

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Virinder Bansal
University of Houston Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
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Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Bansal home, Houston, Texas

UQ: This is the oral history interview of Virinder “Ben” Bansal and this is in his home in Houston, Texas on August 28, 2011. Interviewer’s name is Uzma Quraishi. Alright, you can begin by telling a little bit about yourself, who you are and your childhood, your background.

VB: My name is Virinder Bansal. Currently I live in Houston. I immigrated to United States on September 23, 1970 from India. I immigrated under Third Preference, “Professionals in Short Supply,” so that is the basis of my immigration and later certification from India to the United States.

UQ: Where in India were you born?

VB: In the state of Punjab.

UQ: Okay and is that where your family is also from, your ancestors from Punjab?

VB: Yes, right.

UQ: Okay, how old were you when you came to Houston?

VB: 30 years.

UQ: Okay...

VB: No, when...I came to New York first. My port of entry was New York and we came to Houston in 1975 so I was 35 years old when I came to Houston.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: I see so when you came to New York did you live there and work there as well?

Is that where you got your first job?

VB: That's right.

UQ: Okay and what company was that?

VB: My first job?

UQ: Yes.

VB: The name of the company was R-a-a-m-o-t, Raamot Associates. They were an engineering company and I worked in the engineering field for 4 years before I came to Houston on a company job transfer.

UQ: So you were with the same company when you came to Houston?

VB: No.

UQ: No, transferred?

VB: I worked with that company for two years. Then I transferred to another company, another company but then in '74, I was with a company called...I came to Houston with a company called Lummus.

UQ: How do you spell it?

VB: L-u-m-m-u-s. It was a petrochemical (it is, it was and it is) a petrochemical engineering company. So I came to Houston to work on a construction project in 1975.

UQ: How would you compare New York as a city versus Houston as a city?

VB: Oh, too damn different! Totally damn different. At that time. Knowing as much as I knew there was a pretty stark difference between the surroundings of New York and Houston at that time. Because I came on the construction site, my interaction was with more crafts people and people who work in the field than in the office and design. So my

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

interaction was a totally diverse. I came to know about another dimension of Texas as a state and the people from that state were in a different setting. So my experience was totally different in a positive way but it was pretty diverse, difference between the people I dealt with in the mode of transportation, matters of transportation, ease of transportation was totally different here because here you have to drive 100%. There is no public transportation readily accessible to my site in Channelview, Texas that is where the refinery was. I was on the refinery construction for four years.

UQ: I see. So tell me about the people who you interacted with here at that refinery.

VB: Well, they were local construction workers and local supervisors so I dealt with people on two levels, in supervising capacity and in a coworkers' [capacity]. And so the people from the State of Texas they were, because they were in a trade, they were in a vocation, they were in a particular construction trade so the treatment was very informal to formal but working relationship was really cordial and I learned a lot how this industry works in this country. At the same time as supervising staff, the people I reported to they were in a different setting also. Their method was very direct and but it was very personal because we had to be on the job and deliver our services in a more direct manner.

UQ: Okay when you came in '75 the workers, the construction workers, what was their ethnic background mostly?

VB: Mostly we dealt with 70% white. That was a difference. That was... I can now draw that line and draw the comparison. Most of the construction workers on the refinery, they were white local Texans.

UQ: What were the rest, the 30%?

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder**Interview Date: August 28, 2011**

VB: The other not even 30% I would say 15 to 20% were a combination of African American blacks and Spanish and we dealt mostly with the local Texan, white mid-age 35 to 40 to 45 age group as construction workers and their supervisors. There were very few blacks at that time. There were very few Spanish at that time and my location of the work was Channelview Texas.

UQ: How did they generally treat you?

VB: They did not know anything about me. On the spot whatever interaction I created they did not make any assumptions. They did not ask any questions on the face value. They took me on the face value for the purpose intended because I was one of the supervisors in some cases. In some cases I was a colleague so they took me on the face value.

UQ: Okay. So in New York you had an office job and so your interaction was not in the field it was in the office?

VB: Well more office but see my field job in New York was of independent nature because I was in the testing field that in that capacity you work independently. When I came here I came here on the construction site where I was a construction supervisor so I had to interact with more people all day long.

UQ: I see. How would you compare New Yorkers to Texans at that time? What was your impression of the people kind of as a whole? Did you find them to be the same?

VB: I'm... a lot of differences but as I say our interaction is on a professional basis and more than likely it is for a purpose so there was no interaction on a non-professional basis.

UQ: You didn't socialize with them outside of work?

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: No, very, very little. Very little. We were so much in that time, we were in the early process of settling. We had our own small little adjustments that we had to make and we are so totally engrossed in our personal life at home was totally personal and if at all we interacted we interacted with a few Indian families that were around and then comes the work 5 to 6 days a week and then over the weekend a small interaction, groceries and going to mostly I would say the small interaction over the weekend, maybe 5% to 10% interaction with non Indian groups and that, again, was totally on a participation basis, picnics and/or some, you go to a game to watch. Those are the things that we did. You go to a movie, you go to a sports event or you go to, you know like not a family to family, no. No, zero interaction with local Americans in New York and/or Houston up until I would say 1977, I would. And then we started kind of opening up a little bit. From 1977 when we were in Houston we opened up a little bit and we started interacting with some local coworkers after 5. Okay well let's have a meal or let's travel together a little bit over weekend. So our interaction on a family basis with Americans was very little all the way through up until today I would say up until today mostly in the office, mostly we would interact with them a lot in the office. That continued. So I left Lummus. I left Lummus in '78 I went to Iraq on a job with Lummus. I came back and I left and I joined another company called Kellogg here in Houston. In Kellogg again I was a construction engineer I traveled from Houston to Lake Charles, Louisiana. Stayed there 5 days and came back to Houston 2 days over the weekend. As I say, because of the nature of my work, it was... all my dealings with Americans and the local people were professional but when we came from New York to Houston the striking difference was there is union workers in New York and this is a right to work state so we were

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

dealing with people who could, who were not paid as well as unions but at the same time they were allowed to work as open shop. That was a big difference. So suddenly from a union state you come to a non union state and there is a... the work culture changes.

UQ: In what way?

VB: Union worker is restricted to do certain tasks and they are not allowed to deviate.

So in an open to work state you are allowed to do more tasks even though you are not classified as a fitter or a pump fitter or electrician for example. You can touch mechanical parts. You are electrician but you can touch mechanical parts and nobody is going to object and/or sue you. In unions if you are an electrician you cannot touch mechanical pump. So that is a very big difference or the labor for that reason. So that was a striking difference between New York and Houston.

UQ: I've heard some people say that New Yorkers are kind of a lot more hurried and some would say even rude versus Texans being more open and friendly. What did you find?

VB: Well it depends you know as I say I am describing my relationship on a professional basis. It is the pace of life is different as I say because of the mode of transportation, methods of transportation. I would say my interaction with the people who are professional was no different and that's, those things, those encounters were kind of a social setting or a personal setting or a personal interaction. There is a general comment somebody can make but that is a general observation. What setting are you in? You know what I'm saying? If the other person is in a hurry and you are not, so that is apparent but then you know that is a that is the call of a person and I am getting out of my house 6:30 in the morning and coming back to work at 7:30, 8:00 and then I'm coming

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

back at 5:00 so my pace is my... I am in that initial setting you know picture the 70's is very regimented you know what I'm saying? I'm so structured in my mind to be organized to be timely, to be regular to be conforming to the standards that I do not want to think of the things that don't concern me, you know my job. I am at that time my concern is to settle myself, to prove myself, to make space for myself so that is my outlook at that time.

UQ: Okay.

VB: So yeah in general when you are coming here you ask somebody, somebody who doesn't drive for example. I mean say for example the culture in New York is people don't drive right and if I am driving for my job and I am asking a local person for directions he has never driven what can he tell you? "I don't know." See what I'm saying. Maybe even if it's two streets down he doesn't know. So I am saying that you consider that as being rude and/or but he doesn't know so I am taking that way so I should not... first of all I should not be asking a pedestrian about the driving instructions. My driving instructions should come from a person who drives.

UQ: Drives right.

VB: Okay?

UQ: Did you find any... that your being a foreigner...?

VB: All the time.

UQ: ...proved to be sort of challenging for other?

VB: Oh yeah, all the time.

UQ: Can you give me some specific instances?

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: No question about it. Communication continues to be a problem up until today. I mean you and I are communicating, you are drawing your own conclusions from how I speak, what I speak, my English, my pronunciation so I am who I am. But then I never could understand what is the percentage of communication the other person has understood me. For example, he or she understood me, I thought. How much, I did not know and my speed of talking has slowed down a lot now. In general when we came from India our speed of talking was really fast and we thought we were communicating and now hindsight tells me, I think we were losing a lot in communication. And in general American society is very polite to not rudely reject you. They try to connect point A to B and in between they try to connect the points. That's what I understand today and then I can go back. But then I had some people from my country who were my coworkers...

UQ: What kind of workers?

VB: Coworkers.

UQ: Oh, coworkers.

VB: For example I worked with people from Lebanon...

UQ: Sure.

VB: I worked with people from Russia in New York and the company that I first joined that person was from the country of Armenia, Armenian so they had their own pronunciation they had their own east European you know situation so they understood me, my English in certain times was better understood than theirs but then because they had been there for long time they did not change. See the one striking difference that I now I'm not trying to change. See we were we were trying to modify our communication

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

and pronunciations thinking that we want to be more communicative by changing our own pronunciation and/or matter of speaking which was not the case with the east Europeans that we worked with. They were from Yugoslavia they were from Czechoslovakia they were from Armenia, they were from... they kept their method of talk and communication the same and let it be understood by the other person that he or she is from Armenia or from Italy or from... I tried to change and that was not good. So somewhere we lost in between. Then I realized, "No you don't... you be who you are." So today that's what the situation. I am trying to be who I am. Over the number of years we have learned that you don't have to change your pronunciation you try to express yourself slowly and clearly the way you can today without changing your tone your expression. Of course you have to be polite and you have to be expressive as best as you can and you should pay attention to the mood. For example I'm looking at you, watching you. If I'm losing you I should be able to judge you and say, "Ma'am is there anything I can do to make myself clear?" That is something we do now.

UQ: Okay. Were you ever, did anyone ever treat you badly on the basis of you being a foreigner whether at work our outside of work?

VB: Badly? Not badly but differently. For example I have recollection of two or three instances I was walking down the street in New York. It was dusk. It was in the evening after hours between when the sun is setting so the complexion is darker. So you are walking, I remember walking in Queens on a street to try to go to my house and I think I lost my way. I am trying, because this is in my first 12 months. So now, you know, somebody so I'm trying to ask somebody and somebody said, they thought I'm going to go and attack somebody, you know what I'm saying? So they didn't tell me the

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

directions what I was trying to look for when I was in a little light. Then I realized maybe you know I should have not asked somebody just maybe I should go to the proper intersection and ask some business instead of just a passerby. Other than that...

UQ: What do you think it was they were thinking?

VB: Either somebody is going to mug me or something I don't know. We have very good experience in New York. My wife worked at several stores she traveled by subway in the night odd times. She had odd jobs. No we did not have any incident of mugging and/or being treated badly on the subway and we were treated with respect in our apartment. We were...our needs were met.

UQ: What about here in League City any instances of being treated badly?

VB: You mean in Channelview?

UQ: In Channelview I'm sorry League City...Channelview.

VB: No it was different. We were treated very fairly and squarely at the bank when we came here. In general my experience of the local people was very cordial. I was never rebuked and/or harassed and/or humiliated? No.

UQ: Okay what about the... you said that it was the vast majority white Americans working in Channelview and very small percentage of African Americans and Hispanics.

VB: Hispanics right.

UQ: So did those groups interact with each other a lot socially not at work but outside of work? How did you?

VB: I don't know.

UQ: Not sure? Okay and treatment of the African Americans how was that professional?

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: What I could understand because no direct... but my sense, my sense was they did not want, they did not want to connect socially no. They did not want to connect socially. That culture has changed dramatically now between '70's, '80's and today. At that time my observation for those 40 years is, because it was Brown and Root so that is who our contractor was so Brown and Root had a work force which was 70%, 75% I would say white local whites.

UQ: During lunch did these groups interact with each other, have lunch together?

VB: Oh yes they did but I don't know because they go to a break room. We are in a supervisory staff, we go to a different place. I wouldn't be able to comment on that but I would say professionally there was a code that they have to conduct but then outside, my general impression was that their interaction outside the work was very little.

UQ: Okay you obviously weren't with the construction workers in terms of you know working, you know, hand to hand with them...

VB: No.

UQ: ...but from your own impression why do you think that is? Why do you think there wasn't that interaction outside of work?

VB: It was I would say the country was in the mode of adjustment. They were learning because the Civil Rights movement just happened in '63, '64 the country is trying to adjust they were not used to this. There was no... it is not a question of why, the question is it takes time for these things to settle. People don't... people normally do not need to adjust to any culture other than theirs unless and until they have to and it takes time and there is no reason for some people to do that. And the reason that some of the construction workers ever talked to me is because I am their supervisor otherwise

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

they don't need to know who I am. They don't even need to know my full name. They don't want to. They don't need to. There is no...food is diametrically opposite, I'm in general, vegetarian, so all the diametrically....struggle up and until today for the food habits. So very little interaction. You go, you cannot go to a lot of these places because there's a lot of drinking, a lot of food, a lot of meat. Those things are, have been traditionally very much...

UQ: So even today when you interact socially with your friends, they are largely Indian?

VB: No. These...today is a diverse culture [at work]. All day we are dealing with...with a typical get together it's two local whites...see, there is a group of 10: I'm from India, my next door neighbor is from Egypt, the next door neighbor is from Syria. The next door neighbor is from Lebanon. My boss is from Iran and then his secretary is Spanish/Mexican and the co-secretary the second administrative person, she is a local black. The next door person is from Vietnam, the next door person is from China, and then there is one from Pakistan and the last one in our group is from he is a local American married to a Filipino. So that is group.

UQ: That is your work place now?

VB: That is my work place.

UQ: Okay do you ever go out with any of these folks outside of work?

VB: Yes, we go out every month.

UQ: What kinds of things do you do?

VB: No, "go out" means lunch.

UQ: Okay what about on the weekends?

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: No. No.

UQ: Or the evenings?

VB: No. Weekend is 100% Indian.

UQ: Okay.

VB: 100% Indian and South Asian, yes.

UQ: Okay if you had to label yourself for demographic purposes what labels would you use? So for example...

VB: I'm an Asian, I'm a South Asian, American, Indian-born American citizen.

That's it.

UQ: Okay.

VB: Indian born American citizen. All my professional life I have with non Indians. Okay? My preference would be to deal with a mixture. My preference would be to be very select group of Indians. I would like my children, my grandchildren to interact with the locals with no specific walls to be drawn. No we do not have that. We are very... my professional life is with non Indians. I do not make an effort to be associating with Indians out of the way than normal. My association with my Indian community is on social events. Otherwise I am so busy because I have a, my side interest for example, I am little bit outside of my engineering profession. My preference would be that these kids, my grandchildren would interact with as many locals in addition to Indians as possible. It is a struggle and acceptability has been a problem.

UQ: Acceptability of?

VB: Acceptability of each other.

UQ: Okay.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder**Interview Date: August 28, 2011**

VB: There are anticipations as and when we have broken those walls we have been received well. If I anticipate certain things then you hesitate to communicate and create a common ground. So as and when we have had the interaction with another ethnic group it has been, it has been well received. But the initiative from the local white community is very material dependent. There is no open communication between people unless and until they know that you are in an advantageous position to give them some benefit materially. If you are placed in an advantageous position where you have the power to grant them some contract and/or a service contract and/or a service or you happen to be a supervisor because of your professional capacity then there is a more... then that is the only way in my estimation that there is a reception from the other side. Otherwise there is no voluntary reception. You can live in the same subdivision for so long. You have to have a commonality has to center around. Either you are neighbors; I mean you are communicating on issues like for example here. This is a good example. In this community we are here. We have no neighbors other than; we have no neighbors that we communicate with.

UQ: How long have you been in this neighborhood?

VB: Eleven years.

UQ: Eleven years. Why did you move to this neighborhood as opposed to any other?

VB: Being central.

UQ: Central to?

VB: Being central to everything. My work, hospitals, my parents who are, they are no more. We needed to be near hospitals. We needed to be near schools; my son's school. Our neighbors our next door neighbor is a Greek family, very good and when we talk

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

very nice but there is no commonality. I mean the total culture is different, total culture is different. I mean their work is different. Their businesses are different. And for example they have a Christmas celebration once a year but do you know it's totally different. Do you know like that Greek Egyptian and they have a Christmas celebration once after a week. So we were... the next door neighbor he was a black, he just died but he was in a different kind of a profession and so one thing is that we go out of the way to interact with other ethnic communities but there has to be commonality. Some commonality either professional or children or some business proposition that you are trying to discuss. Unless there is a commonality there is now voluntarily just for the heck of it let's go play field ball. Let's go and play... let's go for a drink. See the commonality those...I cannot go and discuss my personal things with the next door American two doors down. I mean this is not such a friendship that I can exchange my views with him. That has been impediment all the way through. It is just, really there is a groupism, that is, people like to restrict themselves to their groups where they have a commonality that is general, in general and I don't feel bad about it. I don't feel a lack of it. I mean there is enough communication in the office to the point that we understand professionally. People don't open up. When we want to talk on certain... sometimes the conversation in the office goes in a tangent and we communicate for the kids, for the family, their education, their college, some problems but it is not voluntary.

UQ: Do you feel that obviously it would have been different if you had remained in India as far as interactions with neighbors, right? Because there would have been that commonality?

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: I don't even know how important that is today's world. It was very important when I was growing up. Today with this IT and globalization it is going away. Nobody cares anymore. I would not know... it would be neighborly; definitely it would be better but how important it is in today's world I don't know.

UQ: Did you find more commonality with either of your neighbors the Greek versus the black neighbor?

VB: Our interaction with our neighbors on the Greek side has been more friendly than on the African American side. These are not a typical example either because he was by himself most of the time. He didn't have a family so I don't know.

UQ: He generally kind of kept to himself no matter who it was?

VB: That's right.

UQ: Alright. So you've been in this neighborhood for eleven years. Have you found that the neighborhood has changed over this time or since?

VB: Yes.

UQ: Really?

VB: The neighborhood has changed [in] that it used to be people the younger group used to move out. The younger group is moving back in this area, South Maplewood and Meyerland. The younger group is moving back. It used to be labeled as [age] 60-plus Jewish American population type of you know people in that group and they were stabilized and retired people the parents would be here and parents would move away. But that's changing. You see a lot of renovation, new houses being constructed within a mile from here and within a mile, mile and a half is Bellaire, you know. So that's changing yes.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: Has the housing value increased, decreased, stayed the same?

VB: In our case it has been I would say reasonably steady here. Neighborhood has changed because Mexicans and Hondurans and people from Nicaragua and from El Salvador that landscape has changed because... in this, right here in our pocket, no, but just half a mile from here the landscape changes. The landscape changes half a mile from here, you know in Meyerland there is a little different age group and income group so we were in the very middle income group here. And we are now the only thing is the population age group has changed. I would say that we are not all 60-plus there is a mixture of about 40-plus, 50-plus something like that.

UQ: I see has that influx of Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, has that impacted housing values?

VB: No. Why? Because the Guatemalans and Honduras and El Salvadorians they are right now in a transition stage. They haven't started buying into... this is the working class which has changed this landscape. They have changed the rental structure. The rentals used to be whatever, now it is different.

UQ: Rentals of like house rentals?

VB: Not so much owner...not so much ownership of the houses I think.

UQ: Oh, so you mean more of the houses are going for rent?

VB: Not houses there's more apartments in this area.

UQ: I see.

VB: There's a few houses that they are renting. What I am saying is right now they are in a transition stage. They are settling themselves. They are deciding on where to go. They may start buying houses and/or properties because I think their concentration is

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

right now to settle themselves in business and they're working right class now. The landscape that has changed from those communities is more workers in this area are from those three or four countries.

UQ: Okay. Do you ever have occasion to interact with them?

VB: No other than our services that they provide in the area?

UQ: Such as?

VB: Lawn mowing. We go to their restaurants. We eat their food that's about it.

UQ: Interesting.

VB: It hasn't... some people think it is a high crime area.

UQ: Is it?

VB: Some people think. There was a survey by Houston Police. My own brother-in-law who lives in Sugarland he has told me, "You know have you not thought about moving from here because it is labeled as a high crime area when you go on the computer?"

UQ: Really?

VB: Used to be. On the intersection of Bellaire and Hillcroft there were a lot of complaints basically. You know see how the statistics goes in the police department is, I work for the City of Houston I know how the statistics work. For example, you know, if you live in Houston or have a water leak or have a sewer back up okay? So then for example on your street if we get 20 complaints for example in a 90 day period right? Then what we do is we generalize. Then we make a statistical analysis so that's what happened about two years ago, three years ago. There was a rampant of complaints in that area of Houston and Bellaire at one time Houston Police posted a squad on the corner

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

of Hillcroft and Bellaire. It used to be police presence in the night 24 hours about two years ago. The area has since changed completely. There is a Sharpstown Management District now. And they have brought in extreme high degree of improvements in the area. You may have seen the changes in the signage?

UQ: This is the Sharpstown area? Is that what this is part of?

VB: No well we are on the tip of it.

UQ: Okay.

VB: The Sharpstown area really stops at Bissonnet and Hillcroft.

UQ: I see.

VB: So you will see the new road that has been constructed along Hillcroft from Highway 59 to Bellaire and you will see those traffic boulevards in between they have noses that have been totally decorated with bricks and with fountains and with landscape that has been done by Sharpstown Management District. The signage along Bellaire, you see the sign next door if you pay attention it is not an old green and white Houston sign.

These are large bold black and white signs which have been put by Sharpstown Management District. And so that, that has brought in a lot of stability in the area. So the... in fact the influx of Salvadorians, of Honduras has provided a better understanding of the culture because they are competing with Mexicans. So the Mexicans, Hondurans and Salvadorians they are the competition amongst themselves. That has created a very healthy competition. It has brought stability to the area.

UQ: Interesting.

VB: They are trying to compete in a constructive way. Who is better than the other is for them to decide but they are all trying to provide a better service. Sharpstown

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

Management District has provided a very positive climate and you may have seen the changes in the area, in the number of stores that are changing faces and the number of businesses that are changing faces that has... it has stabilized Gulfton. See, Gulfton and Renwick used to be a troubled spot. It has been stabilized.

UQ: How?

VB: By the influx.

UQ: I see.

VB: By Sharpstown Management District.

UQ: I see.

VB: By police actions. They used to be a labor pool on the corner of Renwick and Southwest Freeway. There used to be a labor pool on Westpark and 59. And that labor pool has been organized into a room. There have been two or three multicultural centers that have been built Baker Ripley Multicultural Center. Have you heard about that?

UQ: No.

VB: Baker Ripley Multicultural Center is a very positive force in the area and then City of Houston Multicultural Center on... what are the street? Near... yeah off of Hillcroft very close to Sandhill, no, no... those things are a very positive force. All of those things put together have stabilized the area and they see that Sharpstown Center that has now been bought by America Plaza, that has been stabilized. Okay? All the development on 59 and Bellaire and Hillcroft it is a totally different landscape. See there were defunct businesses on the corner of Bellaire and Fondren if you noticed there used to be a Gillman car distributorship that has gone but that has gone since 8 years. Now that land of several hundred acres was vacant. Now it has been committed. There is a

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

developer who is working on that. There was a hospital that closed on Bellaire called Twelve Oaks. That has been bought by Kipp Acadamy. That has changed because Sharpstown Management District helped their Sharpstown Center to be sold to Plaza America under a TIRZ program. Tax Reinvestment, you are in a tax reinvestment zone. That means what the developers are being encouraged to develop businesses and no taxes for the next 5 to 10 years.

UQ: So it's a tax-free investment zone?

VB: TIRZ, T-I-R-Z Tax Reinvestment Zone and there are two of them in this area! So that has made a very positive development. See Plaza America shopping center, the Sharpstown Center has been bought under TIRZ that means what the person who bought it, all the development that he is doing, he is exempt from the taxes for the next 5 to 10 years.

UQ: I see.

VB: So they are being given the opportunity to redevelop this area.

UQ: That's a big incentive.

VB: Right big incentive.

UQ: So you said you have a brother in Sugarland, brother-in-law?

VB: My brother in law.

UQ: Brother-in-law, so what did you tell him when he said, "Why don't you come out to Sugarland?"

VB: Well I told him that even though the statistics is very localized in general we haven't found the impact. If I can leave my door open so many times I haven't locked my door, four cars are standing outside we have never had, we never had a burglary. We

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

never had a car stolen. We never had anybody push through our door. I say, “Actions speak for themselves.” We are very kind of... you know the whole design of the house is very open. Anybody can jump the front gate and come inside. We have never had anybody jump from the gate or from the back fence. Right here on the back of the house is an ally. People can just jump over it. We never had it... actions speak louder than what we have on the record.

UQ: You’re not aware of the neighbors experiencing anything like that either?

VB: No very safe, very safe... very I would say all the things that we need are within reachable distances. All the services we need are within a reachable distance and our experience with all communities, my car mechanic is from Pakistan for example; wonderful experience for the last 12 years. My...we buy food from you know all kinds of stores. I go to a tire shop, he’s from Mexico. My mechanic work and other inspection is from... our experience from all vendors from all countries has been very positive.

UQ: Okay. Before you came to Houston and you were in New York when you heard that you were going to be sent to Houston or that’s where you got your job, what were your feelings? What did you know about Houston?

VB: I did not feel anything but my colleges give me some you know, they said, “You should be careful. That state is known for, it has a very violent history and this happened and that happened.”

UQ: What kind of things happened that they were telling you?

VB: That Kennedy was shot here and cowboy town and people are, you know, you are going to be dealing with a very rough environment and you may be subjected to some

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

unknown...I said, "I'm not afraid, I came from India." They were... that was not alarming for me.

UQ: Okay other people were alarmed for you though?

VB: Right, right.

UQ: Okay and did they compare Texas to the rest of the South or did they kind of view Texas as its own?

VB: I did not pay attention to that. They did not compare Texas to Mississippi or no they did not. They said, "Texas is Texas. You are going to a more civilized part of the South but you have to be careful."

UQ: I see. What kind of groups are you involved culturally, kind of Indian cultural groups?

VB: I'm a part of India House. I am vice chair of the... council member, I'm a council member of India House and I'm a vice chair of the Indian what do you call it? India Council. Then I've been the president of American Association of Indian Engineers. That is how me and Chad connected. Then I am a life member of my temple.

UQ: What is the name of your temple?

VB: Hindu Worship Society.

UQ: They were established a long time ago. What was the year do you know?

VB: Yes it was...

UQ: Approximately.

VB: 1969, yeah.

UQ: And you joined them soon after you came to Houston?

VB: Yeah I did. That has been our house of worship, you can call it.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: When you came to New York, you came with your family is that correct?

VB: No, I came by myself.

UQ: Okay when did the rest of them join you?

VB: I came in September '70 they joined me in May '71.

UQ: Okay and who specifically joined you?

VB: My wife, this current wife and my son.

UQ: Your son okay. And how many children do you have?

VB: One son.

UQ: One son. He was born?

VB: In India.

UQ: Which city?

VB: Ludhiana L-U-D-H-I-E-N-A, Ludhiana in Punjab.

UQ: Is this where your family is in Ludhiana?

VB: Right.

UQ: In your opinion are there groups in the United States who are discriminated against?

VB: I would say I have suffered very little discrimination. I think more I think it's your outlook. Your outlook if you create barriers more for ourselves. I have not suffered discrimination per se. If I have openly communicated I have been received well; every level, every place whether in a social setting or professional setting. That is my conclusion. We have communicated with blacks and we have found wonderful human beings. We have communicated with Spanish people on a personal basis they are wonderful human beings. I have communicated with people from Pakistan my outlook

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder**Interview Date: August 28, 2011**

with them is 100% positive. Again on a limited basis and then when you one thing is the discrimination is very objective and subjective. There is built in opinions I don't want to I don't want to anticipate on those. I want to present my viewpoint, my need, my objective and I think I've been received with rationale. Let me put it this way I have not been subjective to irrational responses. Let me put it this way most of the time most of the situations.

UQ: Okay back to Channelview a question again. Were there Indians who lived in Channelview when you arrived?

VB: No.

UQ: None?

VB: None.

UQ: Did that remain the same the entire time you were there?

VB: It continues to be the case even today.

UQ: Okay so on the weekends in the evenings who did you socialize with?

VB: No, I lived in Houston.

UQ: Oh you lived in Houston you simply worked in Channelview.

VB: Right.

UQ: You drove back and forth there.

VB: Right.

UQ: How long was this drive?

VB: About 22 miles.

UQ: That's not too bad okay.

VB: 22 miles I was living in Spring Branch...

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: I see.

VB: ...and worked in Channelview no question about it. I didn't even think about it. I didn't even think because I came to Houston and I started looking for some places and I say something a couple of people I knew they were in Spring Branch so I took my apartment in Spring Branch. I didn't even think twice to find a place closer to Channelview. That was not a consideration.

UQ: You didn't even want to live out there?

VB: Well no with no preconceived notions. I just wanted to be in the middle of the city that's it.

UQ: I see.

VB: That was the idea with no preconceived notions about people, their culture, their habits. It so happened that was the right decision.

UQ: Regarding marriage and what you observe in the Indian community. Do you find that Indians marry mostly among other Indians or that they are marrying other groups?

VB: Well it's a transition that's going on right now. In general there is a perception that if there is a equally qualified and balanced family available among Indians they try. Children are not dying to marry necessarily Indians from India even though some parents have insisted that way. So the preference is...so there is a resistance in general to go back to India for marriage. They will say, "Okay well if you want me to consider a matrimonial alliance let me try to see if there is an Indian family centered in America and/or Canada." So that is one trend. And second trend is we see about 20% of the children going out of Indian community to marry you know I would say what we have seen so far I would say about 15% to 20% of the people we know have gone out vice

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

versa more so with American boys than girls. We know one or two cases where Indian men have married white girls one or two but we know 8 for example Indian girls who have married American men.

UQ: Interesting. Well two questions. First when you say American do you mean white?

VB: White.

UQ: And second question, why is there that disparity between the girls and the boys?

VB: Materially, financial. Father is a doctor, his daughter had been dating this white guy next door neighbor in upscale neighborhood from the childhood. When they grew up

the girl's parents weren't as involved but they were involved in business so they were

rich business wise and the daughter was rich medical profession wise, daughter of a

doctor so they found a compatibility material wise. There had to be a material

compatibility. Okay then the other way we know an Indian girl married a drummer. She

is a doctor. She married a drummer. She do not pay attention to anybody from India she

wanted somebody totally different culture when she comes home. She does not want to

be thinking about medicine she doesn't want there to be another doctor in the family she

wants to totally somebody who can spend time with the family or something she married

a musician for example. Another case is an Indian guy who married and Indian doctor,

for example, that girl she didn't want to marry and Indian doctor or somebody she wanted

somebody that has his MBA for example. So then the other girl who married a white

guy... 20% we have lot of family dual ship. This is in general kids who have grown up

in families where they have seen a lot of arguments in the family, in general. They have

seen this day in and day out and those kids made a decision, you know. I mean if this is

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

what these people are going through I don't want to go through the next generation this way. So they made a very conscious decision when they were growing up. Right now we have two girls who are going to marry their colleagues, their class fellows we don't want any part of this. We don't a repeat of this. We have seen this they have delayed their... I would say two girls are marrying these white boys and the other two have delayed their marriage decision indefinitely like they are 39 years old. God knows why they would delay that. We have seen enough of this. That's another section. There is, that element cannot be ignored.

UQ: So you are saying a large proportion of girls who just don't want to get married at all?

VB: Delay.

UQ: Delay?

VB: Delay, I don't know what they will get down...

UQ: Eventually.

VB: 32, 34, 39. I know three of them right now, professional, IT, electrical engineer, MBA, very well placed, working you know very nice jobs, delay.

UQ: Of the ones who marry outside the Indian community, do you know any who marry Hispanics?

VB: I don't know any Indian girl marrying Hispanic.

UQ: Okay and what about any who marry African American boys?

VB: Yes one. One.

UQ: How was that received among the Indian community?

VB: Not well. She knew it. She is totally isolated. She don't give a damn.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: Really?

VB: She knew it. He's a CPA, she's IT but they seem to be very happy but the marriage party consisted of for example the reception the boy's side was mostly black, no they don't receive it. They don't receive well.

UQ: How would they or how would they...

VB: There are people... there is a wall now. It is not being received well at all.

UQ: How recent is this?

VB: Nine years ago.

UQ: Nine years ago okay. Why do you think it wasn't received well?

VB: Well...

UQ: He's professional, he's CPA right?

VB: Yeah. The... this is a fact of life. Somehow I mean we, I and my son we are very open to communicate with black people more so than my colleagues, more so but there is a there is a lack of understanding built in and anticipated and fear that even the educated class is not communicating, there is a stigma that is not happening.

UQ: What were some of the things that members of the Indian community said when she decided to marry him and it became public?

VB: I don't know what they said but its cold, in the reception there was a cold wall.

UQ: It wasn't warm and welcoming and...

VB: Simple it had to happen. It happened and after that the boy and girl are leading... my (according to my son) because my son's age that girl is my son's age so he tells me that they are, Craig and Mona are very happy. Okay but they don't have... she doesn't communicate with Indians at all after her marriage. She has no circle with Indians at all.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: Okay. The girls who marry white Americans do you find that those marriages are treated differently were they welcomed more and have they continued to interact with Indians afterwards?

VB: It depends upon the guy. In this case this guy Scott is an attorney and the girl is an attorney and they got interested in each other at the work place. So he, he is he seems to be grasping her side of the spiritual part coming to the temple and in family life more so than the others but then he also knows that it is for a limited time that he has... and most of the time they have to live together he doesn't... the only time he sees them is in the social function. We don't see them like hand and hand going in the public, here and there. You know this is...

UQ: But they haven't cut off completely from the Indian community they are still there?

VB: The cutting off is, again, what kind of cutting off?

UQ: I guess I'm comparing it to the other couple you talked about.

VB: Yeah they cut off.

UQ: By choice? You think it was their own choice that they decided, "No we don't want to."

VB: Yeah, I think so. And basically as of today it could be different scenario 10 years from now but today the transition. There is a cutoff point. There is a white superiority continues mentally. Black inferiority continues mentally. Simple no matter what you have to that transition has to decide in the next 8 to 10 years. There is a... we grew up with white superiority when before we came in here. My parents, right? We were ruled by Britishers, right? The white superiority continues until my father died, white man is

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

superior in his mind. Simple he didn't grow out of it. I'm trying to grow out of it. My son has grown out of it. The reality is not. The reality is different. And we didn't decide to integrate with the black people. We are trying professionally, 70% of the city workforce is black. So how could you not integrate? How can those people be right they are wrong on all sides? They are not. It's a matter of integration decision. I have decided to integrate. I have decided to be very in discriminatory in my mind. What is their decision I don't know. You may think that you are superior they may think they are superior. They may think that we invaded their jobs you know. They may think that we have creative differences or something I don't know what they are thinking. But as and when I got a chance to know they are not thinking necessarily that unless and until they are made to think that way. So there is a, as of this minute there is no open communication after marriage in the inter-racial. There is a... in fact the family who married their girls to the white boys those families get cut off from the families in Indian community. They think it's a different landscape that they have created and you know that's it to a certain extent. There is a conscientious difference that you know expectation, anticipation, behavior everything is kind of...

UQ: You think it's just a matter of time before those kinds of ideas are...?

VB: I would say this generation of my grandson's generation that will be watched difference in that understanding I'm sure there will be.

UQ: Are you hopeful?

VB: I am.

UQ: That it will be? Okay.

VB: I think we are kind of done.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: Sure we can end it here. Is there anything else you'd like to add before I turn it off?

VB: No I think it has been a good interaction your questions have been very, you know, formally informal. But I have tried to share I have more positive input then... I have nothing to there is no derogatory of my experience in being in the United States. The human side is very positive. The human side is very positive. The landscape of the economics and the politics is changing. That is something that we cannot control. But in general it has been a pleasant experience to immigrate. I don't regret it.

UQ: Do you plan on retiring here in the U.S.?

VB: Yes.

UQ: Do you go back to India a lot?

VB: Yeah, we have been going to India about every 2 or 3 years. Within the last... my son married an Indian girl from India.

UQ: From India?

VB: He married an orphan from India.

UQ: Oh.

VB: From an orphanage.

UQ: Did you arrange this with somebody?

VB: Yes.

UQ: Did somebody there arrange it?

VB: No, we looked for it. We looked for it. He looked, he went and... and that's what he desired.

UQ: His main priority or one of his main priorities was that she be an orphan? Okay.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: His main priority was to marry somebody who would never get a chance if America is called the land of opportunity then he wants to provide that opportunity to somebody who will never think about it.

UQ: I see.

VB: So that was the premise.

UQ: That's fascinating I have never heard of anyone who has thought along those lines although I have interviewed someone who wanted to marry someone who didn't, was for sure did not want to go back to India. They wanted to be dedicated to living here in the U.S. That is the closest similarity I could find.

VB: What do you mean?

UQ: The man I interviewed when he married someone he didn't want someone who was going to come to America and then say after 6 months, "I don't like it here I'm going back." So he wanted to marry someone who was dedicated to being here.

VB: So who did he marry?

UQ: He married someone he met in Chicago who had already been here for some time. She worked. She was a professional and she didn't ever want to go back to India. Not permanently.

VB: No that's a totally different outlook. In this case he wanted to marry someone very poor and then, and not that he's rich but the question is, the idea behind it is to afford an opportunity if you think that you are in the land of opportunity

UQ: I see.

VB: ... then he wants to share that opportunity with somebody who will never have it...

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: Otherwise.

VB: ...even think about it. So we looked for an orphanage. We had to research an orphanage. As soon as he said that we, me and my wife, supported it whole heartedly. We went for it. So he has been, he has been trying to work it out for the last nine years.

UQ: How did you develop that kind of social ethic in your son?

VB: Him, that's him.

UQ: All him?

VB: I don't know but that's... I mean from the time he said that we have supported 100%, 100%. No second thoughts, no colors, no expectations, no I mean this is our adopted; this is a better religion than being a Hindu or a Pakistani or Christian. This is our religion. This is our humanity and human related needs and human related environment. There's more, that is along the lines, that is what we are trying but it is not accepted in the community. Community is not that way. The community is very, you know, there is expectation from the daughter in law, there is education wise, money wise, family wise, status wise, color wise, height wise. All those things are very prime in that material covers all of that. But my son (not me) my wife is of course... we have to, my son... see in order of making that happen my support was prime in the beginning to encourage him, "Let's go and do it." So we went blind folded to an orphanage in India okay? Of course it was a well established orphanage where there were 6 or 7 girls of that age.

UQ: Where in India?

VB: Firozpur, Punjab on the border of Pakistan. So we were there and she is in high school. She did 3 years of vocational training industrial training institute. She was living

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

in a dorm in a girls dorm and we... they are under the care of a warden manager, hostel manager this and that. Very, very basically basic... basic. Very basic you know. Provision wise, money wise, food wise, clothing wise. So I said, "I want you to come with me. Don't be a utopian and try to be a hero for a cause without understanding what you are going in for. I want you to go with me. Let's go." So we took one, two months leave from here me and him only.

UQ: Otherwise he would have let you decide on your own he was okay with that idea?

VB: No.

UQ: No?

VB: I do not know how it would have shaped but this is how I approached.

UQ: So the both of you went.

VB: As soon as he said that then we first located an orphanage that took about two months with the help of a local priest who gave us some numbers to look for. It is Arya Samaj. Do you know Arya Samaj?

UQ: Yes, I do.

VB: Arya Samaj is an organization run by D-A-V organization. DAV is a very big organization in India. DAV College, DAV University, DAV is Arya Samaj so they have a, you know, Swami Deyanand, he is the preceptor of Arya Samaj so the Arya Anathalaya, it means Arya Orphanage centered about 123 years ago in Firozpur. Hundred and twenty-three years ago it was established. It is on a compound of 123 acres and then there is a high school, middle school, vocational school, there is a boys hostel there is a girls hostel there is this, this... It is run by some endowments and some...

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: So this is the orphanage you chose? How did you narrow from 6 or 7 girls to one?

VB: No, we went there. We met with all of them.

UQ: How did you decide which one?

VB: We met, well, you can talk to my son more [about] that. I was there all along and we met and then we just talked with the manager and we talked with some girls who had, who had been married before her. They were there they were working as teachers. So somebody who has more subtle values. You know what I'm saying. You understand

Urdu?

UQ: Yes, yes.

VB: [begin Urdu] You know what I mean when I say 'grounded?' Well, grounded, stable, mature, not immature, you know.

UQ: Right.

VB: So then we saw her. We talked with her [end Urdu] so then we... relative, relatively she seemed to be stable, more stable. Never been outside of the four walls...she was 24 years old. Never been outside the four walls of that ashram.

UQ: Wow.

VB: So to take a girl from that surrounding she had not heard the word passport. So we were there after the decision was made. We went to the regional passport office to apply for a passport. We were... you know there was a delay. There was a delay. We went three times. Bureaucracy in bureaucracy same thing no different than any other country. So finally the passport came through. Then we married, we arranged the marriage.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

UQ: There in India?

VB: In 2002, we arranged the marriage in the ashram in the Anathalaya.

UQ: I see.

VB: So the perception is there must be something wrong with the boy. Why is he doing this? He graduated from the University of Houston, for all practical purposes brought up here. Why would he be doing it? And we anticipated that. Before we left the country I got him checked medically. We had medical reports on him that he is in sound health, he has no medical problems, blood work. His sperm count. His TB, his HIV certificates were on our file. Okay, before we went. That was our approach that we are not going with a disadvantage. When we went there we were labeled as if this guy had some deficiency that is why he is coming. But we had covered that ground.

UQ: I see.

VB: Right?

UQ: Yeah.

VB: So he got married and now comes the visa. K1, K3, Fiancé Visa 1, Fiancé Visa 2. You cannot bring her as married, we had to apply for a Fiancé Visa.

UQ: Right.

VB: I applied for a Fiancé Visa. We were rejected in the consulate. They thought we were human trafficking. They thought. Our Indian girls at the consulate in American embassy they rejected on the grounds that this is not right. That this is not genuine. This is human trafficking. You are trying to exploit this girl. They took her on the side. They kind of scared her.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

[knock at the door, Interviewee speaks to person at door] Yes come on in. You can come in... Okay they scared her. I was told her... I'm telling her about Amy. I was telling the conversation and the interview kind of transitioned into Manesh and Amy, that's what I was trying to tell her.

They scared her at the consulate that you are going to be subjected to human trafficking you are going to be a slave. You are going to be misused. They are going to do this... I don't understand all this. I don't think so. So they refused her visa on the grounds that this is not right. So we came back. She was there they got married. So we left her there for a year. I applied through an attorney here, went back to the same consulate. It was the same girl who scared her. She told me and my son. We want you to just establish that this is genuine. That now after a year you have come back. So we understand it is genuine. So that is when they came back here in 2003.

UQ: I see.

VB: So since then that was my role and her role to begin with. After that the credit goes to her and my son. It is because they have to deal with her more than me and my son the most.

UQ: Yeah.

VB: Because he's going to... [begin Urdu] you have to handle it. You took the step but now how are you going you handle it? Handling it, that's the main thing. This first step...

UQ: It's easy?

VB: No, it's not easy, it's difficult but after you take the step [end Urdu]... Oh my God, this guy his friends, his circle, his American circle, he used to drink, he is 100% vegetarian now because of her. She is vegetarian 100%, their children are 100%

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

vegetarian because of her, he is more so. He had to sacrifice his personal life, his social life, his habits up until today. This is our challenge to bring her up to the normal standards, American standards. So that is what we are, that is where it is right now. So we are really proud of it.

UQ: You should be.

VB: The fact that it is working and we are making it work. So now we have started her in American school system. She is going to do American high school and then whatever she wants to do. I mean if she wants to go for any training it's up to her. I mean the children are small but my effort would be same thing to afford an opportunity that she will not have otherwise thought about.

UQ: So I'm dying to know what does the Indian community think?

VB: They don't.

UQ: They don't like it?

VB: They don't accept it mentally.

UQ: Even after all these years?

VB: No. There is no appreciation. There is reservations. There is reservations and for no known reason. We distrusted. We withdrew ourselves from those people who don't understand and accept this. You cannot change them, we have to change out ourselves. We had to concentrate there's a lot of work to be done in this cause. This is a very big cause. See my son and his wife is one stage. The children of those parents they have to face challenges in the future. You see what I'm saying?

UQ: Yes.

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder

Interview Date: August 28, 2011

VB: "Who is your mother?" "Oh, where is she from?" "Where is your *mama*, where is your *nana*?" and all those things [maternal uncle and maternal grandfather, respectively]. We understand and we know who is her mother, who is her father. They have to face those questions. We have to make them ready. We have to prepare them. Those are more important questions than worrying about the people who would think of what we are doing right now. I mean my one comment about America is that they have taught us more humanity than I would have otherwise learned when I was back home. That is a very positive contribution to, I would say in my lifetime I have, that is my... that is how I would describe America, on the positive side. That country has more human values, very simple. They care for the human being. The country is designed to care for the human being.

UQ: The individual.

VB: I mean how you... how it shapes up otherwise as national model is different but the basic foundation is humanistic values are very superior. I mean the country's model is very humanistic. Somebody thought of this humanistic model. The current situation is that it has changed from an uncompromising country to a compromising country because of economics. See when we came from India my reason to come from India was that I had to compromise. My reason to come to America you can read that write that was that I was subjected to very heavy compromises that I did not want to make. It means in your personal life, if your value system you have to compromise with your things. I was an engineer, corruption. I didn't want to compromise with that. I wanted to get away from that. That was the compromise I have to make if I stay back in India. So that was uncompromising in '70's in this country. The thing was changing there was some

Interviewee: Bansal, Virinder
Interview Date: August 28, 2011

compromises being made because of economics. But those things are something I have no control. But the fact of the matter is the humanistic values that we have seen in this country that is a very superior model that I would like to emulate anywhere in the world.

UQ: Sure, okay, let's go ahead and wrap it up. I know you have to go your family is waiting. So, we will stop it there.

End of interview

