

**Gummadi J. Franklin**  
**Narrator**

**Polly Sonifer**  
**Minnesota Historical Society**  
**Interviewer**

**July 31, 2004**

**PS:** This is Polly Sonifer, and I'm interviewing Gummadi Franklin on July 31, 2004. Good morning. How are you today?

**FG:** Great. I'm doing great.

**PS:** Good. To get us started, we're in your home here in Arden Hills. I'd like to have you tell me a little bit about your background, where in India you were born and your family circumstances there in India, and so on.

**FG:** Okay. I'll start [by saying] my birthplace is Guntur [in Andhra Pradesh State, India]. Guntur was not a city when I was born, but today it is a big city. Its population is roughly around one million people. I was born in a Christian family. My father worked for the state government, and I was the eldest of eight children. My mother was a teacher but she never worked outside the house after she got married. I went to school in a small elementary school that was close to my house the first few years, later to a Christian high school, which is also in the same town. Right next to the high school is a Christian college called Andhra Christian College. Guntur, at that time the population was maybe about 200,000 people, though it's a small town. But that is one college that is quite well known all around [unclear] in those days, called Andhra Christian College, which was started by Lutheran missionaries. It's probably one of the first colleges in that part of the country, and I was privileged to attend that.

As I was growing up throughout my high school and college years in Guntur, I had friends from every religion, everyone that lived around there: Hindus, Muslims, you name it. It didn't feel anything different. They all attended the same schools, even though they are Christian schools. As we were growing up—the time was, of course, in the late 1950s and 1960s—the British influence was still fresh, though they had left long before that, you know. Most of our studies included some British literature and British history. And of course since it's a Christian school, there's a lot of Christian literature as well in the lessons, as well as the Hindu mythology that we studied.

Let's see. What can I think about my growing up years? [It was] definitely very, very pleasant, safe, like any child growing up anywhere, maybe. I don't know in today's world that you can say that., but in those days I think it was quite enjoyable. I have very, very fond memories of my childhood growing up in the town of Guntur.

**PS:** Did you have siblings?

**FG:** As I mentioned, yes, I'm the eldest of eight: five brothers and three sisters. The youngest one passed away in infancy. All of us are still living, and I have two of my younger brothers living here in Minnesota. They joined me, and all the rest of them live in India, but only two of my siblings live in that home town, Guntur. My father, since he retired from the government service in the revenue department, has been living in the house that he has built in Guntur, and he is still living there. He is ninety-four years old.

**PS:** Wow.

**FG:** My mother passed away about six, seven years ago. One of my brothers and his wife help my dad around the house.

**PS:** What did you study in college in India?

**FG:** In Guntur, I took sciences. I was preparing myself to become an engineer, but after that I moved away from Guntur, went to study Pharmacy at Vellore. That is in another state, in Tamil Nadu. I studied at a Christian Medical College. After graduating from the Pharmacy School, I started working for a company in New Delhi, a medical engineering company, as a marketing manager for South India. I was posted in New Delhi. That's the headquarters, but I'd been traveling to South India most of the time, to Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad. While I was in Delhi, I met my wife, Shirley.

**PS:** What was she doing in Delhi?

**FG:** She was just a visitor. Actually, she came as a short term missionary to India and was on some kind of a national conference for teachers. She came to teach English as a second language with the Lutheran church, and later came as a Fulbright scholar, so she continued after her missionary term is over, so that helped us, you know, get together on a continuous basis.

**PS:** So yours was a love marriage?

**FG:** It was a love marriage, you might say. Yes. [Chuckles]

**PS:** Did the Christian traditions in India have arranged marriages?

**FG:** Of course. Yes. I mean, even today, yes. Arranged in the sense, not like in the old times, old days. The boy and girl like each other, and the parents first select the boy and the girl and they meet each other and if they like it . . . You may say that it is semi-arranged marriage.

**PS:** More like assisted?

**FG:** More like assisted. That's what most of the marriages are these days, at least in our community, and I think, as far as I know, to my knowledge, in other communities as well, as far as in Guntur and some of my acquaintances are concerned.

**PS:** So here you were, finding your own young lady?

**FG:** Right.

**PS:** And she was an American?

**FG:** She's an American, and it is definitely not acceptable in my family, in the first instance.

**PS:** How was it for her family?

**FG:** It's even worse. Yes. It's just totally, totally opposed to the idea. Our family had a totally different impression about westerners in those days. This is going back almost forty years. I don't know what impressions they had, Shirley's parents. I can imagine . . . marrying somebody other than a white person is very, very hard for especially Shirley's father. But again, jumping all the way to U.S., since the day that I arrived in U.S. and my father-in-law and mother-in-law came to pick us up at the airport in Minneapolis, we just hit it off. I mean, he was my best buddy in my life, actually, right from the day one!

**PS:** How did he get over his prejudices?

**FG:** It is something very miraculous, I guess. Yes. Shirley had been writing; there was some correspondence taking place. But you know, after you meet the person, I think it's totally different than you don't see a person. You have all the biases.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** When you really sit down and meet and talk eye-to-eye on issues . . .

**PS:** Did her father not realize you were an educated, intelligent person?

**FG:** He probably did. But he just was not ready to give his daughter away to some stranger in a strange country. Yes. He definitely did not know my potential and capabilities, even after I came here. He liked me and all that. But then I remember one comment that he made. We were here. Of course, we were paupers, no job, nothing. We were traveling through Europe, begging, borrowing. We had lots of friends. I had some friends and Shirley had some friends. In fact, my good friend's brother arranged a ticket on Czech Airlines, Czechoslovakian Airlines. He said, "I'll give you three days vacation in Prague on your way." Of course, it was a very economical ticket in those days. We wanted to save every penny. We arrived in Prague, and the whole city of Prague was occupied by Russian troops. I don't know how they didn't let anybody know that are coming into the country. They could have canceled all these flights before, but I don't know what happened. They took us in a bus and put us way, way out in the country somewhere, about

forty, fifty miles away from the city. On the way, we didn't see a single human being on the street, only military tanks.

**PS:** Oh!

**FG:** And nobody spoke in this hotel, nobody spoke a word of English, not a person. We were just shut out about two, three days. Then they brought us back to the airport, and that was our vacation.

[Laughter]

**PS:** Did you ever find what was going on?

**FG:** Actually, the Russian troops occupied, and there was an emergency going on in the city, like a curfew, a twenty-four hour curfew. You can see the beautiful buildings, the nice roads, [unclear]. Yes. You go through the check points. Then we traveled through Europe and stayed with friends.

So when we arrived here, we had no money, in fact. One comment—going back to my father-in-law comment which I remember—is that Shirley was a teacher and she was interviewing for teaching jobs, and she got a job as a teacher in the Minneapolis school district, and my father-in-law said, “Oh, that’s good. At least Shirley will earn some money, and if you can actually earn a few bucks for gas . . .” [Laughter] He thought, “That will suffice for you.” That comment . . . his understanding of my potential. So then I went and interviewed for a job at 3M, and they offered me a junior scientist job. I came back and announced it, and they just couldn’t believe it. I mean, they were just flabbergasted and said, “My goodness!” It’s just one of those things.

**PS:** Did you work at 3M?

**FG:** Yes, I worked at 3M for thirty-two years.

**PS:** One of those “lifers.”

**FG:** Right. I retired about four years ago. At the end of 2000, I retired, yes.

**PS:** Is Shirley still teaching?

**FG:** Shirley retired about three years ago. She was going to work four years after I retired, but she just said, “Call it quits.” [Laughter] She wanted to spend time writing. In the last year or so, she’s quite serious. She spends about three, four hours a day. Only today, she took off with a friend. She gets locked up in her room, in the study. She really likes to write. Hopefully, something will come of this. [Chuckles]

**PS:** When you came to the United States with Shirley, you were already married?

**FG:** Yes.

**PS:** So you married in India?

**FG:** Yes, we married in India. Then we had, actually, a church wedding again here.

**PS:** Was it a church marriage that you had in India also?

**FG:** It's a civil wedding. We had, actually, an engagement party, a huge party at my house with a pastor from Canada who was a missionary. So we had a lot of ceremonies before we came to U.S. I was working as a hospital administrator in Haryana at that time, and they had a wedding celebration, the whole staff, the whole thing, a mock wedding. The nursing superintendent, who now lives in California, was cleaning out her shelf, and she recently sent some of the old photographs that she took from there.

**PS:** Ah!

**FG:** That is a big wedding ceremony. Then at our house is an engagement. Then, of course, the civil wedding. I had a few friends in New Delhi, and we just went to the court and got married. Then, of course, nobody knew here that we were not married before in the church. We got married at Hope Lutheran in North Minneapolis. Again, our parents had a regular wedding here, you know, just one of those lucky ones that got too many marriages. I don't know whether it's good or bad. [Laughter] We're still holding on.

**PS:** That's great. It's been forty years?

**FG:** We got married in 1969, so this is our thirty-sixth. Since I met Shirley—we met in 1965—it will be forty years next year, our meeting, actually.

**PS:** Good for you. All right. So you came to the United States to follow your wife?

**FG:** Exactly. Yes. The whole idea was not to live here. We were so serious at that time that we would come here, work for two years, do anything. We were promised jobs even before we came to the United States. I had a good friend, a nurse, from Michigan, the hospital that I had worked, and she is quite influential in Ann Arbor in a medical school. She said, "Franklin, you will have no problem finding a job in Michigan. You come on over. I'll talk to the people." So when we came, we went to Michigan directly from New York and interviewed for the job at the hospital. They said, "Franklin, we would love to have you here, but you've got to wait six weeks before you can start working." Six weeks is a long time, you know.

**PS:** Yes.

**FG:** So I said, "Let's go to Minnesota and finish the ceremony of the marriage and all that. Then we can come back." After we got married, I said, "Might as well look for something here. We've got another three weeks or a month left here." So I started interviewing and, bang! The second

interview at 3M, they offered me a job, and Shirley got a job even before that. I said, “Why Michigan? Let’s hang out here.” That’s how we settled here. I think we came at a very good time. The situation was a good time in the sense. Job wise, I think it’s a good time. The Vietnam [War] was in full swing and there’s a lot of political unrest and that’s a concern, but otherwise it’s a very good time for us.

After nine months in the apartment, a friend of mine said, “Hey, if you want to borrow some money, I can lend you some money. Why don’t you buy a house? It’s a good deal. There are nice houses here.” We talked about it and said, “We’re going to be here temporarily.” I just jumped at the opportunity to have my own house kind of, and we bought a house. One thing after another. We started talking, “We’ll go after three years. Four years.” [Laughter] It never happened.

I started corresponding with the government of India to start a pharmaceutical industry in those days after I somewhat settled down in my job and I was confident that I could actually run a small firm. I had a lot of experience in setting up things and all that. Indian government was encouraging in the beginning, but when it came to kind of giving any help—this is going back a long time; I have all that correspondence from the minister of industries and all that—it didn’t pan out. There was no such encouragement, so I was frustrated. Will I make a trip to India? I could go and talk to some of these people and I get a big run around from place to place. So the idea of going back to India is still very big in my mind and so in Shirley’s. Whenever Shirley gets kind of a little bit upset, she would say, “Oh yes, you said that we’re going to go back to India.” [Laughter] [unclear] The way that I see that is in a much larger picture. Going back to India physically is one thing, but the whole idea of being there in India is to really encourage the next generation and to help out in some way, you know, just like we being blessed. It is our obligation really to pass on some of this stuff. That’s the whole idea of going back and living there and being amongst them. Now, since we’ve been retired, we’ve been spending almost every year two to three months in India.

We have some interesting projects going on in India sponsored by our own family. We have started a rural clinic, which is run by one of our close relatives there. Then we have a buffalo program. We give a buffalo on a loan, a water buffalo that’s milking, and the family would get it with five or ten percent down payment. They’ll have a buffalo that will give some milk. Then out of the [profits] after they sell the milk to the co-op, they pay off every month part of the loan. We started with a few buffaloes, and now, every month there is some money pooling in. And then when there’s enough money, we’ll buy another buffalo so another family gets it. Initially, this is like Heifer International Project.

**PS:** Yes.

**FG:** That’s going very good, and we are quite encouraged about it.

**PS:** These buffaloes are not pregnant buffaloes? They’re already delivered?

**FG:** They’re already . . . Usually, you can find them within a month or so. You know its capability after [it] delivers, how much milk it’s giving. People would like to sell them. That’s

the buffalo that they buy and give it to . . . Then, afterwards, it's up to them actually whatever they want to do with the buffalo.

**PS:** So they could breed the buffalo again and have a calf?

**FG:** They can breed it or sell it again outright. That is the idea of going back to India to start something, either an industry or something, in our locality. Since that did not work out, we started on these projects, just to satisfy our own obligations and like to do more. Once you get settled down in a place and, again, you have kids and you have grandkids, you kind of get attached to this kind of stuff.

**PS:** Right, and your cell phone and your computer?

**FG:** Yes, yes, as much as you want to detach yourself . . . I am still somewhat involved with India Association, yes, since I got off as the president. Recently, they amended the constitution, India Association's constitution, and they created another group besides the board of directors. It's called the Trustee Advisory Committee, they are calling it. There are seven trustees. They're all past presidents or vice-presidents of India Association. The role of the trustees is really to reinvent, to energize and give support to the board. That is one, but in doing so, actually to really keep the community of Indians together, which is becoming a big challenge.

When India Association was created and Jack Desai was president, the needs were very different for India Association of Minnesota. The need at that time was . . . There were a few Indians from here and there and different parts of the country, and they all wanted someplace to come to and share in the commonness. In so doing, they created the association, and then they represented the community. From there, then all other things came out: the SILC, the School for Indian Languages and Culture, and all these dance academies. Then there are others that at one time were actually part of India Association, and India Association gave full support for these kind of organizations [that] came to bear. Today, most of those have grown quite independent, and they have their own entities, you know.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** So also the community, the regional groups. In fact, I started the Telugu Association around the same time as the India Association was created. Then there's Gujarati Samaj and Punjabi Samaj, Marathi and so on. The regional groups have cropped up, and the number of people taking part in this has increased. So the efforts and the interests of the India Association of Minnesota have been diluted. Today, you ask people about India [Association], they say, "What do they do? Why should I be involved?" In a way, it is very sad. I have one of my early newsletters here, actually, when I was the president. I want to share some of this.

**PS:** Sure.

**FG:** I want to read what I have said in those days.

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** Why people need India Association and what India Association is all about. I think it is still relevant even today, though it's almost six years later.

I've been posed and challenged with a sixty-four dollar question: What's the role and purpose of this association in our community and what am I going to get out of this deal by becoming a member? While there are many skeptics and many more who are simply not aware of India Association of Minnesota, I would like to make my view clear. We, the Indian community in the Twin Cities metro area, are not only one of the fastest growing minorities, we are also the largest group of Asians in Minnesota. Along with the growth of our population, there has been an increase in our regional, religious, political and other special interest groups. Interestingly, there is only one organization, the India Association, that strives to harness all these unique individualities and create an identity that represents the Indian community at large. This applies to all individuals and friends of India. While the purpose and mission for each of our separate groups differ, they all need our support. This is only possible when we have strong united support from each of you and others who are not yet members of the association.

Here, I'm going into drumming up support for the association then. I think this still stands good, even today, with all the differences, the regional, cultural, and other stuff. There is no organization as unique as India Association of Minnesota that represents Indians as a community. One may ask, "Why? Why do we need the community?" I mean, this goes back to the broader question.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** We all know, actually, the need for it. The people that are actively involved, the people that are really concerned about the community and the sharing of the commonness that we all come from, India, and live here, we can internalize it in ourselves. But really to define and tell it to someone, we need to articulate our message, the need. We are in the process of defining that, how to really communicate this to a larger community and to the next generation.

**PS:** Of Indians?

**FG:** Of Indians and to the community at large. There are all kinds of things we see today on Channel 17, public television. They are....

[Tape interruption]

**FG:** ...what I felt at that time, actually, the need. I think it needs to be articulated in such a way that everybody can understand in two or three sentences the need for this group, the existence of this group. The larger communities, they are encouraging. Like, for example, on public television you see on Sunday afternoons segments of different communities taking part. I don't know if you've watched . . .

**PS:** I don't watch television.



**FG:** At all? Well, good. That's a good way. [Chuckles]

**FG:** There is the Hmong that have started a long time ago, Somalis and the Muslim community has their own program. Now the Indian, there are two groups that are locally produced, two different shows. One is Muktar Thakar. You've probably heard of him. He produces *Geet Mala*, a program. Then there's another one by Mr. Mathur that's called *Chai City*. These two programs on at ten o'clock on Sunday nights show the community here within the Twin Cities as well as the Indians that are making a difference in the community and in the world.

**PS:** They're showcasing?

**FG:** Yes. They're showcasing. I think then there is a definite need for any community to bind together and to work not just for the their own community's sake but especially Indians that have come and settled here. This is, again, my opinion. We owe a lot to where we have come from. You know the country has invested so much in us.

**PS:** India has?

**FG:** India has.

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** And of course we are obligated to return it. I mean, we got nurtured here after we came here. We need to be responsible for the community here as well, as good citizens. But at the same time we should not forget about where we came from. This you can only do if you bind together as a community. Like, for example, there are all kinds of needs even in the last twenty years. There are so many natural calamities like earthquakes. And right now there are floods. There is ever increasing need for all kinds of stuff. As a community, that's exercising good citizenship.

**PS:** Explore a little further. You said that India nurtured you. In what sense has India nurtured you?

**FG:** India invested in me.

**PS:** Invested in you.

**FG:** See, every Indian that comes here (except the second generation, of course), your parents paid the fees and all that, but the country has invested so much in the doctors, engineers, technicians, people. You know, it costs a lot of money to have, as we know, even a kid here in the U.S. It takes about \$200,000 of investment until he's eighteen years old.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** This is about five, six years ago. I don't know what it is now.

**PS:** It's probably higher.

**FG:** Even higher. That is an investment, not only monetary investment but that person has blossomed into somebody that's a useful citizen, so you are getting ready-made product into this country when you hire a doctor or an engineer.

**PS:** Oh, okay, who comes from India.

**FG:** Comes from India, yes.

**PS:** You're saying that India made that investment even though it was your parents who paid your fees to go to school?

**FG:** Right. The country has to offer the opportunity for doctors, engineers. They had to create schools. They've had to create the infrastructure for all of that and to keep you healthy while you're doing it and all that kind . . . So that is a big investment.

**PS:** All right. And then when you leave India and take your investment to another county and are productive there?

**FG:** Of course, that way this country has encouraged many to bring the best out of one. The U.S. is very unique. Probably, there is no other country in the world that has the kind of welcome and treat you like you're part of the system. So the responsibility for each of us is greater than a person that has actually been born here. How do you really get this message through to people to realize that?

**PS:** So your vision is that the India Association's new role or evolving role would be to give service back to India?

**FG:** Besides giving service here.

**PS:** Oh, okay.

**FG:** Being a good citizen here, and also give it back to India.

**PS:** That would be in terms of disaster relief or literacy projects or the buffalo project that you were describing?

**FG:** Anything.

**PS:** So anything that gives service back to India or to the United States is the role of the India Association?

**FG:** Yes.

**PS:** Does that mean that the people who would be primarily in activities in the India Association would be older people, or would somebody who is twenty-seven years old and just moved here from India and they need nurturing themselves—?

**FG:** Sure. I mean, that role, India Association's role, in the older days was to welcome all the strangers and make them part of the community and give them any help that they need and all that. These days, an engineer coming into U.S., a twenty-seven-year-old as you said, he's so well-versed. He knows so much about the place here. These fellows, the IT [information technology] engineers, that come just on a short notice, that have never been here, within a week, they're established. They buy a car on the third day and they come with their international license, and it's just amazing. It's not the case when most of us came here, you know. The world is different, so that kind of a thing, the India Association's role, I mean we have done it, and I think some of us are still thinking in those terms, actually, just being here and doing things amongst ourselves, which is good, but I think we need to look beyond that. First of all, we need to strengthen the community. We need to feel the need for oneness in the community, for whatever reason, that you need to bind together as a community: Hindus, Muslims, irrespective of your religion. But since we all came from that background, we have that in common, and we are Indian Americans, then Hindus or Muslims or Christians.

**PS:** So you still see it serving primarily the people who directly emigrated from India. So your offspring and your grandchildren and your great grandchildren, who were born here and lived here, what would their need be from India Association?

**FG:** If you take part in this kind of an endeavor, your offspring would . . . Naturally, they imbibe this kind of message. Automatically, they will be interested and taking part in a community and the activities and the culture. They may take from both sides, of course. They will be taking some good values from our culture and stuff. And also from here, from where they are more familiar, where they're born and where they're raised. The need for them . . . yes, there are needs, but those needs can also be discussed. We used to have social dancing for young folk and organized youth activities, different things, etc. They don't seem very much interested in taking part in any cultural stuff. At the University of Minnesota, there is a nice student organization, and they put on excellent shows for festivals, and they all bind together. The India Association's role is a lot different as I see from the past. This generation is taking care of itself, and they don't need, as far as I see, much help and guidance. Do you know Sudhansu Misra that started the Fifty-Five-Plus group?

**PS:** I do know him, yes. He was the first person I interviewed.

**FG:** He started The Fifty-Five-Plus Group, and he's doing an excellent job. He's keeping up with it, to take all these older people on a picnic, for a show, and just sit down and reminisce some old stories. In fact, I was at a hospital yesterday translating for one of the older gentlemen, a Telugu gentleman, who came to visit his son from India, but they have been living here for a while in this country, about ten years. All of a sudden, he went into depression. He lives in Austin [Minnesota]. Both son and wife, they both work. He has been a [unclear] accountant and attorney in India, very active, and he has got his own circle of friends. When they come to visit

here, I mean, they are cooped up in the house, in winter especially, and there's nobody to talk to except wife and husband. Kids are traveling.

So there is a need for that and for women who want to bind together to discuss domestic violence and things of that sort. Yes, there are groups that handle it, but India Association, I think, should look beyond some of these things. When you're living in this country, there's all kinds of help, resources, automatically. Like they called me to interpret. Where else can you get that kind of service? This guy is well versed in English, but still, there's some psychiatrist that's interviewing him wanted somebody that can he can understand what he's saying. He speaks English, but he's got a little accent. India Association need not get into all these kind of little stuff, you know. They should look beyond and have vision for greater things.

**PS:** You see the focus naturally as being to help out with things in India rather than, say, Afghanistan or the Soviet Union or Norway or Kenya?

**FG:** That's where we know.

**PS:** Yes, that's right.

**FG:** That's where we know, and we know the needs. In fact, internally, in my own thinking, I am a world citizen. In my thinking, we're looking at a level where one thing is common: that is humanity. We're all human beings whether you are Afghanistani or an Iraqi or an Egyptian or anything. I try to project myself as that. [Chuckles] Still, you have certain affinity to things that you're familiar with.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** When it comes to it, I feel the same . . . as somebody's suffering with like the Darfur issue. If you don't watch TV, you probably are not aware what is going on in Sudan.

**PS:** Oh, okay.

**FG:** The Arab militia that is hired by the Sudanese government has been harassing, and actually they are calling it a genocide of the minority population. There are almost a million people in the camps, in these refuge camps all over. I feel for them, you know. They're not Indians. They're not Americans. Human suffering is human suffering wherever it is, irrespective of your nationality. Sure, more power to India Association if they can actually get involved more than in one area.

**PS:** But I imagine there's no shortage of projects in India either. It's still a developing country in many ways.

**FG:** Yes. That's the way I see it. I'll give you an example. We are quite involved in our church, as well. Our church is so blessed, and it's got so many resources, and they still keep raising funds for things. What can we buy next? Can we buy a riding lawn mower this week with this

men's breakfast thing? That is, as far as I'm thinking—I hate to this—very shallow thinking. There is so much more need even in the community around here and the rest of the world. Do you need a riding lawn mower so badly that you have to have a fundraiser? I mean, we are a church. We call ourselves mission oriented. So we should be looking . . . Anyway, I do speak out. [Chuckles] We are raising lots of funds for building and building. You need to look at things in a much more balanced way, you know, where you can actually use your resources.

So India Association, if we can actually unite and agree on what we are about and how we want to exercise our talents and resources in a community, I think it's up to us. But I see that it should be something that's more useful, not only self-serving our own community. Yes. You need to look at your own house and your own thing, but you need to look beyond, also, I'm saying. Most of us that are here in the Indian community are so blessed.

**PS:** Let's backtrack a little bit on the India Association. You moved here in 1969?

**FG:** Yes.

**PS:** When did you first become aware of the India Association?

**FG:** Actually, I was aware when it was forming. People have asked me if I would be interested in [it]. In those days, I was already into the Telugu group. I'm from Andhra Telugu Association then. A bunch of us were actively trying to build the Telugu group. So I concentrated on that and didn't pay attention to the India Association.

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** Once the Telugu Association was formed and was on its way again, later, I think in the late 1980s, one of the presidents, who was a good friend of mine, Paddu Arimelli again asked me, "Franklin, I would like you to join India Association as a board member." Even at that time, I was traveling a lot. I was doing other stuff, but I did come to certain meetings. Paddu has invited me, said, "Come and just sit down in a couple meetings, and you would have some understanding." I exactly don't recall the incidents. I attended two board meetings. There was a lot of unrest at that time.

**PS:** What was the unrest about?

**FG:** It's just this communal unrest, something that comes up from time to time. I think it was [unclear], some issue was being discussed, maybe the emergency that was imposed by Indira Gandhi or one of those things, very hotly debated here. People are not very civil to each other. I said, "My goodness. I can't believe this is happening." It turned me off. [Laughter]

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** Throughout the last thirty-five years, I've been approached some way or another, but I withdrew. I didn't get involved. A few years ago, I think in the early 1990s, Neena [Gada] called

me. I got to know Neena through one of [Ram and Neena] Gada's neighbors, who is a pastor, a retired pastor. So we got to know the Gadas at the time. Neena called me two, three times, said, "Franklin, you've got to come to these meetings. You've got to get involved."

**PS:** She's a persuasive salesperson, isn't she?

**FG:** Very. [Laughter] Yes. "Okay, Neena. We'll give it a try." So I started, I think, in the association in probably 1994 or 1993. I don't recall . . . in those years, and then ultimately, became a president in 1998.

**PS:** Was it already called the India Association rather than India Club when you joined?

**FG:** Yes, India Association already then. Yes.

**PS:** What was it other than Neena saying, "You've got to do this," why was it different that time around?

**FG:** Telugu Association thing was off, and I was also thinking about getting involved in the community activities. You know, you need to do something. You've got to get involved in the community somehow. The first two or three meetings I attended, they were very encouraging. I think Niru [Misra] was one of the presidents, as I recall, at that time. I saw good leadership and people are civil again. [Laughter] It's a little more welcoming, I should say, the atmosphere.

**PS:** What did they talk about? These weren't board meetings? These were just general meetings of the—?

**FG:** These were board meetings.

**PS:** Okay. So they don't have any general meetings for their general membership? Only the board meets?

**FG:** Board meetings, yes. General meetings means you got to go to an annual dinner or get involved on some project or something they're specifically working on, like the Festival of Nations. They do tap volunteers to come in and help. No, this was the real board meetings.

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** I was actually nominated and elected as a board member.

**PS:** Right away?

**FG:** I mean, after a few meetings. That's what I recall. Since then, of course, I have been in touch with India Association somehow, that means in the last ten years. Yes, more so that I was involved.

**PS:** How many years were you president?

**FG:** Just one year. The term is only one year. Yes, that's the other thing, you know. When a president takes charge, he barely gets to know the ropes, and by the [time] term is over, he doesn't want it for another year. [Laughter] Unfortunately, that's what happens. Actually, it should be in such a way, I think, if they are more equipped and if there is more energy from the rest of the board, that it would make the president's job easier. Then he may continue on and be more effective. These are some of the things that the Trustee Advisory Board is discussing.

It's all going to take a while to bring in these kind of changes. First of all, the agenda for the India Association that I see right now is really keeping the community together. There is a lot of activities going on in the Indian community, the religious and regional groups. So people are involved in all that stuff, which is great! They should be. But, they should at least spend one to ten percent of what they spend in these other organizations with India Association, also, because we need this. We need the identity as Indian Americans more than anything else, more than Indian Hindus or Indian Muslims or Indian Christians. We need the India Association. So it's a hope.

**PS:** Do you have the sense that the members find enough places to plug in and be active? They don't go to the board meetings, but they get involved in various volunteer projects like the Festival of India or the Festival of Nations so they can come, and they can do their five hours of volunteer work or whatever they do. Is that enough to have the sense, "I'm in this community?"

**FG:** It's a very good question, Polly. The thought crossed my mind many times. How do you really bring a community together to have a chat like this, to bring different groups . . . ? Attempts have been made at least to bring the community leaders, to bring these groups that I've been talking about, the regional groups, the cultural groups, and bring the leaders and have a dialogue. We do this once in five years. Then there's no follow up. You know, they all want to do it. There is a lot of energy just for that moment.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** Then it fizzles out. You need to capture it and sustain it, that kind of a thing. The communication is very hard. You know, we send out a newsletter. There's about 20,000 Indians living in the Twin Cities. This goes to only 400 people. I mean it's just a drop in the bucket. Of that 400, only 200 probably have paid the dues. It's a small minority that support it. What I've been thinking is—we discussed it in the TAC, the Trustee Advisory Committee—the newsletter should go, even if you're not contributing, to everybody in the community. It should be available. At least to get a roster of everybody's e-mails and send it in an e-mail.

**PS:** Then you almost need a staff person just to keep track of 20,000 addresses and e-mail addresses and do the production of it.

**FG:** Yes. Yes. I mean, we need something definitely a little more organized than this. We have been doing this Festival of India, Festival of Nations and the Independence Day picnic. That's

become a routine, and people barely get involved with those, and that's about it. But we need to go beyond it. We need to look, yes, a lot more further.

**PS:** My guess is that like most other Americans busy living their lives, they have jobs and children and all these things and they're busy. So to think about, "Well, should I give fifty dollars to the hurricane relief fund in Madras?" They don't think about it on a regular basis.

**FG:** No, they don't. I think if you want a community to be together and to have an interest, even if each of these families get involved on one activity a year, that's adequate. That's more than adequate really to keep the community together and have that sense of the community and some identity.

[Tape interruption]

**PS:** Tell me about some of the early projects that you got involved [in] with the India Association.

**FG:** Okay. Notable projects, maybe?

**PS:** Things that you were involved with, and what you got out of them, what they were like.

**FG:** One thing that I really enjoyed and spent a lot of time with is when I was the vice president and Sarat Mohapatra was the president at that time. That was the year of India's fiftieth anniversary of independence. We started preparations just about eighteen months before the occasion. We formed committees, actually a committee to really bring out a magazine, a journal, commemorating the occasion. We had a committee to do all the Independence Day stories on stage, and finding a keynote speaker and a committee to take care of all the exhibits for the day. I mean, it's amazing how many people came forward to help us out on this, you know. When you approach the folks, the response has been very positive, and it took lots of coordination.

**PS:** So this was a one-day celebration?

**FG:** This is just a one-day celebration, yes. The fiftieth anniversary of India's independence was a big thing. It was a big celebration in India with all kinds of specials going on, not just in India, but wherever, throughout the Diaspora. In fact, Muktar has arranged an interview with BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] with me. They called me at three o'clock in the afternoon at work. It was already Independence Day in Britain, and when they are celebrating they want to interview me, how we are doing in Minnesota. It was a big thing. We invited a speaker, a Mr. Kotamaraj, who actually was retired as a diplomat, but he was one of the Freedom Fighters in those days, in the Gandhian days. His son happens to be working here. Our daughter was working for General Mills at that time, and she said, "I can get a grant for the magazine." Things like that worked out. It's fun. It was great fun, and it was a huge success. We had Vineeta Sawkar from Channel 5, who came and hosted that evening. Everybody in the community all just took part and gave their time. That is in 1997, yes, 1947 to 1997. 1947 was India's independence



and 1997 was . . . That was a fun event, yes. Of course, there were a few frustrations as you do things, but all I remember is the good stuff and the positive stuff.

**PS:** How many hours would you say you, personally, invested in that event?

**FG:** Hundreds of hours.

**PS:** Hundreds. Over six months?

**FG:** Yes, the last six months. But the planning started actually about a year long before, almost eighteen months.

**PS:** How many people attended the event?

**FG:** Hmmm . . . The capacity of the hall . . . It was at the Brooklyn Park High School auditorium, say about a thousand people, I think, yes, as I recall.

**PS:** My guess is that many of the people who were involved with organizing it were living in India at the time of Independence?

**FG:** Oh, yes. Yes. This is the one that was produced. There are articles by Jack Desai in it, early people. Then we got letters from the embassies and Freedom Fighters, their speeches and the Preamble to the Constitution.

**PS:** Wonderful. You've got General Mills' name on the back there because they provided the grant money for it.

**FG:** Right.

**PS:** Wonderful.

**FG:** It was a fun event. Of course, then you are doing a thing like Festival of Nations, which needs a lot of energy and coordination. It's three-days of Festival. It was a fun thing. I thoroughly enjoyed doing all the organizing, but especially working in the café.

**PS:** Tell me about that for you.

**FG:** In those days, in fact, even the time before that, before my time, when things like this happen, people brought everything from home, you know. You cooked dal. You cooked chipatis. You cooked puris. You all bring it in and you sell it in the café. But in the mid-1990s, everybody is busy and kids are busy, everybody has their own thing going, so we said, "We'll contract it out to a restaurateur." We contracted the food out, but still, there is a lot of work that needs to be done. People coming in shifts still happens, I think, even today. You have to have as many as one hundred volunteers to work the three days, some days two shifts, some days three shifts, doing the café. And so also the exhibits and other stuff, too, while you are there. It is

everybody's time; I mean it's freely donated. That's one of the fund raisers for India Association, not only a fund raiser, but it actually shows that the Indian community is there together, working together. So it's a great witness to the community at large, showcasing India with the exhibits and things like that, and the preparation of food.

**PS:** So you were the restaurant worker, the café worker. Some of the time you volunteered as the worker?

**FG:** Right, coordinating.

**PS:** What was the most fun about it? Were you the coordinator or did you actually serve those mango milkshakes?

**FG:** I did. I would come home so tired. The next day, again, you get up in the morning and get going again. I enjoyed it so. I spent all hours there.

**PS:** What was the fun about that serving people?

**FG:** One is actually getting to see the other people in the community there.

**PS:** So the other Indians were also volunteering?

**FG:** No. Working with them is a fun thing, but also, the people that are actually the visitors to the festival, meeting some of them and sharing. A lot of them have questions about food and of other stuff. "What are you wearing?" "What is that made of?" This and that.

**PS:** Okay. So you had more in depth conversations than, "I'll take three pakoras?"

**FG:** Yes. People that are curious, they would ask. You know, you take time to share with them, and you get to meet all the people in the community that you have never seen before.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** Just to know that they are there . . . It's a very busy and fun activity. All kinds of stuff goes on in the kitchen. People that have never worked, helped in the kitchen, some of the men, they're put to work to stir this or stir that. There will be a few accidents. "Oh, gee, my goodness. I didn't know that this was going to happen here in the kitchen." [Chuckles] The main concern is, of course, about the safety when all these things are happening, and people are moving around there.

**PS:** And you don't want people to get food that's going to poison them.

**FG:** Right. That's safety first, of course, yes. The new generation is getting on and doing a wonderful job. And of course the Festival of India is another big thing. You've been there. It's just like any typical street in India, I guess. The atmosphere there . . . everything is going on.

People are talking, doing their own thing. I expect you will see this season, I think in October, this is a political year, so there will be all kinds of political interest groups that would like to bring their candidate to speak and to represent. While that's going on, there is food being sold. There is people from the embassy, from the consulate, that come and issue resource and all of that. It's a fun day, yes. It's a short one; it's four hours. You get a glimpse of India if you just walk by. If you're somebody from Minnesota that has never been to India, this is what India is like.

**PS:** And you get to watch all those cute little kids dancing and singing and doing skits on the stage.

**FG:** Right. Yes, a few people are paying attention, but the rest of them, you know . . .

**PS:** That was always my favorite part, to watch all these little kids doing their beautiful dancing in their bright clothes and the hair and the makeup and bells on their ankles.

**FG:** Yes. Yes. Last year, at the last minute they asked me to be the speaker. I don't know if somebody turned them down or what. They called me two days before. [Chuckles]

**PS:** Oh!

**FG:** I managed the stage there in the past, and I participated in different activities on stage, but really to speak to people that are doing different things, it's really very bad, very discouraging. [Laughter] I don't know how these politicians speak for hours when no one is listening!

**PS:** [Laughter]

**FG:** They can, but they're given some time, but nobody is listening to them. The atmosphere is such, it's not conducive to somebody giving a speech.

**PS:** Right. The hall sort of echoes a little bit, too.

**FG:** It echoes. For a typical entertainment and all, that's fine, but to give a speech, you need to have a regular auditorium type of a setting. But to celebrate something like an India Day, an auditorium would not be proper. You've got to have this. Yes. And of course it's a great facility, the Landmark Center.

**PS:** Yes, it is beautiful.

**FG:** Wonderful. They talked about moving somewhere, but nothing would offer the natural, the openness, and everything else goes with . . . That is sort of a fun event. I enjoyed that.

**PS:** Any other projects that you were personally involved with?

**FG:** Anything with the India Association . . . I think when I was the president, there was a flood [unclear]. I was in India at that time, but people here took charge and did all that's needed to raise funds to support that.

**PS:** So how much funds were raised here?

**FG:** I don't recall. I was going to go through this . . . I'm sorry. There was some help that went from here.

**PS:** Okay. The funds that the India Association raised in that case were for immediate flood relief, right?

**FG:** Right.

**PS:** Yet, my understanding is that some of those floods were caused by things like deforestation because people are cutting down the trees. So does the India Association see its role as just take care of the immediate disaster or go back to the root cause and maybe buy trees to repopulate the mountains or whatever is causing these flood?

**FG:** You know, we are not that deeply involved, actually. Most of the funds that we raise is still a drop in the bucket. But every little bit helps. It is a sense of satisfaction that we took part in it more so than really to look into . . . to bring a change like that you are mentioning. It's a monumental change; I mean to think in those terms and to really go to cause. That would be great, actually, if you can, you know. Again, there are a lot of activists in India that are doing that. You probably have heard of Arundhati Roy? She is a writer, a Booker Prize winner. Actually, she comes and speaks to different groups, social causes. She's a great environmentalist. There are people and organizations. If we recognize it, we should support those kind of activities that would bring changes like that.

**PS:** Do you think the India Association will ever become like a grant-making association that someone like this activist could come to and say, "I need \$10,000 for this tree planting project so there won't be floods?"

**FG:** It would be great, actually, but the thing is, right now, as I mentioned, the membership is so small, and we ourselves are seeking grants here and there at this time.

**PS:** Oh, okay.

**FG:** A few people have the dreams of actually, first of all, building an India Center in Minnesota. It is a great dream to have. I would like to see . . . but the thing is, you can achieve things like that after you have exhibited certain responsibilities, like taking care of somebody, some other things. I mean, this is my view again.

**PS:** Sure.

**FG:** The Trustee Advisory Committee, one of the things on our long range plan is really to build an India Center. But before you do that, if you want to build a center, you need to apply for grants and what do you show when you apply for grants? You've got to have some substance. You've got to have some good works on your record, that this is what you have done.

**PS:** Or activities that need a bricks and mortar place to [unclear] them?

**FG:** Right. So you need that, and we need to do that. You need to sell that idea. You cannot just go around and asking for grants to build an India Center just because our community is growing and we need a community center. If you have some things going already somewhere, some charitable stuff or some helping, some great causes here and there, that you brought this thing, then I think people will recognize you, anybody, either grants from other foundations here or the rich Indians in the community that would donate. All that is going to take some time, yes.

**PS:** The India Association has been going for a long, long time. From your perspective, what would you say is the key to the long term success of an organization like India Association? What keeps it going after twenty some years?

**FG:** You know, this is something that we've been talking [about] in our TAC meetings, the Trustee Committee. There is something that we are doing right that we are still in business, the India Association is still in business. I think one thing is the need for people to come and share the commonness is there, whether it is our generation . . . If we do a good job, the next generation should also be interested to take part, and you are seeing that already. The current board [is] nearly, or I would say close to half of them, second generation young professionals. So that itself is showing that their parents and grandparents have done a good job to get them interested in the community and the activities.

So the need, I think every community has that kind of a need. Although, you go to your own churches, mosques, and temples, but coming together as a community as Indians, I think is there. As long as there is that hunger, that need, even in one person of the community, the India Association would still be going on. Yes. I see that. For us, as we think more about the future of India Association, I think we need to really understand that. We need to know. That's one thing . . . I've been trying to see if we can actually get somebody to articulate the message, somebody that writes some marketing message, you know, more like a mission statement, but not a mission statement, but more in simple terms that this is what we are and that's why we need to be a part of it.

**PS:** That will only work, obviously, if there is a felt need among the people that advertising is reaching.

**FG:** Right. Yes.

**PS:** So these twenty-seven-year-olds that come here from India on a short term contract for engineering, they might not have any felt need to be involved with the India Association.

**FG:** No, I don't think so.

**PS:** All right. Are you familiar with any other similar organizations that are in other states or is this unique in Minnesota?

**FG:** I have talked to people all around the country, some friends from different parts of India, and they all have similar challenges, like we are struggling to get the community together. Communities in other parts, like where there's a larger community, like Chicago and New York and big towns, Houston, they do great things. I mean, they can actually celebrate for days together, have events, like huge festivals and parades. New York celebrates both a Republic Day and Independence Day, and they invite big guys from India, big movie stars.

**PS:** And they come!

**FG:** They come. Then they have the governor and the mayor in the parade. It's great they're doing [that]. The community is coming together. But you talk to any of those people, they say, "Franklin, it's a lot of work. It is never easy." Yes. You have the masses there. You have the mass power. And there is a lot of commercial interest.

**PS:** So the Indian-owned businesses want to be serving food and selling clothes and selling jewelry?

**FG:** Yes, right. In a way, India Association of Minnesota, as far as I know, to my understanding, it is unique. [Pauses] It's unique in the way that it is very strictly non-political, very strictly non-commercial and non-religious. So if there is any commercial interest, we discourage that idea.

**PS:** Oh, okay.

**FG:** Yes. People have come forward in the past, some of the businesses who would like to do this, you know, with the banner of India Association, or some religious group. Once in a while they try to really bring in India Association, but our mission is to be neutral. We are non-religious, non-profit. We don't want any of that. That's very unique, and so far, we are maintaining it. Once in a while, you get pulled over and get into trouble. But you live and learn kind of a thing.

**PS:** Yes. [Chuckles]

**FG:** That is great. I value that quite a bit that we can stick to that. If you are lenient in it, I think there are opportunities to a great deal here, too, even today. All these other things can be realized, but you don't want to sell yourself. You want to be neutral here, yes.

**PS:** That, you see, is like the secret to how this organization keeps going?

**FG:** I think so. I think so, yes.

**PS:** When it comes to recruiting your members, what specific things do you do to recruit members? I'm thinking here of paying members.

**FG:** Oh, as a paying member for the association?

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** Most of them happen, actually, at special occasions, like India Festival or Festival of Nations or the picnic. A family comes into town, and somebody invites them, you know, that something is going on, and they come and have a great time, and there is somebody offering, "Hey, would you like to become a member?" They're having a great fellowship, and they simply would like to become a member for that moment. Then I think their interest wanes afterward . . . I guess, yes. Most of the members join that way at different occasions.

**PS:** Okay. So they would only be at the events that are sponsored by India Association? You wouldn't have the Telugu Samaj give out applications or forms for people to join?

**FG:** No. No.

**PS:** Or the Hindu Mandir or any of those other organizations?

**FG:** No.

**PS:** So you only recruit at your own events?

**FG:** Yes.

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** That's a very good question, Polly. We've been thinking about . . . actually, again, it is a thought: how do you really broaden this reach to be a part of India Association? One is if all the commercial outfits—or if not the commercial, if the non-profit entities of Indian organizations, like Ragamala [Dance] Theatre, Rita Mustaphi [Katha Dance Theatre], all these other groups, if the IMSOM, Indian Music Society of Minnesota, if they can actually give . . . If you're a member of India Association, you get a certain discount in our thing. Some reciprocity, I'm looking at. So, also, with all the Indian businesses. You're carrying an India Association identity something . . . you get five percent discount. Then there is more exposure to India Association, and they're actually getting some kind of a loyalty to that business of the Indian community.

**PS:** Do you have advertising in your newsletter?

**FG:** We do.

**PS:** So that pays the fees for the production of the newsletter?

**FG:** Yes. But you see, you need to seek after that, too. If people know it's only being circulated four hundred copies . . . If you've got a wider circulation, then there is more. Nobody's thinking commercially. You need to have that aspect of it.

**PS:** Yes. It sounds like there's a balance between not letting yourself get sold out to the commercial interest, but still having access to those to partner with.

**FG:** Right.

**PS:** It's a delicate balance, is what I'm hearing you describe.

**FG:** It is. Yes. Since it's a volunteer effort . . . Unless you have a part time staff member that can put together some of this stuff, it's a challenge. Yes.

**PS:** What's been your luck with getting the recent immigrants to join? You said the people that come here on short term work contracts, they're not very interested. But how about somebody who comes here . . . their brother came here ten years ago, and now they're joining the brother, and they bring their whole family? Are they interested?

**FG:** Not really. See, most of the people that come in the recent phase of immigration, most of them that are coming are computer software people, IT. These people, a lot of them, are not sure how long they're going to stay. They come on temporary visas. Some of them would like to do a term and go back. Only once people are a little more settled, they'll have an interest in joining an organization like this. Some of these folks, after they settle down, maybe they may get interested to get involved in the community and the activities. [unclear] they're here very temporarily.

**PS:** Those are the contract workers?

**FG:** Right. I don't think they have any interest.

**PS:** And how about the people who join existing family members who are all settled in here?

**FG:** Yes, they would be, I think, interested. Yes, they're a good potential to join [unclear].

**PS:** Is that a large group of people? I'm not sure who is immigrating now, other than the contract workers.

**FG:** I don't think there's a large group. The waiting time, right now, for any of those class visas are ten to fifteen years.

**PS:** Whoa! That's a long time.

**FG:** You apply for somebody and . . . Yes, it's a long list. Even those, some of them are not approved these days.



**PS:** Those are only for close family members, like brothers or parents?

**FG:** Right.

**PS:** Okay.

**FG:** Even then, there's a long wait. Yes.

**PS:** The last question that I have on my list. Is there anything else you want to tell me about? This is free for all. You can go anywhere you want to with this. [Chuckles]

**FG:** I think I told enough already . . . my thoughts about India Association. It seems like as you ask different people about India Association, you would get different answers. In most circles that I meet, with India Association Board members and the past board members and the Trustee Advisory Committee, one thing is that there is a definite, definite interest in all these people, genuine interest, to build a good, strong Indian community here. How to go about it, I think, is very debatable, and that's the hardest. That's the challenge. Of the ingredients we need, you have the interest, and then we have to do some research to know how to bring them together. And that's where we are, actually, at least for the community in this part of the country. There are mature communities in Chicago and New York and other big cities, and we probably have a lot to learn from them, how they do things without compromising our ideals and our mission and our neutrality. That's going to be a challenge.

We are blessed in many ways here, I think. We have the Historical Society of Minnesota so encouraging to really include us in part of the history of Minnesota. I think the community should be proud. If not now, a hundred years, two hundred years—who knows?—when these archives may be used for something that we have never imagined, could never imagine.

**PS:** Right.

**FG:** It's a great project, and I'm really proud of being part of it. I want to thank the Historical Society of Minnesota, and it's a pleasure to visit with you today.

**PS:** Thank you very much.

**FG:** Yes.