TRANSCRIPT—JHANA PARIKH

Interviewee: Jhana Parikh

Interviewer: Maydha Devarajan
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Location: 102 Kalmia Lane, Cary, N.C. 27518

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Maydha Devarajan: My name is Maydha Devarajan, I'm with Jhana Parikh in her house in Cary. Today is November 9th, 2021, and we're going to do an oral history interview for Southern Mix. So yeah, I don't know if you could maybe tell me a little bit about yourself, like where and when you were born, the area you grew up, that kind of thing.

Jhana Parikh: Yeah. So I am born and raised in North Carolina. So I was born in 1996 in Raleigh, North Carolina. So different house than where we are right now. But when I was about two months old, we actually moved into this house. So I have completely grown up here and my siblings were born down the road. So this is, for all intents and purposes, home for me. My parents, they moved to the United States when they were very young. They were born in India. But my dad was four and my mom was two when they moved here. So they also have very much grown up in the United States and have had that very, you know, American experience, especially in the 70s and 80s. And then, you know, I was obviously born in the 90s and have grown up here since then.

MD: Yeah. What year did each of your parents come to North Carolina?

JP: So my dad was born in '65 and so he moved here '69. And my mom, I think, moved the same year, '69. She was born in 1967.

MD: OK, cool. Yeah, I want to get into some of those experiences.

JP: Yes. [Laughs].

MD: But I was going to ask you, I guess, where in India is your family from?

JP: So both of my parents are from Gujarat. My dad was born in Mumbai and my mom was born in a small town called Vadodara. And then they moved here.

MD: I guess, like for each of them, do you know, was their parents' jobs and that's why they moved?

JP: Yes. Yeah, it's actually both of their fathers. So my mom's dad came over here, he worked for Ford Motor Company, so he was brought over here. You know, obviously in the late 60s, early 70s, that was a huge industry. And so he actually came here first. And then my mom and her mother came over a couple of months after he had gotten a place and established everything. And then my dad's father was a physician and he came here. I think he came here before the requirement changed to do residency in the United States. So I think he was able to practice, like right off the bat. And so they actually moved to Fuquay-Varina. So they have been here since the late 60s.

MD: Yeah, I want to get into that to, they must have some really interesting sort of growing up. Cool, OK. And then what do each of your parents do?

JP: Yeah. So my mom was a stay-at-home mom for a long time after I was born. And then more recently, once all of my siblings and I, you know, have grown up and gotten our jobs and things like that, she's gone back to work for a nonprofit called North Carolina Asian [pause] Americans Together, NCAAT [laughs]. And she really enjoys it. They do a lot of their engagement and outreach to the Asian American community, particularly in the South. So they do a lot in North Carolina, obviously, but they partner with a lot of other organizations in Georgia and, you know, up and down the East Coast as well. And then my dad has been in software development, pretty much since he graduated from college. He actually went to N.C. State, did computer science there and then he has an MBA from UNC-Chapel Hill, but has worked for pretty much every major software company. And he's currently at Oracle.

MD: OK, cool. Yeah, and you— what do you do? [Laughs].

JP: Yeah. So I went to UNC-Chapel Hill, I majored in psychology and then I started working in clinical research in the Department of Psychiatry at UNC-Chapel Hill. And then I transitioned over to Duke Hospital in anesthesiology, still in clinical research. So a lot of drug trials and things like that. But right now I'm there part time while I'm doing my master's in physiology at N.C. State. So we are very much a UNC-Chapel Hill-N.C. State family. [Laughs].

MD: What year did you graduate from UNC-Chapel Hill?

JP: 2018.

MD: And you have two siblings?

JP: I do. Yes.

MD: A sister and a brother?

JP: Hmm mmm.

MD: OK.

JP: Yeah, and they're both younger. My sister is 20- how old am I? She's 23, she'll be 24 in January. And then my brother just turned 22. Yes.

MD: So you guys are pretty close in age.

JP: Yes. Yeah. We're all exactly 16 months apart.

MD: Cool, OK. So I want to talk a little bit about high school now and school in general. Where did you go for elementary, middle and high school?

JP: So I went to a private school for elementary school, was the Montessori School of Raleigh, and then I started at a public school in 7th grade, it was Martin Middle School and then went to Enloe High School for high school.

MD: OK. And your dad also went to Enloe, right?

JP: He did. Yes, he was actually part of the first magnet class. So I think it was in 1980? They pulled a bunch of students from surrounding high schools, so he actually started in 10th grade there and then graduated in '83.

MD: OK. Yeah, that's funny. I don't know if that was a conscious decision for your parents that you should go to Enloe.

JP: I think so. And then part of the reason I went to— so the elementary school that I went to did have a middle school. But part of the reason that we, and by we, I mean my parents, chose to put me in a public middle school was because they wanted me to be in the magnet system, so I would have a better chance of getting into Enloe.

MD: Right. Yeah. I mean, so I am curious about your experience in a magnet school, like in that Montessori school you went to, what was the, I guess, racial diversity like there?

JP: Yeah. So I distinctly remember being the only person of Asian descent, like Indian, East Asian, anything. So there were very few— I think there maybe were some people in other classes, but I don't think I ever had anybody in one of my classes who was of Asian descent. And there were also very few Black people, either. So it was very much like white, you know, I mean, it was a private school, so it was a little bit expensive. There were no buses, small class sizes, you know, so you had to have a certain degree of privilege to go.

MD: Yeah. OK. Did your siblings also go there?

JP: They did, yes.

MD: Yeah. And then going to middle school, a magnet school, is also a big transition.

JP: Yes, it was. It was. So middle school was a little bit interesting because I was in that school. My siblings were still at Montessori. And so there were a couple of times when my parents were

late picking me up or, you know, things like that, which is understandable, but it was definitely a little bit of a culture shock because each of my classes was the same size as my entire school day was. And so, you know, lots of different people, lots more diversity. My friend group went from primarily white to primarily Asian, and things like that. So definitely a little bit of a change.

MD: Yeah. Would you say, like, in middle and high school, did your friend group kind of stay primarily Asian?

JP: Yes.

MD: OK. And then so I was curious also, growing up, you were talking about the Montessori school when you were the only person of Asian descent there, but in middle and high school, did you have kind of a sense of community with people who were of the same ethnicity as you?

JP: Yeah, I would say so. I mean, I felt like I didn't have it quite as much in elementary school and kind of with that, so I was pretty active in the Indian local community. So, you know, like the temple and, you know, around Diwali and Holi, I have a dance group and things like that. But until middle and high school, those groups were very separate. Like, I had my school friends and, you know, my parents would plan things with their parents and we would do things together, and then I would have my Indian community of friends. But then in middle, high school, I feel like they kind of started to blend a little bit more.

MD: OK. Yeah. And I was going to ask about that, too. Did your parents have a set of friends, like growing up, would they be your family friends that were also Indian?

JP: Yeah, I would say so. I think for the most part, their community, it was also very split, I think. So like the people that we would have play dates with, you know, from school would be mostly white. But then, you know, my mom choreographed dances. And so we had the dance team and all their parents and stuff would be part of my parents' friend group.

MD: OK, that makes sense. Yeah. And, I guess, there's more things I want to get back to. But thinking about then going to college, you know, UNC-Chapel Hill's a predominantly white institution and I was just curious, like, did you kind of continue to have that? Were your main friends in college also of Asian descent or did it kind of shift? Or what was that experience like?

JP: Yeah, it shifted. And so I actually didn't get that until now. But my main friend group, you know, I have a friend group that I'm still in contact with. We lived together after college. You know, we do Zoom calls every week, which is really nice, but I am the only person of color in that friend group. And, I mean, you know, they all have other friends of color. It's just the way that it happened to be. But it is interesting that it kind of switched, you know, from high school to college, even though UNC-Chapel Hill does, I think, have a slightly higher percentage than many PWIs, especially people of Asian descent. Most of my friends ended up being predominately white.

MD: Right, yeah. That's interesting. Were you involved in any Asian organizations at UNC-Chapel Hill?

JP: I started out on a dance team, and so I made a few friends through that, but then the main areas that I was involved in were more like band and kind of music-focused and less around, you know, culture and heritage. And so I think for that reason, that's kind of why a lot of my friends ended up being not Asian, just by nature of the activities that I chose to do.

MD: Were you in the marching band?

JP: I was not in the marching band. I was in the symphony band and wind ensemble.

MD: Did you do that all four years?

JP: Yeah. [Laughs]. And all of my friends are from that.

MD: Yeah. And I was just curious, which dance team were you on?

JP: Well, I actually, don't even remember the name of it. It was a Gujarati folk dance team.

MD: Was it Tar Heel Raas?

JP: No, it was a different one. Nupur Jain was actually in it.

MD: Oh, OK.

JP: So she might remember that as well. I think that was the only year it was active, was my freshman year.

MD: Ah, OK. Interesting. And then, well, I guess you talked about your core friend group in college was kind of was much different than it was in high school. Do you still feel like you had a sense of community with people who were also Indian in college?

JP: I would say so, and I don't think it was through the school, necessarily. But you know, a lot of my friends who were on my dance team ended up at UNC-Chapel Hill or at N.C. State. And so, you know, we tried to do things relatively frequently. You know, once or twice a year, we just get together and hang out. And so I still feel like I have that sense of community. It's just something that we all have to put a little bit more effort into, as opposed to something that is tied to a current shared experience, if that makes sense.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. OK. And then so I also went to magnet schools, and I know sometimes it doesn't, I feel like, work out like it's promised. And so I was curious, if thinking back to your experiences, I feel like the Montessori was probably very different, obviously, from the middle and high school, but your experiences with white Americans growing up and with Black Americans, if like, I don't know if they were things that stood out. Like I don't know if you being only person of Asian descent in that Montessori school if there were times when people said things to you or made you feel othered or if that wasn't part of your experience?

JP: So I don't know if it was necessarily other people saying things or making me feel that way, but I do, especially when I was in elementary school, I remember having this distinct feeling that I was different. And I, you know, for like a year and a half straight asked people to call me Laura because I didn't want to have an Indian name. I didn't like bringing Indian food to class. I wanted to bring, you know, American food to class when I ate lunch. I would say that I think it was more my desire to fit in with the people that I saw around me. And then when I got to middle school and high school, you know, the people that were around me changed a little bit. I think I felt more like I fit in with my identity as it was and not necessarily trying to have to change that.

MD: Right. Yeah, that makes sense. And then I guess, at Enloe, did you interact with— I guess you said your friend group was maybe more people of Asian descent. Were your classes more mixed or were they still kind of—?

JP: So I would say as I got later on, they became less and less diverse. Predominantly Asian and white, especially, you know, for senior year, which is, I think, a common problem that a lot of people have shared about magnet schools. And I remember my freshman year health class, I think was probably the most diverse class that I had been in because it was a required class for every single student. But then I, you know, took a lot of AP classes and I did the IB program. And because of the IB program, too, a lot of your classes end up being the same people because they're specific to the program. But, you know, the majority of people who are in IB are white or Asian, and so my classes definitely looked like the same— you know, it was the same people in each classroom.

MD: That makes sense. Yeah. Yeah. And so I kind of want to get into some of that, too, but I talked about this with you on the phone. But when you think about yourself, are there identifiers, like Indian American or brown person or Asian American, things that you use to describe yourself?

JP: Yeah, I mean, I would say my identity is probably more American than Indian, but I still do identify as Indian American, and that is something that has changed a little bit over the years. I mean, especially in elementary school, very much wanting to shut off the Indian part of my identity and then starting to realize that it's important to me and it's something that I value and that my parents value and, you know, culturally, my family values a lot. And so I would say that I identify as Indian American. I make a lot of jokes about, you know, being brown, especially with my friend group. You know, I'm the only brown person or the only person of color. And so I think calling that out has been something that I find kind of funny and use, and I'm comfortable enough in my identity to be able to do that. I feel like when I was still kind of struggling with how I wanted to identify, I probably wouldn't have made jokes about that. But because I'm more comfortable with that, I am able to do that now, if that makes sense.

MD: Yeah. Do you think there was a point at which you became more comfortable with that? Was it going to those magnet schools or kind of gradually, it happened?

JP: I think it was a couple of things. I think going to the magnet schools was a huge part of it and being more comfortable with— or feeling like, that part of my identity fit in with the people around me. I think also kind of the general climate and attitude towards Indian culture and Asian

culture and other cultures has changed a lot. So I remember in high school, you know, during Diwali, or like Holi, it would be very common to see even white people wearing a lengha or something. You know, or they would come to garba. And you know, that was something that some of my friends and I did in college. I brought them all to garba. And so I think seeing that become a little more mainstream has also made me a little more comfortable with sharing that part of my identity or holding that as an important part of my identity because it's something that a lot of other people are familiar with.

MD: Yeah, definitely. I know that experience like garba is a big thing, too, in the Triangle area. And I also did that with my friends. I was curious, would you call yourself a Southerner or is that something you wouldn't—?

JP: Yes. [Laughs]. I mean, I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina. I have never lived anywhere else. So I think, yeah, I'm pretty comfortable calling myself a Southerner.

MD: OK. Yeah, I mean, I guess, what does that mean to you? Like when you think about the American South, are there things that you picture? Or is that part of your identity more personal to you? If that makes sense.

JP: Yeah, that's a really great question. And I think part of the reason that I identify with that is because I have a couple of friends who are from like Pennsylvania and even Virginia, towards the D.C. area who I regularly interact with. And I do see some differences in like our experiences, the kind of food that we eat. You know, little things like that. But I also will caveat that by saying that, you know, Raleigh, North Carolina, versus other parts of North Carolina, I think is a little bit of a different type of Southern experience. So I think the ways that I view that as part of my identity, a lot of times are with food, you know. And then even, like, weather, seasons or things like that, that are more broadly associated with the South as opposed to like specific regional differences. You know, rural versus urban and things like that.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah. I guess I kind of asked that as a multi-part question, but I'm curious about your thoughts on this. But when you think about the American South, are there things that come to mind that you immediately picture?

JP: Yeah, I mean, and I think a lot of it has to do with like the climate and the area, you know, barbecue, you know, Cheerwine, things like that that I think are very typical that you expect to find in the South. Things like humidity, not so much of a cold winter, you know, people are really bad at driving in the snow. Things like that.

MD: Yeah, that meme, I don't know if you've seen—

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, with the fire in the background [laughter]. And then I also think, you know, especially when I talk to my friends who are from further up north, you know, politics comes into play a little bit. The South, I think, tends to be a little more conservative politically. But then I think there's also some nuance within that as to what that means for certain people based on their experience and their upbringing.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense— I mean, do you want to expand on that idea a little bit, like in terms of the nuances of that?

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so I think within conservatism or people who identify as conservative, I think that there's a couple of different camps that are within that. So I am very liberal and my family is very liberal now. But for a long time, my parents were pretty conservative because they were very fiscally conservative and so they would vote Republican for that reason. And I think a lot of their friends have or still do kind of fall into that. But I remember, you know, mostly at UNC-Chapel Hill and with my interactions with people who have grown up, not really in the Raleigh area. There's a lot of that, you know, very religious-based conservatism or even sometimes the, you know, social-based conservatism that is rooted in some of the racism and sexism and things like that, which are some of those values that I think are really associated with rural parts of the South.

MD: Yeah. That's really interesting. And I'm curious about how your parents shifted from kind of those politics to a more liberal perspective now. Do you think that their immigrant background had any influence in how they identified when they first came?

JP: Yes. One hundred percent. And I will tell you why. Because this is one of the stories that I think kind of exemplifies that. So they and I very much grew up with the idea of the American dream. You know, you come here, you work hard and nothing is out of the realm of possibility. And so for a long time, you know, I think especially because of that attitude and also because of some of the experiences I had, particularly in elementary school and the people that I was around, I definitely had this kind of subconscious idea that people who did not achieve what I wanted to achieve were less than. And I distinctly remember there was an experience I had in high school where I think I was going to the office to be pulled out early for like a doctor's appointment or something. And my teacher was like, "You don't need a hall pass." And I did not need a hall pass, passed several teachers and had no problem whatsoever. Nobody asked to see a hall pass. But I was almost to the office, and a teacher who'd walked by me ended up asking somebody else in the hallway for their hall pass. And I turned around and it was a Black student, and it was like a light bulb went off in my head, I was like, "There's no reason they should have not asked me but asked this person." And so I think, you know, that kind of started a little bit of the change in mindset for me. And I think for my parents, you know, that, and then also some of the things that have started to come out in the last eight or so years. I think that has also been a major driver of their change in mindset as well.

MD: No, that makes a lot of sense. Yeah. And you talked a little bit about being Indian American and I was curious, like for you— I think it might not be so much for our generation, but I've talked to some people about, like the term "Asian" and "Asian American" and how it's shifted, I think, over some generations and also like this idea of when you're doing standardized tests and what bubble you fill out. So I was so curious, like for you, if you have thoughts about like the terms "Asian" or "Asian American," because I know sometimes some people might feel like that is more encapsulating of East Asians. And I don't know, if you feel comfortable using, you know, "Asian" to describe yourself.

JP: I do. I think it depends on the context because on the one hand, I think, you know, there are experiences that are universal to people who are not white, not Black, who are Asian, you know, from the continent of Asia. But I also think that there are nuanced experiences that are particular to people who are South Asian versus people who are East Asian. I mean, South Asian doesn't entirely encapsulate India, either. You know, it's an identity of its own. But I think it depends a little bit on the context.

MD: Yeah. So I guess for you, would you use South Asian American to describe yourself?

JP: Yeah, I would.

MD: OK, yeah. Do you think that your parents would identify differently than the things we've been talking about? Like, do you think your dad would associate with "Southerner"? I was curious if you had conversations with him about that or what your thoughts are.

JP: That's a good question. So I do think he would identify as Southern, but I think it would be kind of similar where he would— or I guess not quite as similar, but I think he would want to clearly delineate Southern from Raleigh, North Carolina, versus Southern from rural North Carolina. And that comes a lot from, you know, I know that when he was growing up, he was very adamant that he was not going to develop a Southern accent. He was really upset, you know, if I started showing signs of a Southern accent. I started using y'all as, like, a gender-neutral term, especially when I was in college, and he was not a fan of that at all. And so I think there are certain aspects of Southern identity that he has intentionally tried to shy away from. But I think that in terms of, you know, the food, he has his opinions about barbecue. You know, where to get the best mac and cheese. He's a big fan of Cook Out, you know, so I think from that perspective, I think he is very much a Southerner, and he would say that that is part of his identity.

MD: Yeah. I guess, growing up, would you talk about like— since you went to the same high school, would you talk about those shared experiences?

JP: Sometimes. And our high school experiences, I think, were very different. I think his was diverse in the sense that there was a high percentage of Black students, just because of the area that Enloe was in. And so the diversity that occurred then was the introduction of predominantly white students, with the change of the magnet status. But I think his experience in high school was more similar to my experience when I was in elementary school. So he actually went by Steve when he was in high school. His name is Snehal, but he went by Steve. You know, his friends from that time that he's still in touch with now are pretty much entirely white. So I think that my experience with, you know, predominantly Asian friends, not changing my name like I did when I was in elementary school, I think I had a little bit of a different experience than he did.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. Do you have things that are your favorite parts or least favorite parts about being from the South? Or being in North Carolina and things like that?

JP: Yeah, I would say that I do you think there is kind of a sense — and I probably should have mentioned this earlier as well — I do think there is a sense of that Southern hospitality, you know, kind of thing. I think that people in general are more likely to be outwardly kind and, you know, just in general, polite to each other. And I think that is also something that I've kind of adopted as part of my experience and my relationship with others just as a product of growing up in this area. I do think that there are certain aspects of, you know, more that inward feelings towards each other that I think maybe don't always reflect that outward Southern hospitality. So I think it's just a kind of an interesting dynamic versus something like, you know, New York. My brother went to school in New York and obviously it's a very liberal state, they vote in a certain way, but they're not going to say hi to you when they pass you on the street. So I think that's kind of an interesting dynamic as well.

MD: Yeah, no it is, I didn't think about that. Yeah, I'm also curious, like, we talked about this on the phone. Technically — because both your parents were not born here, but essentially spent their entire lives here. So in some ways, I guess, you kind of are a third generation. But do you feel like those experiences or your parents', you know, having grown up here, do you think there are unique traits that you had growing up and your time in North Carolina?

JP: I would say so especially, you know, compared to some of my friends on my dance team whose parents came here after college or they were born in India and they came here when they were my parents' age when they immigrated. So I would say yes. I think a lot of it showed up, in particular, in navigating our experiences with other people or with systems. You know, so it was not uncommon for us to go to a restaurant or something, and my mom used to always say that she would speak with her best grammar so that they would know that she is from here and knows what's going on. And then even with just like navigating the school system, like my dad went to N.C. State, my mom went to the University of Michigan. So even though it was a little different when they applied, they were able to kind of help me with that process. And, you know, choosing colleges, it was really important to them that I toured colleges. So some of the stuff that they thought was important and their understanding of how to navigate those systems, I think was maybe a little different than some of my friends who did not have parents who were familiar with that.

MD: Yeah, no, that is really interesting. And this is kind of a tonal shift, I was just thinking about this, was your neighborhood, is it predominantly— is it mixed racially?

JP: We're the only people of color in this neighborhood. [Laughter] To answer your question.

MD: Yeah, are you close with any of your neighbors?

JP: Not particularly, but part of that is because there's been some change. You know, when I was younger and there had been people who lived next to us and across the street who were about my age, we would go outside and play with them. It was very, very common. But they have since moved away. And so most of the people in the neighborhood are either older adults or have young, young children and so there's just not as much in common.

MD: OK. And I also wanted to go back to your parents a little bit. The friends that they have now that are Indian, do you know if they're people who immigrated later or kind of the same as them?

JP: I think it's a mix. The majority of them, I think, are people who immigrated younger. And I'm thinking mostly, you know, because they have gone to college here. Very few of them have any sort of accent, and those are the kind of things I'm using as a benchmark. I think a few of them did grow up in India and then move here a little bit later, though.

MD: Yeah, yeah. I mean, like so some of the things we talked about, like you were kind coming to be more comfortable with your Indian American identity. Do you think like— I don't know, growing up, were those things that you talked to your parents about this? Because I imagine they might have similar experiences.

JP: Yes. Yeah, it absolutely was. And I actually remember, specifically, a lot of these conversations came up when I was in high school and early college with some of the discussions around cultural appropriation. We had very different ideas or opinions on cultural appropriation. And my mom and I, in particular, would talk a lot about how she saw it— you know, for example, people wearing a bindi to music festivals. She used to get really excited because she remembered growing up in a time where she was the only person of color, and it was very much this "other" type of thing. And both she and my dad went by white names. She went by Sue, my dad went by Steve, when they were in high school and growing up. Whereas I, you know, fell into the camp of many other people my age, where I was a little bit offended by the fact that people were doing this, and taking parts of this culture and using it in a different way. So she very much saw it as like an appreciative assimilation kind of thing versus the appropriation kind of thing that I think I and others who have a little bit more of that sense of community now, view it slightly differently.

MD: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. Yeah. And I was also curious, like you talked a little about this, but this idea of like a Black-white binary in the South, where it's like this idea that you kind of have to be one or the other and there's not really a choice in between. I'm curious if ideas surrounding that were ever really prevalent in your experiences growing up or if were there incidents or moments that come to mind around that for you?

JP: Yeah. And this is actually something that my mom works a lot in with her organization because I think, you know, especially with some of the politics and racial tensions that have come up, especially in the last 10 or so years, I think there is, you know, it can be a little bit difficult to figure out where Asian Americans fit into that conversation because I think in some ways, in terms of achievement and, you know, certain social classes and privileges, they are kind of lumped in with the white experience. But I think also in a lot of ways, in other areas, film, sports, things like that, they don't have some of the same opportunities that white Americans do. So I think it's kind of an interesting gray area in the middle there. And I know when I have conversations with my friends or coworkers or things like that about racial issues, sometimes I do feel a little bit uncomfortable because I'm where on this side of the coin, do I fall? Am I able to talk to them about their experience as a person of color? Or is that potentially inappropriate for me to do because I don't have that same experience that they have?

MD: Yeah, right, I think that is a very interesting point. Like the term "BIPOC," like that's kind of to delineate between those kinds of experiences, for sure. Yeah, and then I feel like you kind of touched on this a little bit when you talked about the American dream and what you were talking about just now, but the model minority, I'm kind of curious if ideas surrounding that were also prevalent to your experiences, growing up?

JP: Yes.

MD: OK.

JP: Yeah, and I think, you know, it's changed a lot as I have grown up. But elementary, middle school, you know, absolutely heard the "You're Asian, you must be smart." You know, "you must be good at math" kind of thing. And I have been someone who is high achieving, and so I don't know that I necessarily felt the pressure because of my race to achieve in that way, but I know my friends had experiences like that, where they felt that kind of pressure to achieve because they felt like there was a societal expectation that they had to do certain things because of the way that they looked. So I think that answers the question.

MD: Yeah, no, I think that makes sense. And I also wanted to go back. I'm just curious, do you identify as a second-generation immigrant or is it kind of—?

JP: Based on my experiences, I would say I'm probably third generation.

MD: OK.

JP: Just because, I mean my parents, they don't even remember anything from India. My dad, I think, remembers a little bit, but like 100% of their schooling and their education was in the United States. And so I think that it would be disingenuous to say that I had any sort of experience that wasn't third generation.

MD: Yeah, I think that's really interesting. Do you feel like in your conversations with your friends growing up, who were second generation— I know you talked about how, like for example, your parents' experience with systems like school and stuff was different. But are there other aspects of your lived experiences that you think that were different from your friends who were second generation?

JP: Yeah. And I would say a lot of that in particular came from some of the more Indian cultural experiences. And so, you know, for example, there were certain events or things that my parents did not, I think, hold as much importance as my friends whose parents grew up in India [did]. You know, Diwali and Holi, obviously are the big ones, but especially, as I grew older and started doing other activities, marching band or, I played soccer for a long time, a lot of times my parents would allow me to prioritize those things over celebrating Diwali or Holi, or going to garba or something like that. My parents never taught me how to speak Gujarati. I can understand a little bit, but you know, the vast majority of my friends [who] are from Gujarat can speak Gujarati and the rest can speak Hindi. And so, you know, little things like that, I think

where my parents also maybe didn't prioritize that part of my identity as much, which again kind of feeds into how I identify as third generation, more so than second generation.

MD: Yeah, no. I think that makes a lot of sense. I kind of wanted to get to that, too, was religion an important part of your experiences growing up?

JP: Yes and no. My parents, I would say this is kind of true in general for Hinduism— so I identify as Hindu, my parents are Hindu. You know, that has been kind of our general upbringing. But my sister identifies as atheist now, and that was something that she made the decision to change in high school. And my parents were pretty supportive. They were OK with it. You know, we're not incredibly devout, I would say. I would say we're a little more spiritual, we'll do like a pooja or something, you know, for Diwali, for Holi, for certain other auspicious times. But it's not something like we go to the temple very regularly or something like that. So it is definitely a little more of a kind of casual, less strict understanding of that, of religion and spirituality.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. And because you talked about dance. Was it a TGA [Triangle Gujarati Association] dance group?

JP: Yes.

MD: OK. Yeah. Is that something that you did all throughout school?

JP: Yes. Yeah. And we actually had a group of girls. My mom choreographed, and with the exception of two or three girls who kind of rotated out, it was the same group of girls, I think, since I was in, like, my last year of middle school. So we did it for, like, almost six years. We went to competitions, you know, did all that. And so it was, I think, a little bit more of a social experience for all of us, as opposed to something that was for religious purposes or something like that. But it was nice to have that, you know, social experience within that culture that we all shared.

MD: Yeah, talking about dance competitions, I don't know, was that— [pause] was it like "Dance Moms" kind of, like—?

JP: Uh, no. [Laughs] No, no, no, it was called "Best of the Best." And they have an adult competition and for like two years, they had a junior competition. And so we went to one of those.

MD: Yeah, yeah. That's awesome. And are some of those girls in that group, the people you're still friends with now?

JP: Yeah, yeah. And so we usually do like a Secret Santa every year and, you know, get dinner every now and then. I mean, obviously some of them have moved on. I think one of them is doing her Ph.D. at UPenn, and someone else has moved to D.C. and so they're not all in the area, as happens when you grow up. But we do still try to keep in touch and see each other when we can.

MD: Yeah. That makes sense. I was also thinking about— like you talked about what religion means to you and spirituality, things like that. Was going to like the HSNC [Hindu Society of North Carolina] temple or the SV [Sri Venkateswara] temple, was that something that happened a lot when you were growing up?

JP: Usually around events, so, garba, you know, TGA performances, things like that. I think I did do the— I don't remember what it was called, but the Sunday school.

MD: Oh, like Sanskar?

JP: Sanskar Academy, I think it was. Yeah, I did that for a while. I remember very little of it. But I think that was my parents' kind of way of trying to connect with the culture a little bit until, you know, I started to get more active in other activities and they allowed me to prioritize those things. But it wasn't like the kind of thing— you know, I had friends whose parents would go every single day, you know, to the mandir, or they would go at least once or twice a week. And it was never anything like that.

MD: OK. That makes sense. And I think this question is interesting because I feel like for us it was very different than some of the people I've interviewed. But I'm curious, like how accessible Indian clothes or foods, like ingredients, were when you were growing up?

JP: It's a really good question. So I don't remember it ever being terribly inaccessible. I think partly because of where we are. You know, Patel Brothers has been around since as long as I can remember. Around the World Market and some of the clothing options there. And then my grandparents would go back to India at least once a year for a long time. And so a lot of times, you know, clothing and things like that, my mom would just ask her mom to get a bunch of stuff when she would go there. So I don't remember ever having, you know, any major issues, but a good friend of mine, he is South Indian, and he has expressed sometimes that he wishes there were more options for him. You know, not something he was able to access growing up.

MD: Was it clothes or food?

JP: Food in particular. Food in particular.

MD: OK. Yeah, that makes sense. And how often would your family go back to India?

JP: I have been to India once.

MD: Oh, wow.

JP: Yeah. Again, this is why I consider myself third generation.

MD: Right.

JP; And it was, I think, a little bit more like a tourist trip than it was actually, you know, visiting family because the vast majority of my extended family is in the United States. And so we took like a four or five week trip to go see all of the highlights. [Laughs]. Jaipur, Agra, all the temples, all the palaces, the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, you know, it was very much a tourist trip. And we looked like Americans.

MD: [Laughs]. Yeah. And so you mentioned both of your sets of grandparents were in the United States.

JP: Yes.

MD: So there was not really that— with some people would have—.

JP: Right. Yeah. And, I mean, my parents, when they were growing up, they would visit India at least once a year because a lot of their family was still there. But I mean, I have a pretty large family. Well, my dad's side, it's a little bit smaller. But my mom's mother has seven siblings and her father has three siblings. But they're all in the United States now.

MD: So your mom's aunts and uncles are all in the U.S.

JP: Yes.

MD: OK. Oh, wow. So, do your parents have a lot of siblings?

JP: Uh, no. They each have one [laughs], which I think was also a little bit interesting because, you know, obviously both of their parents on both sides had large families, and they are one of two.

MD: Yeah. Do you know for, I guess, like your dad's parents— you said that a lot of that generation is in the United States now, but did your dad's father have siblings that also came to the United States?

JP: I actually don't know quite as much about his side of the family. I do think that for both my parents, I think that their kind of nuclear family unit was the first one to come from their extended family. And I think a lot of his relatives, cousins, I'm not sure if they're on the mom or the dad's side, but they came after my grandfather and my father came.

MD: OK, yeah. And I know you talked about the requirements for practicing medicine might have changed, but do you know why your grandfather came to this part of the United States?

JP: I'm not sure. [Laughs]. My dad probably knows, or I could probably ask him. I just know that he had a family medicine practice in Fuquay-Varina, and he had that set up for him when he came here.

MD: OK. And did you say your grandparents are still in Fuquay-Varina?

JP: No, they're in Texas right now. They have moved back and forth from Texas a couple of times, but there's actually an ashram in Austin that they have gone back to. They have become significantly more spiritual and more religious as they got older.

MD: Yeah. And I think I might split these up.

[AUDIO BREAK — paused recorder]

MD: Yeah, and so another thing that I wanted to ask about. You talked about food a little bit. And you talked about how your dad likes Cook Out a lot, but are there parts of— does your family eat meat?

JP: So my dad actually does not, which is ironic because he enjoys Cook Out [laughs], but the rest of my family does eat meat.

MD: OK. Yeah. I mean, are other parts of Southern cuisine that you really enjoy?

JP: I would say, you know, kind of a general barbecue, fried chicken, you know, that kind of thing. We all have our opinions about what is better. And with coworkers who are from, like, Texas or something, we'll get into it a little bit about who's got the better barbecue. And then, of course, you know, there are certain things that you can get Cook Out, Bojangles, things like that. This is all fast food, but that you can get here that you can't get up north. But then beyond that, I mean, I don't think we do a lot of, you know, Southern-specific cooking at home. We don't cook predominantly Indian. I would say we do a lot of Asian in general. You know, stir fry and things like that, mostly just because it's easy. But I wouldn't say that we do a ton of Southern cooking ourselves, necessarily.

MD: OK, yeah. And growing up, I know you talked about, I think it's a very common experience, but not really wanting to bring Indian food to school.

JP: Yeah.

MD: Were there times when you did do that?

JP: Occasionally, yeah. But I also, and I don't think it was necessarily because I requested it, but generally we would cook American food or Mexican food, enchiladas, things like that, you know, meatloaf. Things that I think are very quintessentially American. So, yeah.

MD: Yeah. That makes sense. So another thing I wanted to ask about, which is kind of a bit of a tonal shift, but I was just curious like, you know, I always find this to be an interesting question, if 9/11 was an experience that shifted—.

JP: Oooh.

MD: Some of the ways you think about your identity or things like that. For me, obviously, I was a baby [laughs] so it's not really something that I can speak to, but I was just curious for you

if you remember there being like a distinct shift or what, you know, the immediate months after that were like.

JP: Yeah, that's a great question. Great question. So I will, first of all, say that I do not really remember a before 9/11, I was about to turn five when it happened, so I was pretty young. I remember the day, my siblings do not. Obviously, my parents do. But I remember, you know, we went home from school early and we got to watch cartoons. My parents holed up in their bedroom and watched the news and all that sort of thing. I don't really remember a before, but from some of the experiences that my dad has talked about, I knew that he does, you know, experience— or at least immediately in the aftermath, experienced a little bit more discrimination. Partly because of how he looks. You know, at that time I think he had a lot of hair and a mustache or a goatee. So kind of looked like, I think, what a lot of people would stereotypically assume to be South Asian or Middle Eastern. And I think, you know, even with that, during the most recent election like Trump and all of his, you know, very anti-Muslim rhetoric, that was actually a point of conversation. And this is not exactly what you asked for, but it was a point of conversation with my grandfather, my mom's dad, who's also very anti-Muslim. You know, growing up, he talked about partition in India as if he lived through it and he was, like, four. So there's a little bit of a different experience there, but one of the things that he had to kind of come to terms with was that a lot of the people who shared that very anti-Muslim sentiment viewed him in that same light. You know, as somebody who is darker-skinned, who has dark hair, you know, to a lot of people, there's not really a difference between people who are South Asian. And so that was definitely an experience that most of the men in my family have gone through.

MD: So that's actually— I was going to ask about anti-Muslim sentiment because I think, you know, that something that is prevalent in the South Asian community. And, I guess, kind of in a similar vein, we've talked about your experiences— or like the Black-white binary. Anti-Blackness is also something that's really prevalent.

JP: Yes, it is.

MD: And I don't know if like there are experiences that you can remember, you know, I don't know in your family, if you've talked about stuff like that or at school, in college or if there were things that you noticed.

JP: Yeah. And I would say, I don't think it was anything ever overt. I think it was more of like those kind of undertones, microaggressions, you know. I remember a conversation with my dad when I was in college, there was an article that some Duke professor had written about why Asian people are successful and it's because they have names that are very white-sounding. And my dad, you know, we were talking about it. He was like, "Yeah, that's true. You can't get a job with a name like—" pick any stereotypical name that people use when they're trying to be derogatory toward Black people. And I very gently reminded him that he named me "Jhana," which is not a white name. But I think, you know, little things like that. And I think a lot of that stems from, you know, again, that binary and this idea that the closer to the white ideal we are, the better off we are. And so I do think that my family, you know, kind of fell into that a little bit. And especially with my grandparents, my grandfather in particular. One of his favorite things to

say is that he's so grateful for the Blacks because without them, you know, we wouldn't have anything. And I'm like, I don't think that statement means quite what you think it means.

MD: Yeah. Right.

JP: But yeah, so it's just that kind of like [an] undercurrent, you know, general kind of sentiment. Not anything very overt, but I think a lot of it does stem from that idea that we're separating from them. "If we are separate from them, that we won't be treated like them."

MD: Yeah. No, I think that's really interesting. And so when you're talking about your grandfather, is this the one on your dad's side that—.

JP: No, this is the one on my mom's side, who's also very anti-Muslim.

MD: Yeah. I mean, I'm curious like, I think a lot of those— well, thank you for sharing those experiences, I think that makes a lot of sense. And I mean, also your mom, she grew up, I guess, in Michigan?

JP: Michigan. Mmm hmm.

MD: OK. I don't know if like— I guess, maybe that would be something they would have to answer more. But I don't know if you have witnessed this growing up or like their experiences of being someone who grew up in the South or as someone who grew up in the North of America, and if you've had conversations with as a family, if that impacts how they interacted with other people in the South now?

JP: That's a good question. And I would say that I haven't really noticed many differences. And I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that we move, and by we, I mean my parents, you know, moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, as opposed to another part of North Carolina. And I think there are a lot more similarities in terms of diversity, in terms of politics and even just how, you know, people are with each other in a larger city, in an urban setting in North Carolina compared to the suburbs of Michigan, where my mom grew up. So I would say that there's a lot more parallels there. If she had grown up in Detroit or something like that, I think it would be a very different experience. Or if we lived in rural North Carolina, I think it would be a very different experience. But I think that there were a lot of parallels there.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. And I guess, I'm also curious about like your grandparents on your dad's side, who have gone back to Texas, for your childhood were they in this area?

JP: Yes, actually. So they actually lived in this neighborhood, at the very end when you first come in. And so, you know, my parents would drop us off there and we'd hang out, you know, they had a swing in their basement that we would sit on. I think I was in late elementary school when they moved to Austin. But yeah, they lived close by. My parents chose this house because they lived down the road.

MD: Oh, wow. So I don't know if you got to have these kinds of conversations with your grandparents, because Texas is part of the South as well. Do you think that your grandparents would identify with that Southern identity?

JP: I don't think so. I don't think they would identify as Southern. And actually, my mom's parents live here now. They live in Briar Creek. They moved down, I think it's been 10 years. But they were originally from Michigan, and they would not identify from either, I think, as well they would identify as Indian. And I think that's just because they did grow up in India. I mean, they speak perfect English and have very little accent, you know. So in many ways, I think they are more of that, like— I mean, they are first generation, but they're more like what my friends' parents are like. But I don't think they would identify as Southern.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. And I was also curious, kind of going back a little bit more and I asked about if 9/11 had kind of impacted how you viewed some of your identities. Did the 2016 election impact how you talk about these kinds of things?

JP: Absolutely.

MD: OK.

JP: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I think, you know [pauses] I think it also kind of coincided with some of the shifts in how I viewed my own identity and becoming more comfortable and, you know, less afraid of not fitting in with people around me. But I think I cared a little bit less about what other people thought. And I was a little more quick to tie people's political beliefs to how they would view people like me. And I think, if anything, it strengthened the identity that I had with my culture and with my skin color and things like that.

MD: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And this is also kind of a bit of a tonal shift too, but I'm just curious did you ever go to Sangam events or things in college? Or is that kind of a community that you were not [involved in]?

JP: Yeah. And I think it will have a lot to do with the activities that I had chosen to do. You know, a lot of band, a lot of— you know, for three years in college, every weekend I was at rehearsal, you know, in Charlotte or in Virginia. And so I think if I hadn't done those things, I probably would have tried to be a little bit more involved in those events. But it was not really something I did [laughs].

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. I'm not sure if there's something— oh yes, this is also— this is a big question, I don't know how I left this off [laughter].

JP: Oh, no.

MD: I mean, I'm just curious like, you know, we talked a little bit but not using such explicit terms, but are there times you can remember, throughout your childhood, growing up here, in college, even recent times, like in the workplace. I don't know, like being in the South, where you've experienced overt or covert racial discrimination.

JP: [Pauses] I wouldn't say I have many examples of overt. I mean, you know, there's things like the experience I had in high school, where the administrator asked another student for his hall pass, probably because of his skin color. And I would say most of my experiences have been more along those lines.

MD: Like noticing preferential treatment or different kind of treatment?

JP: Different treatment, yeah. And I feel like it's a little bit— I don't really notice it as much when it's directed towards me, for whatever reason. I mean, it's happened before with comments about being smart or, you know, things like that, little things like that. But I do see it, you know, for example, this kind of happened a little bit recently with my manager. We have a coworker, who is Black, and she had come in one day. She had been wearing her hair natural and came in with box braids, I think is the term. But they were braids, and my manager was just asking her all these questions and then asked her, you know, "Are you going to be able to get it up into a bonnet for the OR?" And the whole room just went silent. We were like, "Why would you ask that? And why would you do that in front of everybody?" You know, so things like that where I don't think it was quite enough to fall into the overt category, but it was definitely not OK and it was definitely racially targeted. But I would say that I don't know that I have myself experienced many things like that.

MD: Yeah, yeah. I mean, like for yourself, I don't know if you'd call them microaggressions.

JP: Yeah.

MD: OK.

JP: I'm trying to think of some more recently. [Pauses] I feel like I try not to remember them.

MD: Yeah.

JP: [Laughs] And the friend groups that I have now, I think, are more sensitive to it. And if they do say something, you know, they're fine with us making a joke out of it. You know, like, "Oh, that was a little racist," you know, like in a joking way. I'm trying to think. Well, it's the same manager actually [laughs] will make some comments about like, you know, we do potlucks a lot. And she'll be like, "Oh, are you going to bring chicken tikka masala?" I'm like, "I've never made chicken tikka masala," [laughs] you know, so like little things like that. So I think maybe I don't remember them because they're not quite as— I don't consider them quite as malicious as like a comment about my coworkers hair. But they're definitely still like racially tinged. You know, she wouldn't say that to a coworker who's white.

MD: Exactly. Yeah. I'm just trying to remember if there's anything else that I hadn't gotten to yet. I mean, yeah, I don't know, because you've been in this area, you know, you went to college here— actually I should ask a question about that. Was going to UNC-Chapel Hill something that you always wanted to do?

JP: No. [Laughs] I was actually very, very against it when I was in high school. Like the only reason why was because everybody I knew wanted to go there and I didn't want to do the same thing as everybody else. My dad was very adamant when he met my mom that they move here because of the colleges here because it was a good system and, you know, in-state tuition and better chances and all that. So that was definitely a factor for them. I'm very glad I went to UNC-Chapel Hill, I think it was the best place for me. I think from a cost perspective, it was great. So, you know, I came around [laughs], but the reason I didn't want to go there had nothing to do with race or anything like that.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. In the time that you've been here, have you seen a change in the Indian community in this area or North Carolina?

JP: I don't know if I would say in the Indian community, I think it's grown a little bit larger. I think it has become a little bit more Americanized, Westernized. I think, you know, I'm remembering when I would go to garba in elementary school and it would be only Indian people. And now it's very common to see people who are of other races. So I think it's become, you know, just more welcoming, more cemented as the general kind of broader acceptance of different cultures has increased.

MD: Yeah, yeah. And I mean, this also going kind of deep question but like, you know, we talked about how in elementary school, wanting to have people call you Laura for some time.

JP: Yes.

MD: Do you remember ever feeling like you wanted to be white?

JP: Yes. And it was around that time, too. And I don't even know if I can articulate why anymore. But I think it just had a lot to do with wanting to be like the people around me.

MD: Yeah. Did you have conversations with your siblings about this or did they have experiences like this also?

JP: I don't think as much. And I think part of it was because— and actually now that I think about it with some of the activities that I did, particularly with soccer, I think there may have been some more of those covert kind of people looked at me a little bit differently, potentially because I was the only Indian person on the team, you know. And also, I'm very short, but that is a different discussion. But I think I felt that maybe a little more than my siblings who were not in some of those activities. But I also think that, you know, as they grew older— and they also left that school earlier than I did. So, you know, I went through sixth grade. My brother, I think, left in fifth, and I think my sister also left in fifth. So they did sixth grade as I was at another school. And so I think, you know, by the time that they started experiencing some of those identity shifts, or they were starting to understand their identity a little bit better, they were already around people who were similar to them. I mean, I'm sure you also have this experience, we all have the white name that we go by at, like, Starbucks or whatever. But for them, it was a version of their name, whereas mine was a completely different name. My white name now is not Laura anymore. It's Jane, when I go to Starbucks. But yeah, it was still interesting that there's— well,

my brother's name is Shan, so he just goes by Sean, people just spell it differently. And then my sister's name is Annar, and she goes by Anna and has always done that, even when she was younger.

MD: OK. Like other people call her that or just in that way?

JP: Just in that way, yeah, yeah. And sometimes I think for some white people, when we were younger, she would go by that, just to make it a little bit easier. Which has obviously also changed, as again, cultural understanding has increased, and I think people are more willing to learn how to pronounce those kinds of names. And people of color, I think are a little less forgiving and a little more adamant that, you know, you're going to say this right.

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. And thank you again for sharing that with us. I also remembered one thing I wanted to ask, which is the Indian friends that you had, growing up, did they tend to all be Gujarati also or were they from different parts of India?

JP: Yes. And I think that has more to do with the fact that they came all from TGA, you know, very much in the dance group. And that was just, you know, kind of where we met them. But yeah, there's a very strong Gujarati population here, too, which I think they had a lot to do with it. But then in high school in particular, that was where a lot of my friends who were Indian weren't necessarily Gujarati.

MD: Yeah.

JP: I think just by a product of we went to the same school.

MD: That makes sense. Yeah, I think those are some of the main things I wanted to ask. Was there anything, just like about your experiences growing up here, you know, being in that third generation or things that I didn't ask about that, that you want to mention?

JP: Actually, now that I think about it, and this might be a controversial topic, but dating has been very different for me as well, and for my parents as well. So both of my parents dated many people who were not Indian, which I think again, it kind of goes into the third-generation experience. They met each other in kind of an arranged setting, in the sense that both of them had gone to their respective family members and said we are both ready to settle down. And they were set up together. But it was still their choice, obviously, if they wanted to get married or not. And neither of their parents had had arranged marriages with each other, either. I think their grandparents, some of them did, but that's besides the point. And then, for myself, you know, my parents were very open to me dating when I was younger. I think they kind of wanted me to have those experiences because they had seen friends or, you know, their friends' children sneak around or not tell them things, and they recognized that and didn't want that to be the kind of experience that they had or that I had. And so, you know, I have dated people who are Indian. I have also dated people who are not Indian, and there has never been any sort of restriction on that, in any sense. And they're very open with conversations in that realm, which I think is a little bit different than some other Indian parents and their children [laughs].

MD: Yeah, that makes sense. And when you're talking about like seeing their friends' kids sneak around, are you talking specifically about their Indian friends?

JP: Yes. Yeah, yeah. And East Asian, too, I think that experience does parallel. You know, I remember having friends in middle school and high school who had, you know, boyfriends, their parents knew nothing about them and things like that.

MD: Yeah, and actually, I should have asked that. That's a question I've been asking people about, like how their parents met. They had a semi-arranged marriage, your parents?

JP: Sort of. Their meeting was set up.

MD: OK.

JP: Yeah.

MD: That makes sense, yeah. Again, I think those are the main things. But, yeah, thank you for your time. I appreciate it, it was really great to talk about a lot of this.

JP: Yeah.

MD: And I think it's a good place for us to stop.

JP: Awesome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]