

**TRANSCRIPT—MONI SAWHNEY**

Interviewee: Moni Sawhney

Interviewer: Maydha Devarajan

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Location: 6728 Pointe Vista Circle, Raleigh, N.C. 27615

[START OF INTERVIEW]

**Maydha Devarajan:** So my name is Maydha Devarajan, I'm with Moni [Man Mohan] Sawhney in his home in Raleigh, North Carolina. Today is November 8, 2021, we're here to do an oral history for the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill. So I was wondering if you can maybe tell me a little bit about yourself, when and where you were born and sort of the area that you grew up in India?

**Moni Sawhney:** I was born in New Delhi, India, on January 18, 1936. And I attended a local school there, the same school for 11 years. I graduated from DAV Higher Secondary School in 1952 and then went to Central College of Agriculture, got my undergraduate degree in agricultural in 1956. And then pursued my master's degree in rural sociology and then Ph.D. in rural sociology. Finished in 1962, got married in 1962, began working for the Rockefeller Foundation for about a year. Moved to the United States in '63, came to N.C. State on a postdoc in the Department of Sociology in 1963. And have been here ever since. I was invited to join the faculty in 1964. N.C. State was invited by the United States military to start a branch of N.C. State over at Fort Bragg. So there was a job created, so I began teaching sociology at N.C. State branch at Fort Bragg, so that was my first job. It lasted about a year and then I came back to the main campus and I stayed there for, oh, 39 years and retired in 2001 as a professor of sociology and associate dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

**MD:** Yeah, that's awesome. Thank you for going through all of that. Yeah, I wanted to ask a little bit about, you know, you said you moved to the United States in 1963. And I guess the reason why you came here was because of the offer from North Carolina State University?

**MS:** Well, I came on a business visa and the business somehow didn't work out. And I decided to go back to the academia and I was supposed to come to North Carolina State [University] for my Ph.D. in 1959, but I decided to stay and got my Ph.D. in Delhi. And when I was out of business, I contacted N.C. State and they offered me a postdoc.

**MD:** Oh, OK.

**MS:** So I had an N.C. State connection that I sort of rejuvenated and took advantage of that.

**MD:** Yeah. What was the business that you had?

**MS:** I was exporting handmade carpets from a place called Bhadohi to the United States. So Sharda [my wife] and I were in business together and we were exporting carpets.

**MD:** OK. Yeah. And then were you planning to get your Ph.D. even in 1959 in sociology or was that was something that came later?

**MS:** My degree was in rural sociology, and I decided for some reason to get into business because Sharda's background was an MBA. She has an MBA from Wharton. So she and I decided to get into business rather than academia. And we did that for about a year and things didn't work out the way we thought they would. And decided to come back to academia and then joined the faculty at N.C. State.

**MD:** OK. Yeah. And how come you decided to come to the South? Like why wasn't it another part of the United States?

**MS:** Well, when I applied for graduate studies from New Delhi in 1959, my area of interest was diffusion of technology. And N.C. State was a leader in that research. There was a professor named Paul Marsh. He was a leader. So there were two leaders of that. There was a guy named Wilkinson at Wisconsin and a man named Paul Marsh at N.C. State. So I applied at both places. Paul Marsh offered me an assistantship and admission, so I decided to come to N.C. State.

**MD:** OK, yeah. And I was curious, also, you talked about how Sharda went to Wharton School. What year did that happen?

**MS:** '58.

**MD:** OK. So how long have you known each other, the two of you?

**MS:** Well, we met each other in 1959. She had gone back to India and I was a graduate student in New Delhi and there was the World Agriculture Fair and I applied for a job there and she applied for a job. So we met there as employees of the USDA, United States Department of Agriculture. So we met there for the first time and her employer, her boss, Martin Abrahamson, and introduced us to each other. And then we got to know each other and then a friendship developed. And then we got married over a period of time.

**MD:** Yeah, you got married, I guess, a few years later?

**MS:** Three years later. Yeah.

**MD:** Wow. So you had kind of a love marriage.

**MS:** So, yeah, our introduction was as employees of the United States Department of Agriculture.

**MD:** Yeah, do you remember at the time were your parents, did they expect you to have an arranged marriage?

**MS:** Well, they expected to have an arranged marriage and we actually had an arranged marriage. So Sharda's mother came to see my mother and proposed marriage. We had already decided, but we went through the motion of her mother coming to see my mother and they decided that this was the right arrangement. And they agreed, and my mother told me that she had agreed that I was going to marry Sharda. And so we went through the ritual of the mothers making the decision, and we, like good sons and daughters, obeyed their instructions.

**MD:** That's nice how it worked out. [Laughter].

**MS:** So this was sort of a compromise between the traditional Indian ways of doing things and the emerging urban way of doing things.

**MD:** Right, yeah.

**MS:** Yeah.

**MD:** I know you applied to a postdoc in the United States. Do you think, growing up, you had expected that you would leave India or did you think that kind of came to you later?

**MS:** No, I did not. In fact, the idea of spending my life away from India was unthinkable. I was the only Ph.D. in the market at that time in 1962. I was the only rural sociology Ph.D. in the market. And there was a job created and that job was given to a political connection who didn't even have a degree in sociology. And I went home and I told my parents that I was never going to apply for another job and I was leaving India, so I left it because of the corruption of the bureaucracy.

**MD:** Wow.

**MS:** So I ran into the director of the Rockefeller Foundation and told him the story, and he said that he wanted to hire me anyway. So this was a golden opportunity. He offered me a job

right then and there, and I became an employee of the Rockefeller Foundation. So it was frustration with the Indian bureaucracy that forced me to leave the country.

**MD:** Wow, that's really interesting. Yeah. And then coming to the United States and living here, I actually wanted to go back a little bit to your upbringing in India. What did your parents do? Your father?

**MS:** My parents were contractors. They were builders. And my uncle in "19-teens", when the emperor decided that the capital of India was going to move from Calcutta to New Delhi, at that time, my grandfather, who lived in Punjab — which is part of Pakistan now — gave his son, my uncle, 10,000 rupees and asked him to go to New Delhi and try his luck in the building of the new capital. So he, at the age of 20, moved to New Delhi and became a contractor, so he became a very successful contractor. In fact, many of the buildings of the capital of New Delhi were built by our family. And he, in fact, was honored by the British government and he got the title of “Rai Bahadur” so he was Rai Bahadur Bal Mukund Sawhney, one of the leading contractors in the construction of the capital of New Delhi. So he brought his two brothers in, my father, his younger brother, the third younger brother. So three brothers, they were all contractors and built New Delhi.

**MD:** OK. That's really cool to have that connection.

**MS:** And they all encouraged us not to follow the family occupation.

**MD:** Really?

**MS:** Because it was based on essentially corruption and so they wanted us to make honest living. So none of us followed the family occupation.

**MD:** Right. And then how many siblings do you have?

**MS:** I'm one of eight.

**MD:** Wow, that's a big family.

**MS:** Yeah, all my brothers are public accountants. And all my sisters were educators. They were teachers and high school principals and so on. So the sisters became teachers and brothers became accountants. I was the only sociologist in the family. My other brothers were accountants.

**MD:** And did they all stay in India?

**MS:** They all stayed in India.

**MD:** So you were the only one.

**MS:** I'm the only one who left. I invited them to move to the United States. But they were doing financially very well at that time, and they had no motivation to come.

**MD:** OK. Yeah. That must have been a big shift, a big transition to kind of leave everything that you knew behind.

**MS:** Yeah, it was a big change. But many of them, not all, came and spent some time with us, visited when Anita, our daughter, got married. Most of the family did come and attend the wedding,

**MD:** And was your mom also a contractor or she was a homemaker?

**MS:** No, she was a homemaker. Yeah. And nobody in that generation, my mother and my two aunts, they were all homemakers.

**MD:** Right, yeah. OK. And then so talking about when you came to the United States, you said you lived in your first home for 30 something years, right in North Raleigh? In North Hills?

**MS:** Well, first we lived in a rental unit in western Raleigh on Aycock Street. Then we bought a home in North Hills in '67, I think. And in that house, we lived till '96, same house.

That house we sold. And then as we were thinking about retirement, we needed a house with a bedroom on the ground floor. So we moved into this house in '96 or '97 and we have lived in this house ever since.

**MD:** Yeah. So I guess like for Anita— and then you have your son as well, right?

**MS:** We have a son. We have two children. Anita is three years older than Ravi, who's an orthodontist, whose wife is an attorney. And she is vice president of a think tank up in Washington, D.C.

**MD:** OK, yeah. So I guess for both of their childhoods, you kind of were in that first home in North Hills. You lived there.

**MS:** Yeah, they practically grew up in North Hills.

**MD:** Right. OK. Yeah. So I want to talk a little about your experiences at N.C. State, when you first came there. I think you told me a story when we first spoke on the phone about an application or something and your race was being put down as white instead of Asian, or something like that?

**MS:** Well, at the university, there were only two races: white and Black. So the university decided that I was a Caucasian, and Caucasian meant white. And it so happened, I saved my driver's license. I thought I'll show you the first driver's license I got from the Raleigh Police Department had the same question.

**MD:** Really?

**MS:** "What's your race?"

**MD:** Oh, wow.

**MS:** And I said, "Indian." They say, "Indian is not a category." So they decided that since I was not Black, I had to be classified as Caucasian and Caucasian meant a W. So my initial

driver's license was a W. And then Nash Winstead, who was the provost of the university, a dear friend, came by to my office one day and said, "Moni, you look the same as yesterday. But this afternoon on the instructions given by the U.S. government, I have changed your racial designation to Asian Pacific Islander." So in the university's record, I became Asian Pacific Islander, I think back in '91 or '92. So I was white for a number of years, then became Asian Pacific Islander. [Laughs].

**MD:** Wow.

**MS:** And that way they were able to count an Asian Pacific Islander as one of the associate deans [laughs] of the university. And they were able to satisfy the affirmative action quota system and so on.

**MD:** Oh, wow, was that the reason that happened?

**MS:** Well, it did help. I mean, they were able to say that our top administration is not all white. [Laughs].

**MD:** Yeah. And how long did you have this driver's license for then?

**MS:** I think then the category changed and I don't remember when, but I had the white category for a number of years.

**MD:** Yeah. And I mean, at the time, was it something you thought about or it was just—?

**MS:** No, this was something very normal. I mean, this was not something that I ever thought about or mulled about. It was one of those things that the bureaucracy had to put you in a category. And so since there were two categories, Black and white, and then I think the Department of Motor Vehicles created the category of "O", "other." And then there was Black, white and other. So I became I think I became an "O" and then I don't know what the category is right now. No, right now, there's no category.



**MD:** Oh.

**MS:** On the driver's license, there's no racial identification. Is there?

**MD:** I thought there was, I thought mine says Asian, but I don't remember. [Pauses to take out his current driver's license to check]

**MS:** There's no race anymore.

**MD:** OK. Maybe they got rid of it.

**MS:** Yeah, so now they have the picture, the picture describes itself [laughs].

**MD:** Yeah, that's interesting. So, I mean, I think we talked a little bit about this, but you came to the United States and were working at North Carolina State University before the 1965 Civil Rights Act was passed. So I'm curious about your experiences, like I imagine coming at a time, you know, integration and those things are starting to happen. If you have experiences that you can remember, what that time period was like to move to the South?

**MS:** Well, I mean, I got the impression that all the negative energy was on the Blacks. And I never experienced anything negative. And I always remember one party of the faculty and they were asking if I had experienced any bad situation because of [my] Asian origin. And my answer was, "No, never." And my dear friends and colleagues, simultaneously, said the same thing. They said, "Because you are not a Catholic or a Jew." And these were my Catholic friends and Jewish friends. They had experienced discrimination that I had not. So it was easier at that time, I think, to be an Indian than to be a Catholic or a Jew in the South. They had experienced ill will from people that I had not. So whether I was naive enough not to notice, but I never did.

**MD:** Yeah. You were saying it's easier in some ways than— how do you think that's changed now for you?

**MS:** I have never experienced any.

**MD:** Any racial discrimination?

**MS:** Even in classrooms. One of my students became the chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. Burley Mitchell. He remembers my response to the class. A student asked, "Professor Sawhney, did you know about the air conditioning when you were in India?" I said, "Yes, I knew about air conditioning, except we used to use firewood to operate our air conditioning." [Laughs] He thought it was funny. And he remember that, he still tells people, that I responded by just making a joke out of it. So even when students ask those ignorant questions, because I did not see those as racially antagonistic questions, I gave them a light-hearted answers and so on. So student used to ask about, you know, what caste did I belong to, the untouchables and so on and so forth. I used to give them straight, lighthearted answers, so I did not feel that I was being slighted because of my Indian origin and so on. I was conscious of my accent when I started teaching, and a colleague of mine said, "You know, why don't you just stand in front of a mirror and give a lecture?" And so for months and months, I would go talk in front of a mirror and just overcome my hesitation. I began teaching here without having had any background in being a student here in this country and so on. So my experience was very different from most people who began teaching here. They got their Ph.D.s in this country. I came from outside, so I had no experience of American education, so it was a very different kind of an experience for me. But I had dear friends who encouraged me and I was able to overcome it.

**MD:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And when you would practice in front of a mirror, you would, like, try to make your accent sound more kind of Americanized?

**MS:** Right.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** And I mean, I had experiences that are hard to believe. A colleague of mine wanted me to buy a house in his neighborhood. And he picked a house for us for \$28,000. We picked the house for \$22,000. So he said, you know, "Why don't you want to move in my neighborhood?" I said because that's \$28,000 and this is \$22,000. He took out a checkbook and signed me a check for \$6,000. He says, "Here it is. Go by this house." So they were very generous friends. So our reception was absolutely unbelievable. So it was almost make-believe. When I applied for visa, the department had said, you know, "You're the first foreigner." I don't know how to apply it. I went to the dean's office, the dean says, "I don't know how to apply. You're the first one." I went to the provost, the provost said, "I don't know how to apply. Why don't you do it yourself?" So I sponsored myself [laughs] for immigrant visa. And the provost, Harry Kelly, signed it, and then Lyndon Johnson passed the law and I got my green card at the same time as the people who had been in line for eight or nine years. So it was one of those very happy circumstances, and the reception from the university was just phenomenal.

**MD:** Really, yeah. That's funny, I didn't even know it was possible to sponsor yourself for something like that.

**MS:** I mean, they said, "Why don't you do it yourself?"

**MD:** Right, yeah. And I actually wanted to go back to a few things that you said. One, you were talking about sort of Civil Rights Movement, Civil Rights era. You were talking about your own—you said you have not, as you can recall, experienced things that you would classify as kind of overt racial discrimination. And then you were talking about, you know, your understanding was that a lot of the negative things that had happened were from Black people were kind of perpetuating—is that what you were kind of talking about?

**MS:** Right. I mean, I knew it. I mean, I had a Black colleague.

**MD:** Oh, you're saying it was being experienced by Black people.

**MS:** Right. I knew the jokes that people were telling about Blacks. That was not directed against the Indians, for example. I mean, I knew a Black colleague who used to sit in the parking lot of the N.C. State campus for five, 10 minutes. And I asked him one day, I said, "Why do you sit there?" He says, "I talk in white English for 10 minutes before I get out." He said, "I make the transition." The torture he must go through — I developed a great love for that man because of the trauma that he must go through, where he had to make the transition from the Black English to white English. He says, you know, he was living in a Black world, Black family, Black world. And then he was making that transition, speaking white to himself. So I knew that, and I was very fortunate that I never experienced that. In fact, people had raised questions that I was the department head's favorite faculty member because I was promoted to associate in four years instead of six. And they said, "This man is playing favorites" in one of the meetings. They said, you know, "How come Sawhney has been promoted in four years instead of six?" He could not think of anything else, he said, "I gave him credit for his job with the Rockefeller Foundation." [Laughs] So I got faster promotions than anybody else. I became full professor at the age of 36, which was faster than anybody else. So in fact, the university never gave me any reason to believe that I was being discriminated against or anything. In fact, it was just the other way around.

**MD:** Wow, that's really interesting, yeah, to talk about those experiences. You said at some point you became associate dean also?

**MS:** Yeah, I became the associate dean and I never applied for it. I became the associate department head. Never applied for it. The department head called me one day, and he said, "I would like you to be the associate department head." And then the new dean came and he said,

"I've heard good things about your work as an associate department head. I would like you to be associate—" I became a member of the faculty senate and I gave a speech. And the next thing I knew, the women faculty came to my office and suggested that I be a candidate for chair of the faculty senate. So I was the first foreign-born chair of the faculty senate at N.C. State.

**MD:** Wow.

**MS:** So there were very fortunate things that happened to me, and I was always on the positive end of receiving these gratifying experiences.

**MD:** Yeah. Why do you think it is that maybe you— you were talking about, for example, on your driver's license or on the forms at the university, like they would mark you as Caucasian at the time, there were just those two choices. Do you think that had to do with why you weren't receiving kind of more discrimination or negative response? Because you, I guess— do you think socially, you kind of identified more with white people than Black people at the time?

**MS:** Well, I think because I was willing to— I mean, my fast promotion was made possible. There was a guy named Charlie Mercer. He got medically unable to teach, and the department head went to two, three people. He said, "Charlie Mercer is sick, somebody's got to teach his classes." And they say, "No, we don't want to teach." He came to me. I said, "You know, I don't have any background in this." And the department head said, "You can stay ahead of the class two or three days and you can wing it." And I did. And he was so impressed that he decided that he had to make up to me. So I always did more than my share of responsibility, and I think people felt compelled to— I mean, I think I probably went to a police officer instead of saying, "Mr. Johnson," I said, "Sir, how do I answer this question of race?" So I don't know. I mean, I have no idea why they asked me to put white, but I always showed respect.

**MD:** Showed respect to like white people or showed respect to—?

**MS:** To everybody.

**MD:** OK. Right. Yeah.

**MS:** I mean people— I had no idea. My secretary, one day— you know, in India, we had the practice of using umbrella against the hot sun. So I took my umbrella, [she] said, "Dr. Sawhney, are you expecting rain?" I say, "No, the sun is very hot." [She] said, "No, don't ever use umbrella." I said, "Why?" [She] said, "Only Black people use umbrellas in the sun." And said, "You're not supposed to use it." She did not want anybody to think I was Black. She was so protective, she came running. She said, "Dr. Sawhney, Dr. Sawhney, why do you want to use umbrella? Is it going to rain?" I said, "No, it's too hot." But she was protective. The white-Black thing was so dominant at that time. She didn't want anybody to think that I was Black.

**MD:** That's really interesting. Yeah.

**MS:** Because in those days, only Blacks use umbrellas to protect themselves against sun. White people want to tan.

**MD:** Yeah, that's really interesting. I guess we can get into some of those questions, which is that like, you know, when you came here, I was curious, I imagine that some of the bathrooms were still segregated or things like that.

**MS:** No, that had stopped.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** There were still signs at the railway station. At a certain angle of the sun, the sign that had been painted over. But you can see the drinking fountains for Blacks only now. So in '63, they had been painted over.

**MD:** OK, yeah.

**MS:** So that wasn't there. The stores, the railroad station, and there were at least one of these doorways, I can't remember which store, so when the sun was at the right [angle], you could see "whites only," but they had been painted over.

**MD:** OK. Yeah. That's really interesting. And I guess, you know, you were talking about like at the university, you were the only foreign-born professor for a while?

**MS:** There was one more— no, in the humanities. There was one in engineering. From Pakistan.

**MD:** Were you guys friends?

**MS:** Oh, yeah. We became good friends. In fact, he died young and he told his wife that I should do the eulogy for him. So, you know, when you're 30 years of age, you've never seen anybody die and you end up doing a eulogy in front of 500 people. That's one of the most traumatic days of my life.

**MD:** Yeah, I can imagine. Thank you for sharing that. I mean, did you go back to India to do that?

**MS:** No, no. He was here. He was on the faculty, in civil engineering.

**MD:** Right. But, I guess, you said 500 people.

**MS:** Oh, the faculty came. Yeah, [when] he died, the faculty, the neighbors, they all came. So there was the big thing in Pullen Baptist Church.

**MD:** Really? Yeah. Yeah, at the time when you came up, did you know any other South Asian families in North Carolina?

**MS:** Well, oh, yes, N.C. State had a special relationship with the government of India at that time.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** So although there was only one Indian family living in Raleigh, there were at least three or four graduate students. The College of Engineering and College of Ag and Life Sciences had a contract with the government of India. And in the five-year plans, N.C. State was training the scientists and engineers from India. So when I came, we got to know at least three other South Asian families. Two from Pakistan, one from India, who were graduate students. No, actually two from India and two from Pakistan, and they were all graduate students.

**MD:** OK. Would you hang with those families?

**MS:** Oh, we became very close friends. In fact, three of those families, two men are dead but the wives, we still have Christmas card greeting exchange with them. And two men, we still call each other every three, four months.

**MD:** Do any of them still live in North Carolina or have they—?

**MS:** No, one lives in D.C., one in Baltimore.

**MD:** OK.

[AUDIO BREAK — paused recorder to ask Sharda to turn down T.V. because it was picking up on the recording]

**MD:** Great, yeah, so you were talking a little bit about some of those South Asian families in the area, how they moved away now, but you were pretty close growing up. Did you, on the weekends, would you get together with those three, four families sometimes?



**MS:** Right, in fact, we used to get together and then there was an employee in the Student Union who got in 18- or 16-millimeter projector. And one of the guys, I don't know where he got the Indian movies, we used to use their projector to watch Indian movies in the Student Union so all the graduate students and some of the local students used to watch Indian movies and so on.

**MD:** Yeah, that's funny. And at home, would you speak, like, Hindi or another language with your family or a main language?

**MS:** Well, we— it's a bad habit, we just did not speak Hindi, even at home. And that's a bad decision we made, our children never learned Hindi or Punjabi. We were so anxious to become part of the local community that Anita and Ravi did not eat much Indian food, we didn't do much Indian cooking. I used to play Indian music for myself, I used play the Indian classical music and so on. But they never had much interest in that. Anita was heavily into piano and Ravi was into playing guitar and trumpet, so we unfortunately did not expose them to Hindi and the Indian culture and so on.

**MD:** Yeah. Well, I mean, I relate that because I unfortunately don't know any Indian languages either, and I talked to Anita about that. But you said you enjoy Indian classical music, like—?

**MS:** The vocal. Begum Akhtar, Fateh Ali Khan and so on.

**MD:** Yeah.

**MS:** So I got a huge collection of their DVDs and CDs and so on.

**MD:** That's awesome.

**MS:** Yeah.

**MD:** Would you watch Bollywood movies at home? Is that something that you would do sometimes or not?

**MS:** I still go for the DVDs now and then.

**MD:** Yeah, yeah. I actually want to talk a little bit about it, you said you didn't expose them too much to the Indian culture. And I guess talking about food, you wouldn't cook or Sharda wouldn't cook too much Indian food?

**MS:** No, we cook more Indian food at least once or twice a week. So we eat more Indian food now than we did when the kids were with us. And then, you know, it's available. At that time, it wasn't available.

**MD:** I'm sure, yeah.

**MS:** So we got away from the Indian food, but with the availability and so on, we started eating Indian food at least two or three times a week— no, three, four times a month, we eat Indian food.

**MD:** Now?

**MS:** Now.

**MD:** Yeah. So growing up, I guess for them, your children, and you know, when you first came to the United States, what kind of stuff would you eat? I know you talked about Southern cuisine a little bit on the phone, but what kind of stuff would you eat for dinner or take to—?

**MS:** Oh, everything, you know, burgers and steaks, and roasts, and turkeys, and chicken, and fish, and barbecue, and Italian, and the Greek, and the pastas and spanakopitas, the Chinese. So we could go for all kinds of foods.

**MD:** OK. Yeah. And I mean, I think we talked about this a little bit, that Sharda picked up some Southern kind of recipes from people or—?

**MS:** Yeah, learned some, you know, barbecue thing from our neighbors and so on. And one of our neighbors was a Greek family. So we learned spanakopita and baklava and so on from them, and learned Southern barbecue and chicken from our neighbors and so on.

**MD:** Yeah, that's funny. That's interesting. And I guess the neighborhood that you moved into, do you remember the racial demographics in that neighborhood?

**MS:** They were all white. We had a couple of Black friends from the faculty.

**MD:** Right.

**MS:** Otherwise, our friends were all Indian or white.

**MD:** Yeah. Do you think—?

**MS:** But in our faculty colleagues, many of them were Jewish and Catholic.

**MD:** Yeah, and you talked about that, though, which is interesting, you said before, how those colleagues who were Jewish or Catholic were saying that the discrimination that they were receiving at the time was worse than what you had been receiving. And I mean, I know you mentioned to me also on the phone that now you would—I think you called yourself a "churchgoing Hindu." I think that's the phrase that you used.

**MS:** Well, we still go to church, but we are not Christian and we still are Hindus. I'm one of the seven founders of the Hindu Society of North Carolina [HSNC]. My name is still on the plaque and I was the chair of the trustees of our church. So, I get more satisfaction from a church service than I do from bhajan and kirtan, and so on and so forth. I mean, I am a good scholar of Hinduism. I know more about Hinduism than most other people I know. But the recitation and kirtan and so on and so forth, to me, don't mean anything. So I don't go for those bhajans and kirtans and so on. But I'm a serious Hindu in my belief system.

**MD:** Yeah.

**MS:** So I do get the spiritual satisfaction from being in a church service, although I am not able to accept the idea of going to heaven or [unclear — only through] Jesus Christ and so on. There's a bunch of baloney.

**MD:** OK. That's the thing, too, you were talking about how you're one of the seven founders of HSNC. And I know that that was really founded 70s, 80s time. So for a while when you were in the United States prior to that, would you practice, like did you have a mandir at home or was it kind of—?

**MS:** Sharda has a small mandir at home. I have never— I don't believe in prayer because, to me, the whole idea of prayer downgrades God. I mean, if I love a baby, I don't expect the baby to thank me. I don't expect God to thank me for anything. I mean, if there's God, he knows what I won't, he knows— so for me, the biggest hypocrisy in Hinduism is this bargaining that goes on. "That God gives me those things and I'll give you 100 rupees worth of prasad," and so on. This is the biggest distortion of Hinduism that Hindus follow. This bribery of God and so on. That's ridiculous. So I don't accept the Hindu rituals. And that's why I don't do poojas and prayers and so on. And I am very inspired by the Hindu interpretation of cosmology. But I don't do prayers. I don't do poojas.

**MD:** Yeah, I was just curious because I was wondering when you started going to church.

**MS:** Pardon me?

**MD:** I was just curious when you started to go to church. And if that was like a substitute for something or just when you started going.

**MS:** If I want to express peace with my creation, I go to church.

**MD:** Did you go when you first came to North Carolina?

**MS:** Yeah.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** We had some dear friends who were members of Pullen Baptist Church, and they invited us and I felt very comfortable with— there was a preacher named W.W. Finlator, a leading liberal Baptist in North Carolina. He and I became close friends, and he inspired me with the Christian thought. And the church was getting old, there was not a whole lot for the kids. So we moved to the community, United Church of Christ, because they had a children's program and Anita and Ravi were young at that time, so we stayed with the community church. And they've had absolutely brilliant preachers, mostly women, and they have had two lesbian ministers. Brilliant woman, tremendous understanding of the faith and so on, and just beautiful people. So I'm very inspired by the ministry. The young, beautiful women who happen to be lesbians and so on. It's very inspiring to me that they stand up and show their love for humanity. And so I feel very comfortable in their presence.

**MD:** That's awesome. I wanted to just turn on a few lights, so I'm going to do that. I want to go back to something that you said, but I think the sun is setting. So I'm noticing that we're losing some light, so I'm going to turn these lights on, if that's OK. [Sounds of me moving around room, turning on lights]. OK, great. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

**MS:** Right. So, essentially, to me, a temple or church is where I can feel at peace with my maker and the other humans there who share the same kind of feelings. And the pandit who is more interested in prasad, and shouting and screaming and Harikrishna and so on, that doesn't turn me on. I'm turned on by a lesbian minister who shows her love for humanity and who understands the pain that a hungry child in India or Africa is going through, and the pain of not

being able to get the vaccination. And the pain of not having a job and not doing well in school, not able to send a child to college. Those who understand that pain, I love those people.

**MD:** Thank you for talking through and kind of explaining some of that. I was just curious how important, I guess, your religious community was in establishing a sense of identity for you here when you came or if it kind of wasn't that central to your [experiences]?

**MS:** Yeah. And my religious community, you know, Baptists are supposed to be, you know, very conservative, but Pullen Baptist was a very different kind of a church. I don't know if you know about Pullen Baptist is among the most enlight— in fact, they were thrown out by the Southern Baptist Convention as too liberal for their liking. And they had to become an independent church and W.W. Finlator and the guy from Chapel Hill, Finley Baptist Church.

**MD:** Oh, yeah.

**MS:** Yeah, so there were two leading Baptist churches in North Carolina.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** So the preacher there and W.W. Finlator were two of the leaders who stood with the Martin Luther King and [pause] the Civil Rights Movement and so they were, you know, happy days for North Carolina in participating in the Civil Rights Movement of the country.

**MD:** Yeah, definitely. Yeah, thank you for walking through that. I wanted to go back to something now. We talked about this on the phone, about Southern identity. And I think I asked you, and I'm going to ask you again now, would you call yourself a Southerner?

**MS:** No. The whole Southern identity has been a divisive identity. And I never gave myself a Punjabi identity. I never understood the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] as a child. I never understood the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] mentality. I never understood the Southern identity. My inclusive mindset prevents me from identifying myself in any divisive

identity. So I'm a Punjabi, but that's not my identity. I'm an American, I'm an Indian American, not a Punjabi, not Southern. So I live in the South, but I'm not— my identity is not Southern. My mother tongue is Punjabi, but that's not my identity. My identity, growing up, was with Gandhi and Nehru, and not with the divisive force of RSS and Muslim League and Khalistan and so on. So, that's why, you know, it was the Pullen Church and the United Church of Christ that attracted me. It was the friendship with my Jewish friends and Catholic friends that has remained very strong. I mean, I've, for example, celebrated my birthday for the last 55 years with my Jewish colleague. He and I celebrate our birthday together, and we have done it for 55 years now. So that means a lot to me. His identity is that not of a Jew, but of an educator, and that's my identity the same way.

**MD:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And thank you for kind of walking through some of that. I guess when you talk about Southern identity, you said that's very divisive and that's not something that you identify with. You talked about some of the other parts of that too. When you think about the American South, is there something that comes to mind or something that you picture?

**MD:** Well, the Southern identity, again, unfortunately, is associated with the Dixiecrat, with slavery, with plantations, with "them and us." It's always dividing. It is exclusive rather than inclusive. The Constitution says this nation is indivisible. And to say, "No, it ain't, it is divisible. It can be divided. You can secede from it." To me, the division, the whole idea of divorce, division — they're unholy. For example, Anita is my daughter. The laws of nature gave me a daughter. I can't divorce her. If I can't divorce, and how can I divorce my wife? How can I divorce my country? How can I divorce my Indianness? I'm an Indian. And that's why, you know, I don't understand the whole idea of Pakistan. I never understood it. I mean, the Pakistanis

have been Indians for 8,000 years, and they have been Pakistanis for 70 years. The hate, the animosity, it's nonsense. I mean, my wife had been a Tandon for 85 years, but she has been a Sawhney for fewer years than that, for 60 years. But she can't hate being a Tandon. That's her name. That's her life. So, you know, I wonder, Homo sapiens survived by destroying the Neanderthal. Is this in our nature? Have we learned that we survived by destroying our competition? I mean, when are we going to go away from our beginnings? We had to fight the Neanderthal, that was— .

[AUDIO BREAK — Maydha paused recorder to cough]

**MD:** Yes, sorry, so I know you were talking about some—.

**MS:** Right, I mean, I feel more comfortable with people who are inclusive. Many of the bonds with my colleagues were created, I think when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. We all marched from the [N.C. State] campus to the [State] Capitol and that's when suddenly the bond of friendship developed. And it's been 22 years since we retired, and once a month, we still get together for lunch.

**MD:** Aw.

**MS:** So there are 10, 12 of us, we meet for old times' sake time, just to have lunch together.

**MD:** Yeah, no, that's awesome, and I think there are a lot of things you mentioned— excuse me, I'm sorry.



[AUDIO BREAK — Maydha paused recorder to cough again]

**MD:** Sorry for the interruption.

**MS:** No problem.

**MD:** I know you were talking about, yeah some of the specifics about why some of these things feel a little divisive to you. And I think that was interesting. You mentioned that you're Punjabi. Was your family impacted by Partition? Were they separated?

**MS:** No, my father's side, they moved to Delhi in "19-teens." So we were all in Delhi. My mother's side was still in Pakistan and they came in 1947.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** So my mother actually was an only child and her parents had died before '47. But her cousins and uncles and aunts, they came over at Partition and many of them came and stayed with us as refugees.

**MD:** Oh wow. I mean, so that makes sense that, you know, you're talking about some of those kind of philosophical questions about divisiveness and human nature. I think that's interesting. I also want to ask you. You mentioned that you can't divorce your Indianness from yourself and I was curious for you, after having moved to the United States and been here for so many years, been here more than you have spent time in India, also. Did you ever feel like you had to choose between your Indianness and Americanness? Or was there a space that was given to you to kind of exist in both of those spaces?

**MS:** No, I mean, life is a process. I mean, no more than—I'm not embarrassed that 85 years ago, I used to mess up diapers. I mean, at a time you were a baby, you messed up diapers. You cried when your mom and dad left you. So whether you are in New Delhi or Raleigh, North Carolina, it really loses meaning as you grow older. If I had lived there, I probably would be listening to the same music, having the same thoughts, eating the same food— [Laughs].

**MD:** Well, maybe not the same food, I guess. Southern cuisine is very—.

**MS:** Yeah, I mean, but I don't think my brother's family eat much differently than we do here in Raleigh. I mean, they've become so cosmopolitan there also. So no, I mean, in the evolutionary process, you become less conscious of having relocated 10,000 miles. I used to be much more conscious of it 30 years ago. But now, at this stage, it's just an evolutionary stage.

**MD:** Yeah, I think that's really interesting. And I was curious, also, if you identify—I know there's a lot of terms that have kind of changed over time. We were talking about how on your driver's license that it used to just be "Black" or "white" and then "Other" became a choice. Then "Asian American Pacific Islander," that was something that was changed for you when you were a faculty member. And I think that there are terms people use to identify and they become more specific or kind of there's more choices, things like that. Do you think you would ever use the term "brown" to describe yourself? I know that some spaces, people talk about "Black and brown communities." Is that something that applies to you?

**MS:** Well, you know, sure, I live in two different worlds. For example, we have get-togethers. And there are times when I stuck by the fact that all my Indian friends live in the suburbs, all my white friends live in the city. In my younger days— [Phone rings and Moni picks up]. In the younger days, all our male Indian friends used to dye their hair. None of my white American friends ever would think of dyeing their hair, and I used to say, "You know, this is a

very schizo culture I'm a part of." I'm having one group of friends, they all have dyed their hair. I never dyed my hair and I say, you know, "What are these people trying to do? They're all in my age group. Why do they dye their hair? Why don't these people dye their hair? Why are all these people living with huge yards in the suburbs? And all these people are living inside the cities?" [Laughs] So yes, I mean, you know, having been an academic with academic friends, no white friend of mine lives in a one-acre suburban home. None of my Indian friends live inside the city. So it's a schizophrenic kind of life. Even today, there are Indian friends, who still, at 85 years of age, they dye their hair. [Laughter] I said, "What the hell are you trying to prove? I mean, who are you faking?" So there are these dynamics.

**MD:** Right.

**MS:** And the Indian friends, they talk about stock markets, you know how much the stock market. And if these people are talking to my buddies and colleagues from the university, you talk about stock market and they'll say, "God, this is horrible. I mean, this is so uncivilized, to get together and rather than talking about the environmental problem, all you're talking about is how's the stock market." [Laughs] So, you live in two different worlds and you have been very careful that when these people are talking the stock market that you don't send them the message that you will be bored by it. That you think what they're talking about is stupid.

**MD:** Are you saying as somebody who is a first-generation immigrant or as somebody—like you have to live in two worlds? Like that kind of thing or—?

**MS:** Well, I mean, you know, I have to sympathize with you. Because you go to a party of your parents and grandparents and their friends, and they're talking about how the 401ks are doing and so on and so forth. And you're saying, "Talk about what the environment is doing." I mean, how much damage is being done to the environment with the technologies moving, and

they're not talking about this. They're worried about how much the property values have gone up, how the 401ks [are doing]. So once you live in two different cultures, you know, there are those dilemmas. The contradictions. Either you develop a lot of patience, or you find that you're being irritated by people. I mean, at one time, I used to get very angry at people dying hair. It used to make me angry. I mean, why should people dye their hair? [Laughs].

**MD:** That is silly.

**MS:** Yes, it's inconsequential. It doesn't make any difference.

**MD:** Yeah, I think that's really interesting. I want to ask you a few more [questions] about the kinds of things we've been talking about. I don't know, if you had to think about having been in this area for so long, what are maybe some of your favorite and least favorite parts about living in North Carolina or being in the South?

**MS:** [Pauses] Well, you get used to it. There are meaningless expressions in every culture. "Y'all come back." If you take it seriously, it is hypocritical. But it's one of those nonsensical things. It's like, "How are you doing?" In India, we say, "Oh, thank you very much, we are doing very well." What do you have to do with my welfare? So "Y'all come back," there are hypocrisies in the South and the built-in racial thing, which is a part of Southern culture, Southern language, that is bothersome. The inability of the Southern mindset, the music, the culture to see beyond race and so on. That is bothersome. They say, you know, "We do not make any distinction." Even saying that is vulgar. To say that, that means they're conscience of it. "It doesn't make any difference to us, whether you're Black or white." I'm saying yes, the very fact that people are saying it is bothersome, that means it's part of their thinking. It would be wonderful when those things are not even said. So that is an embarrassing part of living in the South and the beauty of the whole thing is, I think, [pauses] character develops after you lose.

The Yankee character is flawed. Vietnam did make a difference. See, up to Vietnam, the Yankees had never lost anything, anything Americans tried, it resulted in success. Vietnam was the first defeat. And I think that made America a better place.

**MD:** The Vietnam War?

**MS:** Vietnam made America a better place because it taught that you are not superhumans, you can be beaten. And because the South had lost a war, it made Southerners a little more humane, a little more understanding of the realities. I think the arrogance and the vulgarity, the ugly American syndrome that has caused so many problems for America is because the history of America has been a history of success. So thank God for Vietnam. And if Vietnam lesson is there— see, things like Trump happened in this country because the history had been that of success, the defeats and the losses are considered minor in the background and so on and so forth. It says we can do anything that we want to, and the humans by definition, are flawed animals. And to know that we are flawed, it is very, very important. And that's why, you know, the Gandhian philosophy recognizes that man was created by God as a noble person, but it's a flawed animal. And the history of success, I think, created a very vulgar human being. And the South, having lost, I think created a slightly better human being than the Yankee. So in some ways, there was an advantage. But there was the denial, the denial has created a schizophrenic behavior. That the South that accepts that they lost are better people. The South that denies the defeat are schizos.

**MD:** I think that's really interesting because— I don't know, I guess for the Vietnamese, I'm sure they would not say that the Vietnam War was a—.

**MS:** Well, you know, Chapel Hill is such a wonderful university, primarily because it's a Southern university that knows that it lost. The literature that has come out of Carolina English

department and so on and so forth, it recognizes that. And that's why UNC-Chapel Hill has done things that many of the university— University of North Carolina and University of Virginia have accomplished these things because these are two Southern universities that have recognized that they lost the war.

**MD:** I think it's still— I don't know, I feel like there's still complexities within, though, because obviously, you know, I would say that there's a large portion of people at Chapel Hill, even, who didn't accept that. That's why things like Silent Sam were erected, and we still have buildings on campus that are named for white supremacists.

**MS:** Right, right. But there's still a strong sentiment that all those symbols should be removed. Virginia and North Carolina, which is not the case at Clemson or— you know, these two universities have accepted the Southern tradition as having lost the war, and that's important in the formation of the character of the universities and the character of the scholars and so on.

**MD:** I think that's a very interesting perspective, definitely. And I know we kind of are getting to our time so I want to make sure I get to touch on everything before we wrap up. I also wanted to go back to, you know, we talked a little bit about your interactions with white Americans and Black Americans when you first moved here. And since then, I'm curious for you, you said, you know, most of your friends were either white or they were South Asian, and then you had a few Black colleagues who you were also close with. But do you think you would probably identify more with a white American that live here in the South or a Black American who lives [in the South]? Is that something that you thought about or you feel like— yeah, if you identify more closely with one group versus the other?

**MS:** I don't know. I mean, I have had some very good Black friends, but those numbers are small. And I can't remember the name of this great Civil Rights leader who died a couple of

years ago, who was training academics in racial sensitivity. [Pauses] He came to train. And I was in that training room. And the first thing he asks, he says, "All those who are prejudiced, raise their hand." Everybody raised their hand. I did not. He started laughing, he says, "Are you saying you're not prejudiced?" I said, "I got lots of biases but racial prejudice, I don't have." And then he put two pencils on the floor. And he says "There's a riot going on in Chicago." And one pencil, he shows and he says, "The white people are, the Black people are here." He says, "Which way would we go?" So I indicated to the white people. He said, "That shows you are prejudiced." I said, "That shows I'm not stupid. I don't want to get beat up." So I do not know. If I have to run in a crowded place, I would run to the white people because I don't want the police to beat me up. But my identity is still that of an American of Indian origin. So I'm very aware that I am an Indian American. Not Southern American, not Punjabi. [I'm] Indian American. So that's my identity, so any subdivision don't occur to me.

**MD:** I think that's also really interesting, and maybe that ties into the next point, which we've also touched on. This idea of a Black-white binary that exists in the South, and you talked about some of your experiences with that, like with your driver's license or some of the, you know, forms and designations at N.C. State, things like that. I guess, you know, I'm curious if there was anything else surrounding that idea that we didn't touch on that you wanted to mention.

**MS:** I can't think of anything.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** I mean, I am aware that it is not a colorblind system. Within that system, where color is a relevant dimension, I am an Indian American.

**MD:** Yeah, I think that makes sense.

**MS:** And I don't want to hide it, I don't apologize, I don't brag about it existentially.

That's it.

**MD:** Yeah.

**MS:** [Phone rings] Sharda will pick it up.

**MD:** OK. Another thing I wanted to ask about was sort of, you know, you talked about in your family, you were the only person who, you know, pursued sociology. And I'm curious, like, you know, I think there's this kind of notion now where it's like, you have to be that— it's like kind of a joke, I think, sometimes in immigrant families like doctor, engineer, lawyer, like kind of those professions. Was that something that you thought about or— I mean, both of your kids I guess became dentists, and so I'm curious, like if there was an expectation that they had to do certain kinds of professions? Or I don't know if when you were raising your children, if you thought about those kinds of things.

**MS:** No, actually, you know, they becoming dentists was a pure coincidence. They both needed orthodontic work done when they were children. And Sharda wasn't working at that time. And the clinic, you could say save half the price at the UNC-Chapel Hill clinic. So the young dentist who was working on him, they fell in love with those young dentists. And they came home one day and told us they wanted to be dentists, and never changed their mind about it.

**MD:** Yeah.

**MS:** So they identified with those young dentists who worked on them and they thought they were funny and they told them that was a good life. They didn't have one for five days a week [laughs]. Nobody wake them up in the middle of the night, you don't have to be doctors, nobody wakes you up in the middle of the night. So they were inspired by that and told us they wanted to be dentists.



**MD:** Yeah.

**Sharda Sawhney:** [Sharda comes into the room] You keep going.

**MS:** Could you turn the coffee pot on?

**SS:** It is on.

**MS:** Oh, it's on.

**SS:** You asked me in the beginning to turn it on.

**MD:** I just have a few more questions.

**MS:** OK, sure.

**MD:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense and I was also curious, did your son marry somebody who was a South Asian or did he marry—?

**MS:** No, she is American white.

**MD:** OK.

**MS:** It so happens that both children married people of Irish extraction. Yeah. Greg was born in Ireland and Laura's family came from Ireland.

**MD:** Yeah. Was there ever ideas about arranged marriage for your kids that you and Sharda talked about or—?

**MS:** No, the interracial marriages were part of our experience because Sharda's two brothers were married to Americans. The oldest brother, Ravi, he was married to a German. Shamsher was married to an American. And so they grew up with cross-cultural marriages and so on and so forth. So there never was an expectation as they were growing up, that they were going to only date Indian. So when they went to college and so on, they, I don't think, got any message from us that we expected them to go out with Indian only or non-Indians and so on. So

they dated Indians and non-Indians and alike. So Anita dated Indians and non-Indians. More non-Indians than Indians, I think.

**MD:** Yeah, I was just curious about that. And one thing that I was also curious but didn't kind of touched on, but you talked about those few families that you would have, you know, sometimes the Pakistani, Indian families you would get together with on the weekends? Do you feel like you had a sense of community with people of the same ethnicity as you living in North Carolina, when you first came and things like that?

**MS:** Say it again.

**MD:** Yeah. I was just curious if you felt like when you first came— or even how you lived in North Carolina for so long, if you felt a sense of community with people of the similar ethnicities, like also South Asian people?

**MS:** We had both. I mean, in a typical week, we'll have one get-together with our Indian friends and one get-together with university colleagues. So we had parties, one day we'll have 50 Indians coming to the house, another day— and on New Year's Eve party, we had 100 people, 50 Indian and 50 white people. So our New Year's Eve parties, which we had for 50 years, every year, and they were mixed. And so our kids grew up with having both Indians and non-Indians coming to the home for big get-togethers.

**MD:** Right. Yeah, that makes sense. I think I was just going to tie this to something, which is that like, I'm just curious, have you seen— obviously in the Triangle, Cary and Morrisville have really big South Asian populations. And I mean, they've grown in a lot of the cities in the Triangle. But I'm just curious, you know, how have you seen the South Asian community change since you've been here?

**MS:** Well, the community has grown tremendously, obviously. And it was very uncomfortable to me. When I started on the university campus, in the dining room, Indian students were sitting with white kids for dining rooms and so on. But by the 90s, when I went to the cafeteria, Indian kids were sitting with Indian kids and the white kids, they were in complete isolation. The self-imposed segregation was absolutely unpredictable to me, why Indian students started sharing dining room tables with Indian students only. I thought by the time my kids went to college, this business of identifying with Indians would completely disappear. But the result was exactly contrary to what I had expected. And so it was absolutely shocking to me that when we started teaching Hindi and Urdu, and I actually began the whole idea, I hired Afroz Taj—

**MD:** Oh really?

**MS:** Yeah. So we began teaching Hinduism, Hindi-Urdu to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. But I was absolutely surprised that every Indian student was taking Hindi and Urdu. I would go to the cafeteria and they were all sharing the tables and so on and so forth. It was shocking to me. I never expected that. But I think many of the Indian students were coming with the expectation from their families that they were going to date only Indian students and so on and so forth. So they were shying away from going out with others because they were going to be branded as "too modern" to be accepted by the Indians for Indian relationships and so on. So I think many of them were afraid that they were going to be categorized as "too modern" to be accepted as part of the Indian community.

**MD:** That's really interesting. Do you think that's like a generational thing, like the people who came in the 80s or 90s are different?

**MS:** Well, I think in some ways your generation is much more conservative than the generations that came. The graduate student who came in the 60s, they wouldn't want to go out

with Indian girls. They were anxious to work with American girls and so on. Now, the students that go out, they go out with fellow Indians.

**MD:** That's interesting. I also wanted to go back, you mentioned that you helped to establish the Hindu-Urdu program at N.C. State.

**MS:** That was at the College of Humanities.

**MD:** OK. What was the impetus for wanting to establish that?

**MS:** Well, no, actually, there was a South Asian Consortium, Chapel Hill, N.C. State and Duke started the consortium, South Asian. And within that, there was an idea that we ought to teach. So it was not my idea. It was Tony Stewart, who was a philosopher of teaching Hinduism and so on. So Tony Stewart and some guys from Duke cooked up this idea, and they came by and they said, "We would like to have money to create a teaching position for Hindu-Urdu." And I got the money. And they advertised and Afroz Taj applied. So I did a perfunctory interview. I mean, they were the ones who were responsible. I was basically, coincidentally, the associate dean who did a perfunctory interview. Taj kids everybody, he says, "Moni Sawhney hired me." [Laughs] No, I didn't hire him. It was Tony Stewart and others who had the idea, and he happened to be the candidate.

**MD:** OK. Yeah, that's really interesting. I think a few of these questions might shift in tone a little bit. I just have a few more before we wrapped up, I was wanting to get to. You talked a little bit about the 2016 election and your thoughts on some of the racial like, I guess, conflicts that have been a part of, particularly in the past few recent years and surrounding the 2016 election. Maybe you're kind of alluding to that. I was curious if 9/11, if there were any kinds of shifts in how you perceived or carried yourself? Or if you ever you—I know you were thinking

about your time here and you haven't experienced kind of overt racial discrimination. I was just curious if after 9/11, if there were any kind of shifts or anything like that?

**MS:** No, none at all. No. I know some Sikhs have experienced that. No, I really haven't felt [pauses]— nothing I can think of that created any kind of embarrassing situation or difficult situation. And I have some very good Muslim friends and, I mean, Afroz is a very dear friend of mine and [pauses], no, I can't think of any.

**MD:** OK, I was just curious, that makes sense. And then I wanted to quickly ask this, too. You talked about how at the time, going way back to the first part of our conversation, about how at home you would kind of— now you eat more Indian food, but when you first moved here, it wasn't that often. I think you told me a story on the phone that your daughter at the time said, "Give me liberty or give me daal," or something?

**MS:** [Laughs] Just a joke. Yeah, I mean, she was not used to eating daal and so on and so forth. So any time we had Indian food, they didn't like the idea of Indian food. But now they love it.

**MD:** Right.

**MS:** Now, in fact, every time they come in, they expect us to cook Indian food for them and they bring empty containers so that the leftovers they want to take for another meal.

**MD:** Right. And I was just curious, do you know how accessible Indian clothes or restaurants or ingredients were at the time when you first came here?

**MS:** Well, when we came, you could not even buy whole wheat flour or lentils. So there was a store in New York City, Kalustian. We used to get it from there, once every two or three months, but the kids were not interested in eating so we, by and large, got out of the habit of

eating Indian food. Except at the time of Diwali and so on, we'll make some Indian pooris and so on. But on a regular basis, the Indian food was not part of our everyday life.

**MD:** Yeah, that makes sense. And I think those are kind of some of the main questions I was thinking about. I don't know, was there anything in our conversation, about these questions of things like identity, belonging, living in the South, your experiences here, that I didn't ask you about or that you wanted to mention? [Sounds of Sharda talking on phone in the background to someone else].

**MS:** [Pauses] Well, our American friends were always very anxious for us to cook Indian food for them. To them, this was an exotic experience. So they always would go out of their way to request us every time we invited them. They would say, you know, "And be sure to cook some Indian food for us." And so that was encouraging. So we always try to cook some Indian food. And so they still, when we get together, talk about the happy days and their kids have grown up and they still talk about, gulab jamun that Sharda used to make for them. In fact, last year, a young man, who's now about 50, called. He said, "I was talking to my son about how you used to make gulab jamun for us. Would you mind if I bring my son over? And if you can cook some gulab jamun for us." So the grandson of my dear buddy, Ted Hyman, came in and we cooked some gulab jamun for him. So the next generation is trying to, you know, develop bonds with us. So the grandchildren of another friend who live in Colombia, South America, they came last year. And he wanted his kids to meet us so that he could tell them, you know, how he used to come and eat Indian food at our home, and he wanted his kids to come and have some meals at our home and so on. So they are third generation bonds being carried on.

**MD:** Yeah. No, that's really interesting. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I think we talked about a lot today, so I really appreciate you sharing.

**MS:** Well, I'm glad to do it.

**MD:** Yeah. I think this is a good place for us to stop.

[END OF INTERVIEW]