Dilip Mallick Narrator

Polly Sonifer Minnesota Historical Society Interviewer

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PS: This is Polly Sonifer interviewing Dilip Mallick on May 23, 2005, for the Oral History Project for the India Association of Minnesota.

Good evening, Dilip. How are you tonight?

DM: Good evening, Miss Sonifer. I am fine.

PS: Good. Thank you for taking the time to come over and meet with me and talk about this. Could you give us just a little bit of background information? Your full name and where you're from in India?

DM: Sure. This is Dilip Mallick, and I was born in Calcutta, India. I lived there for thirty years in Calcutta, and then I came over here.

PS: Tell us a bit about your family in India.

DM: I have two sisters, elder sisters. I'm the only son in my family. My dad died in 1989, Ganesh Chandra Mallick. My mom, Sushila Mallick, still she is living in Calcutta.

PS: How did you come to immigrate to the United States?

DM: I was sponsored by my sister here, and then I had to go through the interview process at Calcutta with the counselor general. It was a very, very tough interview when I interviewed, particularly [at] that time in 1985.

PS: So you sponsored your sister to come here?

DM: No, I was sponsored by sister.

PS: By your sister. Okay.

[Brief tape interruption]

PS: So your sister sponsored you?

DM: Yes, and then I go on to the interview process. It was a very hard interview [at] that time.

PS: You already had your degree, and you were already employed in India?

DM: Yes, absolutely.

PS: You didn't come over as a student?

DM: No.

PS: What was your degree in?

DM: I graduated from Calcutta University in engineering college called Bengal Engineering College. It was one of the prestigious colleges in West Bengal, even throughout India. I graduated there in 1975 as a mining engineer.

PS: What inspired you to want to come to the United States?

DM: Yes, that's an interesting question. Actually, as you asked before, the question of what I did in India, whether I was employed or not before coming . . . Yes, after my graduation in 1975, in a campus interview, I got a job when I was a fifth year student in engineering. I got a job. Then, after graduation, I was employed by Hindustan Copper Limited. It was a government undertaking, a big organization in India. I got a job as a mining engineer, and I worked there for two years, and then I thought maybe I'd pursue more education. I quit the job and then started industrial engineering, an MS [Master of Science degree]. Then I got another very, very good offer that I couldn't turn down as assistant manager of a big company, a European and Indian government collaboration company called Orissa Mineral Development. The European collaboration was with Bird and Hillgers. I got that job as assistant manager, and I took that job in the state of Orissa, and I worked there for another seven years. Yes, around seven, eight years. Then, in 1985, I came over here.

Yes, I worked there. The inspiration I got to learn more about the world and to see the world and also when I was in India engineering college and all of that, yes, I wanted to learn more about United States and their democratic country. I would like to come as immigrant.

PS: Did you not like your job in India?

DM: No, I did like it. I did like the job. I was mines manager as well. It was a very challenging job. It was a big labor force that I had to work with. It is a challenging job, but I thought I need to see . . . this is my opportunity to see another side of the world, to come to the United States, so I took that chance.

PS: Did you know anybody here who was already living here?

DM: No, except my sister . . . They were in Golden Valley [Minnesota], so Hope Francil . . . My dad, our family in Calcutta used to know their family, so that is the only person I knew at that time when I came into the Twin Cities, actually, directly from Calcutta.

PS: So, you decided to come directly here because you knew Hope Francil?

DM: Yes.

PS: Is Hope Francil an Indian person or American person?

DM: They are American . . . [she's an] American lady.

PS: Okay. All right. What time of the year did you come?

DM: Yes, I'll tell that story. It is very interesting. I came exactly on January 31, 1985. When I left India, it was, temperature-wise, eighty-five Fahrenheit at that time in Calcutta in January. And when I landed in Twin Cities airport, it was minus seventy-seven windchill.

PS: Wow!

DM: [At] that time, I never knew what the minus seventy-seven windchill means. [Chuckles] So that is the first time I really realized what is the temperature can go that low and what is the feeling of that. Yes, it was very shocking from plus eighty-five to minus seventy-seven.

PS: Right. How did you get a job once you got here?

DM: I started my schooling, going through different courses, and, then, I got a job here in an IT Department in a bank.

PS: So you did go to college once you got here?

DM: Yes, I took courses, different courses in MS, and also Bachelor's degree in computer science.

PS: Oh, okay. So you did come as a student?

DM: No. When I came, I was immigrant. I was allowed to work. There is no restriction or anything, because the student cannot work outside the campus, but that was not the case for me.

PS: Did you have to prove it to the Indian government or the United States government that you should be an immigrant?

DM: To the United States Government, yes.

PS: What was the thing that convinced them that you, out of all the people in India, should be allowed to come?

DM: Yes, that was a challenge, because that was the interview I had to go through. That was just my professional degree also allowed me to come to contribute to this country. Also, I have a relationship with my sister and also, if it is needed, I can go back to India. There was no restriction from either side that if I go back to India, it won't be a problem for me to live there as well. I was interviewed hard, and I was allowed to come.

PS: So one of the stipulations with immigrant status is that you're planning to become a U.S. citizen, right?

DM: Yes.

PS: So that's implied?

DM: Yes. Later on, of course, I became a U.S. citizen. Now, I'm a U.S. citizen and holding a PIO card. That means Person of Indian Origin card. That is a newer version of Indian Government to recognize an American citizen with Indian origin treated the same as a dual citizen, though it is called Person of Indian Origin card. It's a thirty years VISA for Indian government. I don't have any restriction for owning land or getting a government job. I'm treated the same as an Indian citizen [although] I changed my citizenship to United States. So, yes, I had to take that card, apply for that card, and they approved from my background. I am a genuine bona fide Indian origin person. Just the only exception is that I cannot be a political leader.

PS: President of the United States.

DM: [Laughter]

PS: You don't want it anyway. [Laughter]

DM: Either country, I can't.

PS: In either country! Oh, there go all your hopes and dreams.

DM: Yes. [Laughter] I don't want to be anyway.

PS: Right. So 1985 was when you came to the United States. And you went to school for how long?

DM: I've gone through two years in technical school. I didn't do the master's degree, but I took some courses in IT in master courses.

PS: So it was 1987 then that you started working?

DM: Yes.

PS: How hard was it to get that first job in the United States?

DM: Yes, to do the technical job, I don't had any difficulties, but, yes, there was a problem of communication. Though I learned English from my childhood, and I was in Indian college and all that . . . all are English books and writing. Everything is in English. But still there are some communication processes, thinking processes, that is kind of a little bit hard, was hard for me to understand. Other than that, there is no problem at all.

PS: When you came, did you come by yourself, or did bring anyone with you?

DM: No, I came by myself, first. Then, the following year, my wife came. At that time, we didn't have children, so just she came in 1986.

PS: All right. Tell me a little bit about how you met your wife and how you got married. That happened in India before you came here, right?

DM: Yes. That's another interesting story. I don't know how long you are going to keep me . . . the minutes. [Chuckles] But I'll try to go through very short. It is an interesting story, too. Well, when my wife was born in Calcutta at one of the nursing homes, my mother went to see that baby, because my wife Indrani's mother was kind of friend of my mom. She visited in that nursing home to see that newborn baby, Indrani. At that time, her mom proposed her that, "You have a son and why not, if you like my baby, why don't you agree to your son marry with my daughter?" So at that time, my mom said, "Okay, we'll think about it. We'll see." And that happened. When I was growing up, my mom used to say, "You know, there is one girl for you." Indrani also knew. But it was not absolutely a done deal or anything like that, but it was a talk. Then, before our marriage, we met each other.

PS: You didn't meet each other while you were children?

DM: No.

PS: You didn't play together?

DM: We didn't play together, because they used to live in suburb away from Calcutta called Chandannagar. That is in another Portuguese colony. A town called Chandannagar. She was born and brought up there in that town. I was born and brought up in Calcutta. No, we didn't get opportunity much to see each other or play each other. But before our marriage we met each other, and it was arranged by our parents. Then, we like each other, and we got married.

PS: Okay. Indrani is your wife's name?

DM: Yes.

PS: So this was sort of a semi-arranged marriage?

DM: Yes.

PS: You were comfortable with that?

DM: Absolutely. We are very happy with that.

PS: Very good! Now, let's talk a bit about when you came here in 1985. What did you find in the Indian community? What was it like here in Minnesota? Were there lots of Indians? Was it easy to connect with them or was it hard to find them?

DM: Oh, at that time I was very much interested to be a career, to pursue my career, and to have a good job, but an interesting thing happened in 1985. One day I got a call from a company, charitable company, called Children's Heart Fund. Linda Rosseau, the present coordinator, called me and asked me whether I'd be interested to interpret. I said, "How did you get my name and number?" One of her Bengali friends give the phone number to her, because I was a bachelor at that time—not bachelor. I mean live alone, used to live all by myself. Then I asked her, "Why you are asking me?" "Well, that person is coming from Bengal interior village, and he's coming by himself, and we don't have interpreter here as of now, and he does not know any English or anything, and he's not bringing any helper or any person with him. So if we don't get any interpreter right now, we have to send him back."

PS: Oh, okay.

DM: He was coming for open heart surgery. That organization used to bring the children from developing countries, like India, Kenya, Bangladesh, for open heart surgery for the children who are not that much privileged, cannot do operation, doesn't have money. So this organization is to offer that facility for the open heart surgery for free. Then I was kind of a little bit sympathetic to that person, and I went to receive him at the airport with Linda Rosseau. Then I agreed that, yes, I will interpret for him, because as soon as I met with him, he said that, "If I go back to India, then I'll die there. I cannot survive." He was, at that time, around seventeen years old, but because of disease, heart disease, he was looking like, at that time, maybe a twelve-, thirteen-year-old boy. He was not developed.

PS: Oh-

DM: So I was sympathetic and I volunteered for him. Then I interpreted for him for free for three months. Then I get used to more people, [we] know each other, and the community also helped that person, too, and so forth. So I get to know more and more Indian community in the Twin Cities. Of course, in 1986, another thing happened. My wife came, and she is an Indian classical dancer, and she has a master's degree in classical dance. We got involved in whole Indian community more and more since then, actually.

PS: When did you get involved with the India Association or was it called India Club, at that time?

DM: Actually, at that time, it was India . . . In 1986 . . . I got involved in 1986, and India Association started, our club started, in 1973. I think that is the period. I cannot remember right now. But yes, I got involved in 1986, because my wife and Rita Mustaphi and other people had a big dance drama in the Twin Cities—actually, 1987. The dance drama was *Tashir Desh* or *Shapmochan*, one of these two. Following year, in 1988, one of these two happened, the big dance drama. One is *Shapmochan* by Rabindranath Tagore and other production was *Tashir Desh*, consecutive two years. That was a big production, dance drama, under sponsorship of India Association. Then myself and my wife got involved more and more with India Association since then.

PS: So you got brought in by the arts?

DM: Yes.

PS: India Association, at that time, was helping to sponsor art, visiting artists or sponsor local art events?

DM: It was a local art event, but my wife came as I sponsored her. So she came independently, nothing to do with India Association. As her background was in music and [with] her educational background and Rita Mustaphi, they got the grant, because of their educational background and the performance in India, as well.

PS: So you were a tagalong husband.

[Chuckles]

DM: Yes, actually. She later on joined India Association on the board, as well. Then I used to help her, [and was] not that much active with India Association. But I used to help her on all that, Festival of Nation and all that. Then I got involved with the India Association on the board.

PS: First, it was just sort of to help your wife out, to be assisting her in what she was doing artistically?

DM: Yes.

PS: What got you to be more involved? What drew you in that was your own interest into the India Association?

DM: Because India Association is a great organization. Its mission, its way of connecting the community together and offer the culture and the heritage to the Minnesotans is a win-win situation, not only for the India Association . . . for their contribution to the community as a whole. So that attracted me more and more towards India Association. And I think still now that,

yes, this is my responsibility as an Indian origin to get involved and donate my time and energy for the benefit of everybody.

PS: Tell me about the mission of the India Association.

DM: Yes. We have a great mission here:

The India Association of Minnesota, a not-for-profit organization, presents people with an interest in culture and heritage of India to build a sense of cohesiveness within this community, represent the community to the population at large, and serve as the focal point of advancing the educational, cultural, and charitable interests of the community.

PS: So, that's the official mission statement of India Association?

DM: Yes, that is what we believe in. That is the official mission statement of India Association. That's what we believe.

PS: How long has that been the official statement?

DM: Oh, [from] time to time we revised it. This is very recently written, as revised in, I think it is, two years now. This is the official statement.

PS: Okay. We're jumping ahead a little bit, but what inspired the organization to update its mission statement? Had things changed?

DM: No . . . yes and no. There are a couple of things. We added the activity of India Association and the structure of the organization, that is, Advisory Board, Trustee of Advisory Board, TAC . . actually Trustee Advisory Council. I'm sorry. That was created in 2003, and at that time we had to revise the constitution, rules and regulation of the India Association. At that time, the statement was revised at the same time.

PS: So now let's go back in time just a little bit. What year would you say that you got involved for yourself, not for your wife?

DM: Yes, I'm involved throughout the year, throughout the many years since then, 1985, because I used to on [unclear] and volunteer for Children's Heart Fund. They also worked with India Association and so forth. But directly I was elected as a board member in 1998 as the India Association Board. I was elected in a general board meeting. Then I served on the board in various capacities for five years since 1998. Then there is a regulation that the maximum a member can serve India Association is for five years; so I served five years. But people wanted me to join again, and I had to skip one year because that's the decree. So I skipped 2003. I was not on the board; I skipped. Then, in 2004, I joined India Association again as a vice president. Then, again, I was elected in 2005 as a president.

PS: Have you been president twice now?

DM: No, vice president in 2004.

PS: But the first five years, you were just a regular board member?

NHistory Phase **DM:** Yes, regular board member three years, and then two years on executive board. I was treasurer. I served as a treasurer in 2003 with a huge responsibility—2001. Yes, now I'm serving, this is my seventh year in the India Association Board.

[Chuckles]

PS: You must like it.

DM: Yes, I like. I like to contribute to the community.

PS: What's the biggest thing that you get as a reward for yourself out of being on the board?

DM: Sure, it is just self satisfaction. I feel that I'm serving humankind.

[Tape interruption]

PS: What projects caught your attention the most, that caused you to get involved in them?

DM: The most important to me is this one: the Oral History Project.

PS: Okay.

DM: Because I think our most sincere, honest contribution from the people of Indian origin is absolutely necessary and important for future generations to get recorded. The way we help and get involved with the day-to-day's life in the community . . . That, the future generation should know, should know the diverse and rich culture of Indian ethnic background, and that is the best way to get recorded in a very concise and a very sophisticated way. That's why it drew my most attention. One of my goals also for many, many years to get involved with it, and when it came the history of the India Association of thirty years, yes, I expressed my view, and I was chosen to be the leader for the project, and I'm doing my best to record this.

There are some other projects that also draw my attention. Also, I did work for that on humanitarian grounds, especially the earthquake in Gujarat, which happened in 2001 in January. [The] exact date I know; it was January 24th, I think. It was on Friday. Next following day, there was a program in Hindu Mandir for Bengali Association, and I asked people to donate money, and it was donated. It was next day following the morning, and hardly people knew much about it, too, and people donated. And following day—it was a Sunday—we looked for one person going to India, and I sent that money with him. It was not big money, but we decided just to buy water for those victims and send it bottled to there. Yes, I took that initiative, and I was recognized by Gujarati Samaj later on for that immediate action. Also, at that time I was the treasurer, and I organized and helped with all the efforts with the Gujarati Samaj. We raised

around \$275,000 and we adopted a village in Gujarat, and we developed in that village a rehabilitation project in Gujarat. So yes, that humanitarian ground attract me . . . the India Association, good project.

PS: Yes. Wow! That's a lot. But you're from Bengal?

DM: Yes.

PS: And how far is Gujarati from Bengal? Is it close? Why did Gujarat grab your attention?

DM: Just other side. West Bengal is east coast, and Gujarati is all the way across to west coast. No, that's not the boundary. That's not the way my attentions are. It's a totally humanitarian disaster. That disaster is 7.9 Richter Scale, as I do remember still. That drew my attention. Somehow, that's the sentiment I grew up with. When that kind of disaster happens, it always draws my attention, as well.

[The] recent tsunami, also. It is not your question, but yes, to justify my point: when the tsunami happened, I'm the first person India Association called for the meeting. The tsunami happened on December 26, 2004 and I called for the whole Asian community meeting on December 29th. It was benefited tremendous later on. There was an organization called PATH [Pan-Asian Tsunami Healing] was formed, and still they're serving all the organizations those are raising fund for the tsunami victims. Yes, I'm involved in that as well. So yes, I like to help when unfortunate things happen to a person.

PS: Now, over the years, there's been a changing climate about humanitarian projects. Have there been discussions about whether it was the right thing to build this hospital for these children in this certain province of India or to help out the earthquake or to help out because of a famine or a flood or some other natural disaster? There's seemingly no end to humanitarian projects in India. How does the India Association decide which ones it will take on and which ones it won't?

DM: Most of the disaster, which is really in bigger nature and very hard for local organizations to handle, then, yes, as India Association members, we try to help on those disasters. Yes, we did help the Gujarat earthquake. Yes, we did on the flood in Orissa; a cyclone happened. We helped in Orissa. In West Bengal also, there was a flood; we donated there. So yes, when the disaster happened, we tried to organize some fund, and often we work through CARE [Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere], organization CARE, here. They have a very good organizing capability and accountability in India. We work with them, as well as the particular NGO [Nongovernment Organization] in the local area. Also, we select . . . not to misuse any money or any other political or, I'll say, not really good, recognized organizations. We don't fund them. So we had to go through proper fact-finding reasons to donate fund to particular organizations or particular schools.

PS: Are there guidelines that humanitarian aid should be given to a public thing, like rebuilding a school rather than given to certain individuals to rebuild their houses?

DM: Yes, that's always a question to select guidelines, too. Yes, we go through on the situation basis, like Orissa. For instance, on a school to rebuild. And that, also, we have to go through the personal connections to justify that the school needs genuine help. Same as the Gujarat relief fund; we had to go . . . Now, a team went there. The people who live here went there and selected a project with CARE also. So yes, there are guidelines that are involved, too, to identify a particular project.

PS: Are there guidelines all set out in advance saying that the India Association will never give money to an individual to rebuild their house or buy a new boat or buy more oxen or whatever? It always has to go to a community use?

DM: Yes, absolutely.

PS: Okay.

DM: Absolutely not for personal use or private organizations or anything like that. It has to be for humanitarian grounds for the local people for the specified cause.

PS: At a community level?

DM: Yes, community level. Yes.

PS: All right. Were you a part of creating those guidelines or were those already in place when you joined the organization? The guidelines about how you would give humanitarian aid.

DM: We set up the committee, and then we looked through the guidelines, yes. The guidelines are there in place. But, again, that guideline sometimes, it doesn't fall under some other relief thing, because earthquake is totally little bit different than cyclone or flood. But when we look at that, some general guidelines are there, yes. That committee is to justify those guidelines, yes.

PS: Because those guidelines are there in advance, when a disaster happens, you don't have to recreate the wheel every time. You've got a general guideline to help you?

DM: Yes.

PS: Okay. How long does it generally take the committees, after something terrible has happened, before the money is raised and sent over to do whatever project is identified?

DM: That's always a tough decision-making process. Again, all the projected rehabilitation projects are not immediately funded. We disperse because we generate the fund and then we identify the project, and then we disperse that fund. When we release the fund, we also do it in phase-wise. Not all money goes in [at the] same time. We look to the progress, as well, of that project; then we do funding further.

PS: So if they're not actually rebuilding the school, you don't send them any more money?

DM: No.

PS: Are local people hired to do the building? If it's a rebuilding of a building, for example, you hire Indians in that city or that community?

DM: Yes, in that community.

PS: Then they get paid directly from your fund?

DM: Yes. See, we appoint NGO, local organization, and so that organization works with the particular contractor or any other contractor who does have the labor force and all that to build that school, so that local organizations control that project.

PS: Okay. You just provide the funding?

DM: Funding that organization to make them responsible. At the same time, we get the information where the project is going on and what they are doing in that project.

PS: NGO stands for Non-Government Organization?

DM: Yes.

PS: That would be the same as what we would call in the United States here a not-for-profit?

DM: Yes.

PS: All right. Thank you for clarifying that. Has there ever been a situation where somebody was advocating for a particular humanitarian project and it was decided that that wasn't something that the India Association would undertake?

DM: No, it's never happened. We never get into that conflict or anything like that.

PS: So if you define your helping as large natural disasters that affect a large region, then if somebody came and said, "Oh, this hospital for blind children, could we fund that?" you would say, "No, that's not in our scope?"

DM: That's not our scope. It never happened. Nobody said anything like that to come up with a project or we just cancel that project or said, "No." It's never happened.

PS: Then with the funding for things like the tsunami that just happened in 2004, have all the funds that have been raised by the India Association gone directly to India or could some of them go to Sri Lanka or the Philippines or Taiwan or some other place affected by the tsunami or would you only fund projects in India?

DM: This tsunami disaster . . . India Association is playing the role to raise the funds, but we are rather helping more to the organizations of different states, because Tamil Nadu has their own organization, and they are raising their fund. So we are not competing with them. Rather, we are helping them to raise the fund for their local state of Tamil Nadu. Tsunamis happen to other states as well. For that, we just open a fund, totally separate fund, for tsunami victims relief fund. We are raising from who like to give for, say, a particular political area. So there is an organization in here who are raising funds for those area. So in our mind, that area probably needs some help, our help and that help, we'll provide. We are just raising money for a small amount, but we didn't disperse any money yet.

PS: Have you identified what project you would fund for tsunami relief?

DM: No. We are still working with different local organizations. In fact, we are talking with a few people in different areas and so forth. According to guidelines, there is a committee, and that committee is looking at that for more funding, maybe. There is a matching grant, also. Maybe we'll apply with that to get more funding.

PS: In all the years that you've been with India Association of Minnesota, what was the biggest challenge that you saw the organization had to overcome? Any controversies or disagreements that came up that the organization had to work their way through?

DM: As my perception, also before—that's why we talked about time to time—that as per the India Association constitution, the board needs to elect every year. There is a general board meeting and the election process. The whole board gets changed every year and, as well, the president or vice president. They also change every year. Though there is a constitution little bit towards who becomes the vice president . . . could be a candidate for president following year, because every year is change. That was, to me, a bottleneck of the organization for long term planning, because it's a short view of the president to have a long-term planning for the organization and work towards that. For instance, if I have a planning from now in 2005 and wanted to be the bridge between community position of India Association in 2010, but that view and that planning gets misplaced or diverted in other direction, because I don't serve that long... . That was kind of a bottleneck, problematic position of India Association. That we talked about, and then we created the Trustee Advisory Council. That Trustee Advisory Council have a longterm planning goal for the India Association. That is also on a little bit trial basis, because it just formed in 2003. It's just one year or two years anniversary, and also a lot of things need to be worked out. That has members also for three years term. We are planning with that—that is, the organization—maybe we have to work more on that.

PS: So you see that as the biggest thing to work through. I've heard a lot of things from other people I've interviewed about the various events that India Association is involved with every year, like India Day at Landmark Center and the Festival of Nations that happens each year.

DM: Yes.

PS: And there was the literacy project; I don't know that that's around anymore. Is there anything that you want to say about some of those recurring events? Any impressions or any stories that you have from those in your experience with them?

DM: Sure. Yes, I got involved as a chair for Festival of India or India Day, as you said, at the Landmark Center in 2004, October. Yes, we had a great success, and we are interested, and we limited more quality into the program. Also, we publicized in a very big way. That was the highest attendees, visitors, in that program last year. That generated lots of interest this year. When, [at the] beginning of the year, this year, we started forming this Festival of India committee, everybody wanted to get involved [laughter] because of its success. Also, as a president, new president, it was kind of the president's responsibility, really, to do the annual dinner that probably you attended this year.

PS: Yes.

DM: That is also the president's responsibility, to do that annual dinner. This year also was a big success, because we got our dignitary, Senator Mark Dayton.

PS: Right.

DM: And also State Senator Satveer Chaudhary and you [chuckles] and Jim Fogerty and so on. So yes, we had very successful program, annual dinner, as well.

PS: And the ambassador?

DM: Yes, I forgot that.

PS: What was his name?

DM: Arun Kumar. He's Consul General of India at Chicago. Our keynote speaker was the Channel 5 anchor, Vineeta Sawkar. Yes, we had really a very good program this year. We'd like to do it more, and as you heard, I announced that whatever extra money we'll generate, that will go to tsunami fund.

PS: Do you know how much was raised in that event for the tsunami relief?

DM: Oh, I don't remember. I don't have the account right now.

PS: Okay. What do you think has been the key thing that has kept the India Association going all these years? It's a totally volunteer organization, and there's a lot of tasks to be done running an organization. What keeps it going?

DM: This is probably the hardest question you asked me.

[Laughter]

PS: If you want a minute to think, I can pause it.

DM: No, that's okay. I think, you know, that's a very good question. Over the years now . . . this organization started in 1973, and now it is 2005. I've been involved with it many, many years. I saw within the organization lots of energy, lots of interest to keep this organization going. I think that the democratic way this organization is running, we do honor and value all the members' opinions, their thinking processes, their advice, their comments, and we in a democratic way try to accommodate that advice, those comments and those ideas. That is probably the key component of this organization; to run in a democratic way giving all the members value.

PS: My understanding is that if all of you were still in India, you probably wouldn't know each other and would certainly not be working together on something. Because you would all be in your own separate regions or states of India and involved in your own separate religious organizations and your different language groups and that the translation that happens when you all are here is that India becomes the overriding connection, rather than, "Oh, I'm from Orissa and you're from Bengal and I'm from Gujarat," and the language differences and the religious difference don't matter as much. Is that your understanding as well?

DM: Yes. It doesn't matter. It does not matter much at all. There is the interesting occasion; I can tell you one that happened. I was in a conference in another state of the U.S., and in that conference, another gentleman was there in that conference, and one of our colleagues was there. He is American mainstream. He saw at the break that we met first time, and we started talking in English. So my colleague asked me, "Why are you guys talking in English?" I said, "Well, he's from the other state and I am from Bengal, another state, and our mother tongue is totally different. We don't know each other's mother tongue. This is the common language we have." So it's a different feeling when we came out from India and connect [with] each other. It's a feeling of growing up in India, though we are from different, as I said, languages, different ethnic backgrounds a little bit, but there is some common factor there which combined us. As a matter of fact, I learned more when I came here about India than in India where I was.

PS: Really? Tell me more about that. Like what things did you learn more about India here than you learned while you were in India?

DM: Yes. That's interesting.

PS: Give me a couple of examples.

DM: Yes. I was born and brought up in Calcutta . . . [it] is a very old neighborhood. Our parents lived there and grandparents lived there for three hundred years in that same area in Calcutta in one of the old areas of Calcutta. That area is Hindu. People live in that area....

[Tape interruption]

PS: So your family lived for three hundred years in the same area of Calcutta? And what did you learn when you came here about that?

DM: That is all Hindu area. There is no other religion [for people who] lived in that area when I grew up. So I didn't get much opportunity to know Muslim culture, though my family background is mostly in law. My Dad's [father] . . . my grandfather worked with the British in high court and all that, a lawyer, very open-minded person. I heard that in the Hindu riot that happened in 1944 in Calcutta, my grandfather saved a few Muslim people, hiding them in our house. So those stories I heard. But actually, I never learned anything [about] Muslim culture or anything. Neither did I get much opportunity to learn that when I was in India. But when I came here I had a friend who is from Ghana, but he's Muslim and Indian origin, and I went to their house. He invited me, in Muslim celebration, in their house with my wife a couple of years. I got to know more about Muslim culture and their religion, celebrating with them in the same house. That opportunity never happened that much when I was in India. So I learned that. I learned, again, the Gujarati people. We've become friends through India Association, different ethnic states. I mingle with . . . I had a friend. That opportunity was not in India, though I moved through different places, but still, I didn't get to know that much [compared to] what I get to know here.

PS: So it's just having a different venue to mix with each other?

DM: Yes.

PS: Are you familiar with other organizations like the India Association of Minnesota in other states or other parts of the world?

DM: Other states?

PS: Of America, of the United States.

DM: Oh. In the other states, not much. But in Twin Cities, of course, there are different Indian states organizations [that] are there. That, I am involved with.

PS: The sumajs or another organization?

DM: Another organization. Like Bengali Association is kind of a similar type of organization, but it is only state of West Bengal people association. I was the vice president as well for two years in that organization. It is also basically a cultural organization, cultural charitable organization. Yes, I'm involved with that. Some other organizations, of course, I am involved with, but that is probably . . . You were asking for that?

PS: Do those organizations in any way compete with the India Association of Minnesota, or is it a cooperation between them?

DM: It's mostly cooperation, similar type of cultural enrichment, enhancement, like Dragon Festival. I'm involved with the Dragon Festival. That also promotes the whole culture of Asian culture. Actually, it used to be called Asian Heritage Festival. For last eight years, it's [been] happening in Twin Cities. Now it is called Dragon Festival. I am the vice chair of that festival right now. It is the same kind of ideology or mission: to promote Asian culture. So within that Asian culture, Indian culture is also one of the components.

PS: So you don't see these organizations competing for members because people have joint membership?

DM: Yes.

PS: Okay. Then, for projects to do or dollars to support those projects, is there competition for that?

DM: Yes, it's support for each other. Like our organization support that festival.

PS: Financially?

DM: Financially. So it's a bigger umbrella of all the Asian ethnic groups here.

PS: Which one is? The India Association of Minnesota or the Pan-Asian group?

DM: The Pan-Asian group; that is, Dragon Festival. All the Asian ethnic groups participate in that.

PS: Right. So, India Association fits within that, as does the Bengali Association and the Punjabi Association and all the other ethnic groups within India?

DM: Yes

PS: How does the India Association of Minnesota recruit its members? Because you don't have to be Indian to belong, right?

DM: No. Everybody can join as India Association member. There is no bar, no ethnic background, no religious background. We have a guideline for that. We publicize for nomination. Every year we form a nomination committee in our general body meeting and general body election. We form that nomination committee, and that nomination committee will ask for nomination of the members, IAM members, in the newsletters or in verbal communications.

PS: That's for members of the board?

DM: Board, yes.

PS: I'm thinking of your general membership.

DM: Oh, okay. Oh, general membership, yes. We have a registration form, and whoever's willing to be a member, fill out the form and pay the membership.

PS: Do you advertise for members or word of mouth or do you promote it through other organizations? How do you bring in new members? How would you bring in people who are only staying here temporarily while they're on a work visa for two years—or aren't they interested?

DM: They are interested, show interest, a few of them. Yes, we do promote. We publicize. We also call to the numbers we know people to be a member or renew their membership. We send out some e-mails, as well, and we publicize in our newsletters to be a member. So yes, it's for everybody. We publicize through our, mostly, newsletters.

PS: Okay. Regarding the recent immigrants or the people who are here temporarily, has it been difficult to coax them to become members of the India Association?

DM: Yes, a little bit, because it is obvious that who comes, newer generation or immediate immigrant, they have to establish themselves first. So they are busy to take care of their education, take care of their employment, and take care of knowing this country. So the first few years is a lot of time commitments and a lot of work to go through that process first, and then to become a volunteer or to participate in optional organizations. To attract them in the first is little bit tougher.

PS: Do you try to attract them in?

DM: Yes, we try to, because it is also good for them to know the community and to get help.

PS: How about recruiting in new members from the second generation of Indians, the people who were born here perhaps, and they're now in their twenties and thirties, of Indian parents who came directly from India, and who may or may not feel very connected to India? Are they joining the India Association as members? If so, how are they contributing?

DM: Yes, we have some youth programs [for] the second generation, those [who] became the Minnesotan in mainstream American life. Those are little bit different than the first generation Indians [who] came to this country. They were born and brought up here, those youth, and they obviously feel they're mainstream American, and that's good. That's welcome. We like to involve them in the India Association as well, but that response from that side is little bit less. But cultural gathering, they are participants. Of course, on student level, they do participate in different programs like India Day, all the cultural events, Those kids, they participate and they perform.

PS: That's while they're still students? I'm thinking of the twenty- and thirty-year-olds.

DM: Yes. When they are students, they participate, but when they're grown up, old, I mean adult, then that interest gets a little bit lesser.

PS: Right.

DM: I'm not sure why.

PS: Okay. One of the principles—I don't know if it's Hinduism or Buddhism—that I've heard is that at certain parts of your life, you have a different focus. Like when you're a child, it's to learn and to grow and develop, and when you're a young adult, it's to make a family and have a job, and then when you get to be in your forties and fifties, that's when it's service, service back to the world, giving back to the community. So do you think that it might be that these young people just aren't at that stage yet where they're ready to give back? They're busy going to college and getting their first job and getting married and having children. Do you think that could be it?

DM: Yes, that could be also. Time will tell. We need to focus in that how they get involved with the ethnic community. That learning process where they live in this country, and that is really a focus for any particular ethnic or any country-wise or in general in bigger format, that's in their mind and how that will play, I'm not sure.

PS: What's the average age of people that are active in the India Association right now?

DM: Right now, a more younger group.

PS: So what? Thirty-five-year-olds? Forty-year-olds?

DM: Yes. I think mostly in thirty-five to forties group. Thirty-five in average, I think, now.

PS: All right. So the first generation, the people who started it, have sort of retired or moved on or passed away, perhaps?

DM: Yes.

PS: Then there's this group of thirty-five- to forty-five-year old people that are in the leadership positions?

DM: Yes.

PS: Then the people who are not of Indian origin who join the India Association, what do you think draws them? What's their interest in this organization?

DM: They have the interest about Indian culture, and some of them are the persons who adopted the Indian kids. Also, a few people just want to know more about India. And also, I know a couple of Burmese groups, persons, also join.

PS: Burmese?

DM: Yes.

PS: And what was their interest?

DM: To get involved with the India Association to know more and to celebrate the culture. That person came and last Festival of India Day, he danced [chuckles] with the [unclear] group. Here, there is a poetry gathering. He came and recited, so somehow he also got involved with India Association

PS: Okay. He's joining it as a way to have artistic expression?

DM: Artistic expression.

PS: I think we've covered everything on my list of questions. So if there are any other things you feel are important to talk about, you can just lead the discussion anywhere you want to take it at this point.

DM: Okay. I'd like to convey, for the future generation, that India Association should go on in a bigger format to serve the whole Minnesotan so that everybody can [be] prosperous in this country. Thanks, Polly Sonifer, for you doing this project and for many, many years of your helping to do this oral history project. Yes, we appreciate that, as well as Jim Fogerty from Minnesota Historical Society. His contribution towards this project is enormous. We appreciate that. And that's all I wanted to say.

ach for the c PS: Great. Thank you very much for the compliment, and thanks for spending this evening with