a music. Even the night time we couldn't sleep. That's a different you know because of the colored people they have so much loud music.

UQ: [In Urdu] So, why are they so different? This is what I'm trying to ask. Your first neighbors were similar to you, so what makes these neighbors so different?

VA: Yeah.

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AA: Yeah we don't know why but they were different.

VA: They were different because one time my son come and he said, "Mom please call the police because this is after 1:00 and my children cannot sleep. It's too loud." So I suggest half an hour is okay because I don't want to...

AA: They aren't that bad it used to be on the weekend anyway.

VA: Yeah weekend but see that time our grandchildren were little and they wanted to sleep.

UQ: Okay. We talked a little bit about where you lived. I ask people about the housing patterns. I ask them a little bit about marriage. [In Urdu] So, obviously your son has chosen his own spouse. If it were your choice, what kind of a person would you have wanted for him.

AA: All we would have preferred is that it was an Indian.

VA: Indian girl.

UQ: Indian, Marathi speaking?

AA: Not necessarily.

VA: Marathi, any Indian fine. Some Marathi, first choice.

AA: It's not that important. They don't speak... I mean they speak English.

VA: Yeah.

AA: So much a difference.

VA: They both speak Marathi with me. They have a little bit of an American accent, but they both speak Marathi to me. Marathi.

UQ: In your mind, you must have had some expectations. When my son gets married...



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VA: [In Urdu] Yeah, every mother has dreams.

UQ: It's true. Of course.

AA: I think that's pretty common.

UQ: It is. I would definitely agree.

AA: I mean, even the local people here if they are you know of a particular ancestry that is continued (not in Texas so much) but if you go in New York there is an Italian community. There is an Irish community and all that. Even there they don't like to go outside of that community.

UQ: It is where they are comfortable.

AA: It's not like they say, "Oh no, you can't marry, there's no such thing." But they prefer Italian to Italian, you know. Down here it's all mixed up so it's not much of a difference. Basically it's European or non European that's the only difference.

UQ: Though when your son married, what's her first name, the girl's first name?

VA: The girl's name, Michelle.

UQ: Michelle, so when he married Michelle what was the reaction of the community because she's not Indian?

AA: There are some others. My cousin who is my age he married an Anglo. He's not the first of a kind or any such things. So...

VA: \_\_\_\_\_.

AA: But it's not common so...

UQ: [In Urdu] It's not that common? Wouldn't you say that it's becoming common?

AA: No, it's still not common. Most of the Indians, I shouldn't say most. Quite a few Indians still marry Indian.

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VA: [In Urdu] Yeah. After my son got married, 2 or 3 of his friends married Americans.

AA: It is there but I'm just saying that more and more Indians are still marrying Indians I should say. There are some that marry everything. So it's nothing and there's nothing wrong with anybody marrying.

UQ: Okay. You didn't hear any kind of criticism at all?

AA: No.

UQ: [Begin Urdu] Your friends didn't say anything?

AA: No.

UQ: Everything was fine?

AA: Yeah, it's understood. No, it's not anything unusual.

VA: First, he did a Marathi style wedding and then he did an American one; so both ceremonies were done.

UQ: Was the wedding here in Houston?

VA: It was in Houston. [End Urdu]

UQ: What year?

VA: 1995.

AA: '96.

VA: '96, I'm sorry. 1996.

UQ: Okay. Though you don't see it very commonly, when it happens with non Indians, so is the marriage to usually white Americans, Hispanics, African Americans?

AA: Mostly whites, but there are others. I mean I know a few of the Indians have married Chinese or Philippines. I know some Indians have married Hispanics. Some

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Indians have married Africans. But more generally if it is outside of Indian then it is usually the Europeans.

UQ: Okay. Why do you think that is over Chinese over Hispanics?

AA: I guess that majority of our population is Europeans right?

UQ: Majority is that.

AA: I'm sure in another 20 years it will be Hispanics.

UQ: Do you think that will happen?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: Okay.

AA: They are more and more so... they will meet more Hispanic friends so the chance is better.

UQ: Is the reaction the same whether someone marries a European American or Hispanic American, African American; is the reaction about the same?

AA: I think basically the same. I think basically the same. I haven't seen anything anybody marrying anything, somebody marrying a Chinese and everybody pointing out.

VA: No.

UQ: No, it's nothing like this?

AA: At least not obvious. I mean I'm sure people have feelings and comments but it's not like all of the sudden it becomes a topic of discussion. There's no such thing so...

UQ: In passing any comments are made?

AA: No, at least I haven't been exposed to that.

UQ: [Begin Urdu] Has anyone said to you that "so-and-so has married someone white or black." Has anyone said anything like that you?

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VA: No, not for whites. Anita was telling, "I don't want my son to marry a BMW" she said [Laughs]. Black, white...

UQ: Black, Mexican, white?

VA: Yeah, black, Mexican white.

UQ: The majority of people don't say this, only a few say this?

VA: Very few people say anything. [End Urdu]

UQ: I have a few questions about kind of current events.

AA: Okay.

UQ: So one question is: do you think there is an immigration problem today?

AA: Kind of yes.

UQ: Can you explain?

AA: I mean illegal immigration is a problem, not legal immigration. Illegal immigration because that adds to the problem because, not all but the majority of the illegal immigration they come with the less education and they come with some unfortunate bad habits.

UQ: Such as what?

AA: Bad habits they are more into showing the physical power, you know hitting each other and hurting other people, physically. They may be involved in the theft and this kind of stuff.

UQ: Where are these immigrants the majority of them coming from?

AA: They are mostly from South or Central America, not necessarily Mexicans but all the way, you know. I mean some come... some are very honest and they come and they do the excellent work and everything. I'm not saying every single one is bad or any such

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thing. And of course if they are not here our cost of living will go up. That's a fact.

That's a fact because all the restaurants, all the janitor services, everything is now managed by those people. And so and they work hard. There's no... if you go to the restaurant if you see a Hispanic person working even an Indian restaurant there are Hispanic workers. So and they do a very good job. Even if they don't speak English they do their job. If they are a bus boy they come they clean it, take it out quickly and... so that's nothing and along with that they bring some elements that becomes a problem.

UQ: I see. Do you think that there should be stronger immigration control?

AA: Yeah it needs to be but it's not... it should not be inhumane. It should be humane. Whatever it is it should be humane. I mean everybody that is a human being should be treated with fairness and equality so and that's a fact. I mean that's not just because somebody is from here and thinks this way and somebody thinks that way.

UQ: So what would you say is the most important criteria to allow people to come into the U.S.?

AA: Well first of all it should be based on the economic needs. I mean when we have unemployment of 8% and 10%, I don't care legal, illegal there should not be any more immigration for temporary. If it drops to 6%, 5% that's okay. As long as they are checked out that they are honest hard workers it doesn't have to be a Ph.D. guy it could be a janitor that's okay but as long as we need the janitors and we... Like when we started coming in the 60s, and there used to be a quota for engineers, quota for doctors, quota for things of that nature and that was more fair because that was need, the need was met by bringing the people from outside instead of just anybody coming in. So I think that was a fair system.

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UQ: So where the labor is needed.

AA: Where the labor is needed.

UQ: That's what you should...Okay. Next question what do you think about government providing welfare?

AA: Well if it is provided to the people that are really need it then, yes, I'm all for it. But if it is misused (like they used to) I don't know whether you were here or not but in the 70s and all that there were people just treating welfare as a business. They would just go and collect their welfare and then just do some other things and will be driving a fancy car and all that. So that was the basic money that was meant for, for a family to have room and board and all that. That was wasted. That was bad. Welfare is such that if it is done to the people who really need it. The homeless people are taken in and fed them or give them shelter that's great. That type of welfare is good but just welfare and people using it...misusing it is a problem.

UQ: Do you think it's still largely misused?

AA: Nowadays it's not as much.

VA: We used to see them wearing the nice clothes and riding the Lexus and went to the food stamps on Fiesta in front of me.

AA: That...

UQ: That's what you mean by misuse is taking that money and putting it to those kind of expenses. Okay, so do you think that's how the system is largely used even now?

AA: No, I don't think it's now used that badly now. It was the worst in the 70s. No, now it is... first of all it is much restricted. So it is going in the right direction. It's not there where it should be but it's much better I'll say improvement of at least 70%.

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UQ: Okay. How do you define "The American dream" when you hear that phrase what do you think?

AA: Well for most of the people the media to them freedom is a big thing. To me freedom is a big thing but I grew up in a free country. So for me that's not a big transition. I mean if I had come from a communist country or something I would have said that freedom is a big deal. But I came from India it was a democracy so... it's freedom I expect it to be. So freedom although it is American dream for me it's a way of living, because I always lived like that.

UQ: So is there something that's a part of the American dream that isn't in other places?

AA: I will say that living conditions are different. I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about living conditions. Like the cleanliness, the infrastructure, discipline at least in certain communities is much more here than you will see in place like India and I'm sure Pakistan is the same way.

UQ: So what would you say the problems in the U.S. are today?

AA: Today, the problems are people are not giving enough importance to education.

UQ: Why do you say that?

AA: Because what is happening is without studying much some people succeed and other people assume that if you don't study you will be following them. But they forget that for every one successful uneducated person there are thousands that have failed. So the role models are wrong is what I'm saying.

UQ: Okay is this a new problem?

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AA: It's more dominant now than it used to be. Because the difference is these guys who become successful are overly wealthy, you know I'm talking about...

UQ: Can you give me an example?

AA: Like an athlete okay? 40 years back athlete was making more money than normal people but it was not \$100,000 to \$10 million it was \$10,000 to \$30,000 so if it was \$100,000 to \$300,000 or half a million it's not a big deal. But \$100,000 to \$10 million is a big deal.

UQ: Okay, so who is following these athletes as role models? Who is holding them up?

AA: Who is following them?

UQ: Who is holding them up? Whose role model is this? It's not your role model right?

AA: No, but it is the role model of the younger ones who don't want to study. They always... you know if you talk to their parents. I have a tough time with my kid because he wants to be a football player. I keep telling him, don't dream on it if you make it you make it, but if you don't you should have a good education but he doesn't agree with it. I mean that's the story I've heard too many times.

UQ: At work or in the Indian community?

AA: At work not in Indian communities are not in athletics yet.

UQ: Okay so is it possibly a factor of culture?

AA: Yes.

UQ: Is the disinterest in education could it be a cultural thing?



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AA: Yes, because they get the things in life easy; they don't have to work for it to get anything.

UQ: Okay tell me who gets these things easy the athletes or?

AA: Yeah.

UQ: Or someone else?

AA: I mean they don't have to work at it. I mean they have a God given talent don't get me wrong I mean you know and they work at it. There are always the people who work at it and improve themselves and then get it. But the majority of them are just God given thing, hitting the right place at the right time and going up and then some guy, little guy says, "Okay, well I don't want to study. He didn't study." So that's what happens the role models are bad.

UQ: Okay, in the Indian community you would say this is not quite the problem.

AA: The Indian community at least until now is not a problem.

UQ: Okay.

AA: Indian community is other way around they want to make money fast, so nobody wants to go to medical school anymore. I mean if you see all the smart kids they want to go to this business finance side because by the time they are 25 they can make millions.

UQ: You don't say; engineering doesn't seem to be as popular a choice anymore?

Like when you were here you said 35%...

AA: Oh yeah it's our time...

UQ: It's gone?

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AA: That's it. Now, nobody wants to be an engineer because it's a hard school. After hard school you don't get what you...and many of them are engineers and then they go into finance.

UQ: So you...

AA: Finance is where the money is right now in this country.

UQ: So Indians follow the money.

AA: Oh yeah, Indians follow the money.

UQ: Second generation, they are following the money.

AA: Yes, absolutely they follow money. Not only money, they want a quick money.

UQ: Quick money.

AA: Doctors also make a lot of money but they don't make money until they are 35, 40 years old.

UQ: Yeah.

AA: These guys can make double that by the time they are 30.

UQ: My daughter says the same thing. I don't want to be in school so long, okay.

AA: Yeah. I'll give you an example my recently one of our... my cousin is a doctor and his friend came over. I mean he's an Indian but he's a Muslim guy and his wife also is a doctor from India. I mean they both are doing very well but they are both kids didn't go to medical school. They are smart, it's not like they couldn't get into. They both did MBA's but he said their bonuses are more than I make in a year. See how can I say this? And these kids are about 30 or something like that. He was telling me they make their bonuses are higher than my whole income and I'm practicing for 30 years.

UQ: So that's what the Indians do and the Pakistanis, same thing?

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AA: Yeah same thing.

UQ: What would you say that European Americans... their kind of...

AA: What did you say?

UQ: What would you say European Americans, their... sort of... drive is?

AA: They are also is European Americans even 30 years ago education was not as dominant as it was in Asian communities and it is still not there.

UQ: It's not.

AA: But it is more than Africans or Hispanics.

UQ: So African Americans...

AA: They still are, there are some and I have one of my colleges is African and he's a very smart kid and his kids are very smart so that's not the point but as a rule they don't view education as much importance as Asians do whether it's Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese whatever it is.

UQ: What are they giving importance to?

AA: They just want athletics, entertainment.

UQ: Quicker, easier money?

AA: Quicker, easier money.

UQ: Even quicker than the Indians.

AA: Yes, quicker than the Indians but what they forget is at least the Indians with finance and all that you have a chance of success is more than 50/50. With athletics and all of that all you get is one busted knee your athleticism is over. I mean not every singer gets a chance to be in the right recording system. But that they don't realize. They still have the big, big problem.

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UQ: Why do you think they hold athletes up as role models versus holding up kind of educational figures or that sort of thing as well?

AA: Because education what do you say to the kid? Well he's a Ph.D. and he has written ten books so the kid says, "Okay so what." But if he says, "Okay he's a NBA player or he's a golfer or whatever or he's on the screen" and everybody is running around it's the glamour of Beyoncé you know she's singing and dancing just everybody looks at her.

UQ: Is there a possible maybe a cultural reason why they have not excelled in school?

AA: Partly yes, but I think it's more to do with the emphasis on it. I don't think it's a God given ability is not there. That's not... there are some, I mean they have the learning disability and that is okay but the majority of them they just don't want to put the effort into it. If they don't know something they say, "Well I don't know that's okay." And then they go from first, second, third, fourth, up to twelfth and somewhere they disappear.

UQ: Okay. I didn't ask anything about your daughter. She went to school here in Houston?

AA: Yeah, yeah. No, she went to UT.

UQ: She went to UT and where does she work?

AA: Well right now she's not working but she used to work for...

VA: Last three years she lost her job. She used to work in banking.

AA: She was in the bank doing all the loan analysis and all that kind of stuff.

UQ: But she hasn't been able to find solid employment?

AA: Yeah.

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UQ: Wow. That's rough she's really affected by the economy right now.

AA: Yes.

UQ: Were you affected by the economy in the 80's; engineers were strongly...

AA: Oh yeah I lost a job but I was lucky to get a job within two weeks or so.

UQ: Wow.

AA: So I was not... I mean I had to take a pay cut, etc. but at least I was able to get a job. I was not unemployed for 6 months or 3 months or anything like that.

UQ: Okay. Next question is: are there groups here in the U.S. who are discriminated against?

AA: From what point?

UQ: Any.

AA: Oh yeah there is still discrimination does exist from all sides. I mean the businesses run by a particular group then the other groups are not even given a chance and that group could be anybody.

UQ: People tend to favor their own.

AA: I mean simple thing if there is an Indian business there are not that many even the Europeans working there right? I'm not talking about just the restaurant. I'm talking about even the businesses. If they ran a business accounting agency or law offices or whatever it is, a doctor's office they are all employees are usually from the same community.

UQ: Okay. What's the best way to keep housing values up in a neighborhood? You talked a lot about housing values going down.

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AA: The biggest problem in this country especially in this state is they are building too many new houses away and away.

UQ: Away meaning further?

AA: Further and further 30 miles, 40 miles, 60 miles. I mean until that stops it's going to be a problem. What is happening it's not like the house itself is bad or any such thing but it just gets vacant and then some riff raffs come stay there and neighbors leave and that becomes the house like that and before you know it that price goes down while somewhere else 10 miles further the same... it's just like what happened to Alief, a good example. Alief to Sugar Land to Katy. That doesn't mean the overall economy was improving. Sugar Land was not... Sugar Lland was doing it but at a cost of Houston. Like when they opened Sugar Land Mall, the Sharpstown Mall went down, right? So to me that's not a growth. It is a growth to Sugar Land, but it's not a growth for the community as such and such because you lost jobs there and that became a problem area and then you've got it here. Another 20 years they will go further beyond Rosenberg.

UQ: It just shifts the problem around.

AA: Yeah.

UQ: Nothing is solved.

AA: They just have to stop building away and away. That's the problem of having this vast big country, too much space. So I mean in other countries you go in a small area with a big 50 million people, 70 million people. So they live close by. Everything is less than 10 miles, 15 miles and then they have public transportation. We have no public transportation here anyways.

UQ: Why did you choose to live here instead of closer in?

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AA: I actually I looked at it 2, 3 times but I don't have anybody, any of my friends that I visit nobody lives in downtown. Otherwise I would love to live in downtown because we are only two people. I mean downtown is a nice place to live. You know have a townhouse or something like that.

UQ: It's exciting.

AA: And there's the public transportation, medical center is nearby, shopping is nearby; restaurants are nearby, stadiums are nearby so what more do I need? But there's nobody there!

UQ: Well there's nobody...

AA: That I associate with is there I should say.

UQ: Right okay. Alright I guess the last question is do you think we have a race problem in America today?

AA: It is there but it's not as dominant as it used to be. It is still there I mean especially in the smaller towns it's more dominant. You can easily notice it I shouldn't say dominant. You can easily notice it in a smaller town. But bigger times is less and less. In industrial area is less and less because people work together you know go to school together.

UQ: Whereas in a small town...?

AA: Small town it's still there I mean still certain people living a certain area and they don't go to the same school and their parents don't want to associate with them and things of that nature. It's much less than what it was 40 years ago let's be honest.

UQ: Okay.

AA: It's there but it's not a big factor anymore.

UQ: Okay so what is remaining what do you think will happen? Do you eventually think it will be faded out?

AA: Not in my lifetime. Or it may be in my grandkids times though.

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UQ: Yeah? Do you think any additional legislation needs to be passed?

AA: For such things?

UQ: Yeah after the Civil Rights Act you know that was a long time ago.

AA: As long as we maintain those things and not cut, you know find excuses to cut it you know. You know like Texas I think they have made a new thing a new idea to carry your voter registration card otherwise you can't vote. I mean otherwise you can go on a driver's license. I mean they had the list anyway so it's not like you are illegal citizen but now they added one more restriction on the people. That's not required. So basically you are taking away you are not... you are adding the legislation which is kind of hindering the growth of integration.

UQ: Okay.

AA: Because who is not going to have that card is people that are poor people and who are the poor people? It is the non whites. It is the Hispanics or Africans. So you are going to say, "Oh you can't vote because you don't have that card with you"?

UQ: So then they don't have a voice.

AA: Whatever little voice they have, is going.

UQ: It's kind of like moving backwards in time isn't it?

AA: Yeah I mean these kinds of things, that's why I'm saying, these kinds of legislation is hindrance to the growth.

UQ: Okay.

AA: Whatever they find a reason for it but those are bad things.

UQ: What do you think of affirmative action, it's not on here but it just occurred to me?



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AA: It cannot be forever. I mean you know like it was for African Americans, you know they are given even chances for a particular school or a particular profession and I think those... that time is gone. I don't think they need that anymore. They still need it in the private businesses. I mean from affirmative action for union contracts and so on. I think that is still needed for another 30 years, 20 years. But the education and just the regular jobs and all that I don't think we need anymore. Their time is passed.

UQ: You think there is enough presence of minority groups in work places?

AA: Yes. Workplaces now you don't need that, you know. But you do need for self-businesses. That thing is because it still is a "old boy's" network.

UQ: By self-businesses you mean?

AA: If I want to start a business okay I need a little extra protection as a minority, okay, because I cannot necessarily compete with the big boys that have their own golf courses and they make the deals on the golf course. I am not in that group.

UQ: You are not part of the network.

AA: Yes.

UQ: Okay.

AA: So I do need that. But to get a job I don't need that.

UQ: Okay.

End of Interview

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<sup>1</sup> Parla is suburb just west of Mumbai. Also known as Parle.