

Interview with Indru Advani

Interview by Polly Sonifer

**Interviewed on June 12, 1994
at Mr. Advani's Apple Valley home**

PS: Polly Sonifer

IA: Indru Advani

DA: Dolly Advani

PS: How are you today?

IA: Fine, well, thank you.

PS: Thank you for letting me spend some time with you today interviewing. First of all can you tell me what part of India you came from, where you were born?

IA: Well, Polly, I was born in Pakistan which was at that time, India. I was born in 1930, July 20, in the city of Hyderabad, Sind, in then India. I had a very elementary education over there, then when I was about four, or five, I moved to the province of Punjab, which was in the northern part of India. Now I'm talking about the provincial structure of the Indian subcontinent under the British rule.

I moved in Punjab and I started my elementary school virtually there in an English school. It was Catholic school run by the nuns. Such schools were called and are still called Convent Schools. I don't know how the name came about. Perhaps, the British termed it "convent of the nuns. Most of these were run by Catholic nuns. Then I studied there for about four or five years. My father was a manager in the Burmah Shell Oil company which was a British-owned company. He traveled a lot, in the sense of being transferred every three or four years. And then finally, around the beginning of the war, about 1940, we moved to the state of Rajasthan, which is in the central part of India, in the city of Jodhpur. We stayed in that place for a year or so but then temporarily our home was split apart because my brother was studying in the province of Sind; he was in college. Rather than staying in dormitories, we established a temporary home in the city of Karachi in Sind.

That's where my brother was in college. And I went for a couple of years to Karachi school and then when he graduated from college, we moved back to Jodhpur, and I continued my schooling over there. From there I finished my high school and entered college in 1946.

PS: So the war that was going on was the war for independence?

IA: No the World War II. The war ended in 1946. I started my college in Jodhpur. In 1946 the independence movement gained momentum. The leaders who were fighting for the independence, the Congress party leaders, had been jailed during the war period. They were released, and apparently the British government had reached an agreement to allow Indians to declare independence. And in 1947, I was one of the fortunate people in India to be at the ceremony and raise the Indian flag in my college. There was one other student who lowered the Union Jack, and I was the one who raised the Indian flag. It was the proudest moment of my life! Singing, as I always had a good voice, singing and leading the national anthem. The national anthem of India was adopted at that time. So those are some fond memories, and I have never forgotten them.

PS: Were you active in the independence movement?

IA: Well, not active as such, because I was a student. I never participated in any agitation that went on during the war. I was very young. But the sympathies were there. In 1942, for example, I was in Karachi, and Mahatma Gandhi had declared the Quit India movement, because all the negotiations between England and India failed to reach an accord to give independence to India. Mahatma Gandhi declared in one of his speeches that the British have to quit. That speech became the "Quit India" speech and the movement that followed became the "Quit India" movement. And because there was turmoil all over the country the British being engrossed in the war on one hand, and the independence movement in India, on the other, imprisoned all the leaders of the freedom movement, including Gandhi and Nehru. So all over the country the Congress party leaders were put in jail. At that time, as a child, and full of vigor for the freedom movement, we used to take a charcoal and sneak out in the evening hours. Wherever we would see a wall we would write "quit India", "quit India" "quit India". That was my contribution to the freedom movement. If my father would have seen me, he would have pulled me by my ears and locked me up inside the house. Often there would be some riots and shootings and tear gas. So my father would always keep us away from that. My father was not involved in that because it would have been a conflict of interest because he worked for a British company.

PS: When freedom came, what happened to your father's job?

IA: The companies stayed. He was not an employee of the British government. He was an employee of the British business organization. These British organizations continued. If he would have been an employee of the British government he would have become an employee of the Indian government. There was no victimization of any sort after the independence. As a matter of fact, to maintain a smooth transition, the Indian government that followed the British rule, maintained a complete control to see that there was no victimization of any Indians who worked for the British government in India.

I started my college in 1946 and in 1948 after two years of college I got an offer to go to Kenya, which was in British East Africa. One of my uncles who had a very flourishing businesses in Kenya came to India and talked me into working there. He needed someone from the family and he didn't have old enough children to go into that line. He talked me into going over there. I was very keen on finishing my education, at least through four years. But this was a nice opportunity and I asked my father's counsel and he said, "well, opportunities don't knock every now and then on the door, but this is a decision you have to make." I decided to go to Kenya. I was still young enough to take the risk. If it did not work, I could come back and continue my education. I had already completed two years of college.

PS: What kind of work was that?

IA: He had a couple of department stores and wholesale distributions. In about two years I found I didn't like that kind of retail business. I missed my educational and academic interests. The life in Kenya was such that I didn't find any challenges over there from the academic point of view. There were no colleges there. People of my age were mostly high school graduates who were working in retail business, government offices or businesses. They didn't have any academic interests. I was missing that. Then I decided this is not my line. So within about two years, I made the decision, and after three years stay, I came back to India. My father also encouraged me to come back, and I started my college right away after returning. And in another two years, 1953, I graduated from college. I was 23.

PS: And what was your major in college?

IA: I graduated in economics, history, political science and English. At that time, my father retired from his employment with the British Burmah Shell Oil company. We moved to Bombay where most of my relatives lived. Our family consisted of my father, Sitalsing, mother, Ruki, brother Mohan, sisters Sheila and Nirmala, and myself. After the partition of India in 1947, most of my other relatives had settled in Bombay. So, we decided to move there.

PS: So that original community of people from Sind was where you really felt connected?

IA: We felt more connected, right.

PS: Tell me about how you first had thoughts about leaving India to come to the United States.

IA: When I came to Bombay in 1953, I started working at the Bombay docks as a labor officer, and worked there for about two years. Then I decided I should study law. Years ago my grandfather was a judge in Sind. The inspiration came from him. Although, he had never told me or anything like that. But I remember when I was very young, I was one of his favorite grandsons. I have very faint memories (I must have been hardly three or four years) that he would travel a lot as a circuit judge and take me with him. His mode of traveling would be horseback, bullock cart, camel, camel cart, trains, horse carriages. My mother was very uncomfortable to leave me with him but being the patriarch of the family, she couldn't say no to him. So, that's how I got inspired to become a lawyer. I started the law school at Bombay University and graduated in 1957. During the law school years, I also continued working for B.E.S.T. (Bombay Electric Supply and Transport.) In 1955 I met my wife Dolly. Her maiden name was Dolly Kotwal. She was in graduate school, finishing her master's degree in sociology in 1956. We started going steady. Due to our different religions, we anticipated some problems. I am a Hindu and she is a Zoroastrian.

PS: That was very unusual, right?

IA: That was very unusual. Dolly's family and her religion would not permit a marriage of this sort between a Hindu and Zoroastrian. And we knew that we were going to face considerable opposition from the families, especially on her side. I was more confident that I would have no opposition

because my family was comparatively liberal. We didn't announce our engagement at that time, although we had agreed between us to marry already.

PS: Did they know you were seeing each other?

IA: Oh, yes.

PS: Did they approve of that?

IA: Yes. They assumed we were just good friends. Our parents were very progressive in that way. But we had quite a bit of concern relative to the opposition that was to follow. We anticipated that. We decided that in no way would we get married and cut off relationships with our parents. We had to make every effort to get the consent from our families. Because both of us were so close to our respective families, that if we married by pulling ourselves away from them, we could never lead a happy married life. We continued dating.

PS: Did you feel a little bit like Romeo and Juliet?

IA: As you ask, I think it was somewhat like that. You'd be surprised, even in those days. Many, many people lived for years as friends and never married but were loyal to each other. I have known several people like that. We were still very young, in our early twenties, to realize the practical aspect of that lifestyle; we simply knew people lived like that so we knew we could do that too.

As time went on I graduated from law school and Dolly finished her master's in sociology. Then she went for a post graduate course in applied psychology. After graduating from that course, she started work as a clinical psychologist at the KEM Hospital in Bombay. I became an Accident Officer of BEST Corporation. Both Dolly and I wanted to do graduate work in USA with encouragement from a friend who had studied at the University of Minnesota. I applied for admission for the MBA program and Dolly for MA in Child Psychology. We were both accepted. Dolly's parents consented to our relationship. We decided that we will get married after we finish our graduate work and return to India.

PS: Then you had their blessing to marry?

IA: We had their blessing to marry.

PS: If Dolly's parents had arranged another marriage for her, could she have refused it?

IA: Oh, yes. She could have accepted it! Which I think would have been better. She could have lived like a queen in India. Not a slum here. Doing all the gardening and everything. No, I am just kidding. We are on the record now. This is all in a joke you know. She could have refused. Our families were very progressive. I think it was more of a stigma and these families resented this as a stigma of inter-communal or inter-religious marriage.

PS: I know there were different caste systems in India. Were you of the same caste system even though you were of different religions?

IA: Castes were very rigid to the level of professions. In the middle class families, castes are not as such. It's more the communities. A person may belong in the same caste (there are four castes, traditionally). If you are the Brahmin, which is the highest caste, and even in the Brahmin have several other communities; Brahmin of one community may not prefer to marry his son or daughter to a Brahmin of another community.

PS: Are those communities based on religion or regions?

IA: Regions or subdivisions based on scripture requirements. It is so intricate. Even marriages there are not very well accepted. Now things have changed a lot.

DA: May I interject? The caste system is only within a religion, so in other religions, the caste system does not apply at all.

IA: As far as the marriage arranged by her parents or my parents, it could not have been imposed on us. We could have refused that. But when ours was accepted, our preparation to come to the United States became very smooth. Finally in 1960 we left India. We came by a cargo passenger ship because it was very cheap. In those days it cost us \$300 a piece, but took 42 days to reach New York. We were 17 passengers; all graduate students from India and Pakistan. We left Bombay on August 10, 1960 and arrived New York on September 21, 1960. It was a "discovery of America"

and a new life for us.

PS: And was it okay for the two of you to travel together?

IA: Oh, yes, everything was very well accepted. So we came here and we stayed in a rooming house. The land lady, Mrs. Draglis, had one son who lived with her who was never married; mother and son lived in the same house on 14th Avenue and Sixth Street southeast. She boarded students and we had a common kitchen.

We lived there for two years. Dolly finished her master's in 1962 and decided to return to India right away after graduation. I had a little work to do to finish my papers so I decided I would go later on. She returned immediately after graduation and I found a job with an insurance company as a sales representative and within about four months I was promoted as training manager and within another six months I was promoted as a district sales manager. After I started working for this company, they offered to sponsor me for a permanent resident visa. We filed the required applications and were told that it may take some time before the visa would be issued. So, after a stay of about eight or nine months in India, Dolly returned to USA to get married.

PS: So you were apart again for nine months?

IA: Eight or nine months, yes.

PS: It must have been hard.

IA: Well, I was busy. I was traveling a lot and in a way it gave me a little time to work hard. I proved this to my company also. That's how they had accepted me and took the step to sponsor me. She came back and then we got married at the University. We had a simple ceremony with Judge Rolf Fossen who was the chief judge of the Hennepin District Court. He married us. We had a very nice friend of ours, Mrs. Gertrude Swanson who was matron of honor, and another friend of mine was my best man. He was my contemporary in the department of statistics. And since then he has moved to India. He is a professor over there. He teaches in one of the IITs, Institute of Technology.

PS: Is he an Indian man?

IA: He is an Indian man. We decided to make our home here

after we got married. I continued working for that company.

A year later our daughter Ramona was born and in the meantime I finished my papers and got my MBA degree. Then in 1966 I was finally cleared with Immigration and I got my green card and I decided I had enough funds to go to India to see my relatives and show them my daughter. And show them we were married now. My father was also writing, everybody was writing, and her parents were very keen on seeing their grandchild. We left in 1966. When I left I went with the intention of seeing if I could establish myself in India. I took a leave of absence for about six months and stored everything here. About three or four months before leaving for India I had bought a new car, and had to put it in storage, put all my other stuff in storage and then I left. In India I was glad I had six months of respite. I looked all over and found that the opportunities were not the kind that I would be interested in. I had one job offer and I almost took that. But when I added up everything I realized that it wasn't at all lucrative. I stayed there about 10 months and I came back. She stayed there because I decided that when I returned, I would not stay with the same company because it required too much traveling. I decided I should have a more stable job where I didn't have to travel. I was so tired of the traveling. I had traveled for four months with this company. So I came back and started looking around. I was offered a job with Blue Cross & Blue Shield. It was right in my field. I was hired to handle all the in-house legal work. With my knowledge of health insurance plus law degree and master's degree in business administration, it worked out very well.

I was the first in-house lawyer Blue Cross hired. I started the law department. After becoming a citizen, I also obtained my license to practice in the state of Minnesota and Federal courts. I continued working as corporate counsel for Blue Cross and Blue Shield until my retirement.

PS: Did you take the bar exam?

IA: No, Minnesota Supreme Court rules at that time were relaxed to allow my admission here because I was already admitted for practice in India. Since then, the rules have changed and become more restrictive.

PS: What year did you become a citizen?

IA: I became a citizen in 1974 and in 1976 I was admitted

to the practice of law.

PS: You lived here 14 years without being a citizen.

IA: Right. I was on a student visa until I got green card in 1966. Then in '74 I became a citizen. I could have become a citizen in '71 but I wanted to go to India on the Indian passport and I wasn't sure how that would be. So in '73 I went to India for a vacation just for a month, then came back and filed my citizenship papers.

PS: Complicated process.

IA: It was. Well, then in '71 our little Reuben was born. And in '73 that's the reason we went back again to see the grandparents. In 1971 Dolly's parents came here and we thought they would live with us because they were alone in India. So they lived with us for about a year and a half till about the end of '72. When the fall of '72 started they just couldn't take another winter, so they went back and then they never came back.

PS: Not even for a visit?

DA: They were old when they came the first time. My mother was in her late 60's and father his 70's.

IA: Whenever we wanted them to come here, they would say, "No, you come here. To spend that much money, you meet all of us. We have seen already everyone there." She has one brother, also, and he was raised mostly by his uncles, her uncles, too. For all practical purposes she was the only child because they had raised her only. And he was about seven or eight years old the uncles virtually adopted him; the uncles and grandmother adopted him.

PS: For what reason?

IA: Uncles were unmarried. They lived with their mother. He was always visiting them and they became very fond of him. He was at one time very sick and the grandmother took care of him. Joint families like that in India are very common. It's not that the families are split apart or anything. It is considered an accepted fact of life.

PS: What were some of the early impressions you had as a student when you first came here and you were fresh off the

boat? Can you remember what you thought the first day that you came here off the boat?

IA: When I was fresh off the boat, when I was an FOB!! We landed in New York and we went through customs and we decided we would come by bus to Minneapolis. In the morning we had docked and cleared customs took a cab and came straight to the bus depot in Manhattan. We had docked at the Brooklyn docks and came to Manhattan, bought our bus ticket, put our bags in a locker, and decided we would walk around because the bus didn't leave until 8 o'clock in the evening. By this time it was about 11 o'clock, so we decided we'd walk around and we won't go very far. We started walking, keeping track of everywhere we were going.

We entered a restaurant and saw sandwiches. In India sandwiches are generally party sandwiches. You go in a restaurant, you order half a dozen sandwiches --- mutton sandwiches, chicken sandwiches, egg sandwiches, vegetable sandwiches. They are like small triangular type party sandwiches. We thought we'd order a ham sandwich, so I told him I would have four ham sandwiches. He looked at me and he said, "For both of you?" And she said, "No, I'll have four egg sandwiches." He looked at us and said, "You're going to eat here?" I said, "Yes." And suddenly I remembered when I saw his bread and I said, "These are the sandwiches?" He said, "Yes." I said, "One sandwich for both of us." The slices of bread were quite large and I realized that was quite a novelty for us. We had our sandwich and then we asked where the Empire State Building was. I had seen it in "An Affair to Remember" so we asked where it was and we were told about 10 blocks. My impression with blocks was a block of buildings so I said, "Oh, 10 blocks, that's only 10 buildings so it must be here." Well, all buildings are so tall, and we had walked 10 buildings and it was just about one block long or two blocks. And we didn't see any Empire State Building, and I thought we were lost. We kept going and again we asked somebody, an Indian lady. And she said it's another five blocks from here. "When you say blocks, what do you mean?" And she explained, "It's crossroads." Then I said okay. She understood. Then we made it and we saw it. That evening we boarded the bus and were on our way to Minneapolis. In the morning the bus stopped for breakfast someplace. The driver said we had half an hour. We ordered our eggs and tea, and the eggs came but there was no tea. There was hot water but no tea. I couldn't figure out where the tea was. So we ate our eggs and no tea. I was missing

my tea. Finally the waitress came and said, "Is that all?" And I asked her where the tea was. She pointed and I said that's just hot water. She said, "There's a tea bag." So I said, "Don't you have ready made tea?" She said, "No, just put the tea bag in it." So I said, "You do it." She put that thing in --- I had never seen a tea bag! Then we got some milk and quickly had it and we were getting ready to leave. That was a unique experience. So, in two days we had three unique experiences.

I was asking the clerk what time the bus will leave, and he said right on schedule, the schedule says --- I knew that schedule was schedule but why was he saying right on schedule? But then I realized he was referring to the printed schedule, right on schedule. So then I picked up that phrase and realized it's a very commonly spoken phrase --- right on schedule, or the schedule says this.

On the bus I was speaking to a gentleman and somehow or other I asked him to spell his name and he used the letter "z" in his spelling. I couldn't figure out what he was saying. I had never heard of "z". I had heard the letter "zed". And he kept saying "z" and pretty soon I realized he was referring to "z". So I picked up that pretty soon. These were some of the very unique experiences right at the beginning of our arrival here. There were so many other cultural differences we picked up later on in life here. It's hard to recall, but these are so vivid, and sometimes I recall them and laugh.

PS: Was there any difficulty being understood?

IA: I didn't have that much difficulty following the American accent and being understood. I don't know if I had more of the British accent at that time which I lost now. I more or less picked up the American accent when I started working for the American Republic Insurance Company as a sales representative. In the intensive training they gave us, I saw all audio visuals and training films and acquired the American accent. Then I lived for almost five years on the road, I acquired more accent during that time.

PS: How did you stay connected to your family in India in those early years?

IA: Through letters. One of our family traditions had been to remain in contact by dropping a few lines on a post card

daily. During my growing years, I remember my father who traveled a lot and my brother who stayed away from home during some of his college years, always wrote a post card, occasionally followed by a detailed letter. So, I also followed this same tradition by writing an air letter every two weeks. I think the first phone call I ever made was in the seventies. For one thing, in my home in Bombay there was no phone. There were some neighbors who had a phone but it was so inconvenient to use our neighbors' phone. They lived in an apartment complex, the fourth floor down, go to the next apartment complex, go four floors up and get the phone call. So it was very difficult.

PS: How would you say you raised your children differently than if you had stayed in India?

IA: Depends if we would have lived with parents, it would have been different. I say that guardedly because when my in-laws came here and lived with us for a year and a half, we didn't find any difference. As a matter of fact, I favored that very much. I realized that I had a sense of security and I feel that my children also, especially my daughter who was seven years old when her grandparents had come at that time, so she was old enough. I feel that there wasn't any resentment of the grandparents being here. As a matter of fact, there was a lot of support. So we were very keen on their staying with us but they just couldn't take the weather. They were frail in health and they wanted to get back. I doubt if we would have had any difficulty. On my parents side, I don't think there would have been any interference. My parents lived with my one sister and she has a daughter, a very fine woman who is now married with a child, very successful, and there has been no interference. So I doubt that our families were of that type that the child raising at that time would have been in anyway impaired or would have been different. They were so supportive and there would have been no interference at all.

PS: Did your parents ever come and visit?

IA: No, my parents did not come. My mother's health was not very good so she could not travel. My father's health also began to decline and he was not much of a traveling type. He used to tell me, "Instead of his coming there, you come here. You meet so many people, what's the sense of my coming. We don't want to come and see anything. You come here because that's the greatest joy for us;" so they never

came.

PS: Did you find a way to practice your religions even though they were different? Was that important to do?

IA: When we married, we decided we would maintain our separate religions. And I already mentioned, when I talked to my in-laws, and they came around, this was one consideration that came out; how would we maintain in our marriage our religions. And I told them very point blank that Dolly will not be converted to my religion, even though it is permissible, I would not favor that because I don't believe in converting anyone from one religion to another. And neither would I convert, even if her religion permitted conversion, because I don't believe in that. I believe when a person is born in his religion, in his faith, maintain that faith, because I believe all faiths are the same, leading to the same goal in life. After life, the meaning of religion is more material. What is life after death. Death comes to everybody and therefore everybody goes to the same goal. And that's what I believe. And I don't believe there is a shortcut to that goal in a different religion. As a matter of fact, it's a long road if you switch from one religion to another. So I said I didn't believe in that and they agreed. Then the question was raised about children. And I said, "Children, of course, cannot be accepted in Dolly's religion, so I suppose they will have to be recognized in my religion." And they knew that. They said that's fine. That's your life. When Ramona was born we would teach her the prayers in both religions. Dolly's religion is not very ritualistic. It is more on the prayer side --regularity in prayers and beliefs. Hindu religion is somewhat ritualistic but we have not been that ritualistic and followed all those rituals. We have been raised to follow all the prayers. So I would say my prayers. When Ramona was young she would recite the prayers. And when children are young they memorize very fast so she memorized her prayers and my prayers. And we told her the meanings so she understood that. Dolly's parents came here and Ramona was old enough so they took a lot of time explaining a lot of folklore and stories and meanings of the religion. That helped to reinforce considerable faith. Reuben was an infant so he was not exposed to that. In about 1973, we have some friends here who are of the same faith as Dolly and who had two daughters who are about the same age as Ramona. They were going to have a confirmation ceremony performed here in their house by a priest of the

Zoroastrian faith whom they called from Chicago. He's a priest by his family tradition, an ordained priest.

DA: He's an ordained priest but by profession he is a psychologist.

IA: He agreed to perform that ceremony for our friends and we went to attend that. After the ceremony we had a social visit with him. The subject came up about our marriage and our separate religions. I told him, "I suppose you cannot do this for Ramona?" He said, "Why not? I can do it. I have done it for an American." And I said, "You have?" And he said, "Yes. I don't believe, as far as my religion is concerned, that you can't be converted. If you believe in this and you want to follow this thing there is faith." I said, "You mean to say you can perform the ceremony?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "What about the acceptance of that?" He said, "That's up to you. As far as my belief is concerned, I'll do it." I said, "I might take you up on it." He said, "Anytime I'll do it. It will be an honor for me to do it." He was a very nice gentleman. His name was Dr. Antia.

That year I went to India and I talked to my in-laws and they were very pleased. I asked them how they would feel if I had this done and they said to do it as soon as I could. They wanted this. I said, "The reason I want to do this is that I feel a child should have a spiritual identity. It is very essential. It's the crutch of life. Everybody is born crippled without religion. That's why the religions have come out, because they are the crutch of life. And that's what we walk with all through our lives. And that crutch is dropped when we are dead. Then we don't need it because then we meet our mission in life." So I said, "That's what I believe and I feel I cannot give her that effectively as Dolly can because a child is always closer to a mother. I have nothing against my own faith but if it is possible I don't mind them being ordained in that religion. They 'll have an identity, they'll have a support, they'll have a belief."

Dolly's parents really felt very good about it, and I felt good about it when they were in favor of it. So we came back and in 1974 her ceremony was performed right in this house. I called Dr. Antia, he came from Chicago for a couple of days and he did the ceremony in the presence of very select friends. Then when Reuben was about 11 years

old, I called Dr. Anita but he was busy. He had at that time another friend who was ordained and he came and performed Reuben's ceremony. Both of our children were ordained in the Zoroastrian religion. I am so pleased that both have grown up to be very devout and very practical. Reuben, in his philosophy class, wrote a very nice comparative study of certain facets of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. He wrote a very, very nice paper. He didn't give me a copy of it as children are very quiet about that. But I'm quite sure he's very proud of it.

PS: That would be an interesting document to add to this history if you can get him to give it to me.

IA: He hasn't even shown it to me. One of these days as they grow out of that age---he will be 23. In the next few years, I'm sure I'll get to read it. I think he did let me read it cursory.

PS: Well, tell him I want to submit it to the Historical Society.

IA: That would be great.

PS: Because I have another paper from one of the other interviewees about a study of the Hindu society in the Twin Cities that a student wrote. That is really a helpful document. So any kinds of things like that that I can collect are really helpful.

IA: I will try my best to convince him.

DA: I hope he has kept it with all the transition . . .

IA: I am sure he has. He's quite meticulous about it.

PS: There isn't any Zoroastrian community practicing that faith in the Twin Cities area?

IA: There is . . .

DA: Not in an organized manner. They haven't formed any association. Basically the religion is private. You can follow it in your own individual homes. Group worship is not as emphasized. But there are temples in big cities but there is no official place for group worship here.

IA: When I came here in 1960, the first Indian association had been formed at the University of Minnesota the year before. It was called the Indo-American Club. They celebrated the first Diwali function in 1960 if I'm not mistaken. It was in the fall, October or November. I remember I sang a song in the cultural program and met quite a few friends. That association continued till about 1961.

There were some elections and, there was quite a rift between the Indian student community which numbered about 200 at that time on the campus. The Indian community included a few faculty but the rest were all students. Those students almost 90-95 percent were graduate students.

There were hardly any undergraduate students. There was a rift between the Indian community for positions in that Indo-American club. There was division between south and north and it was a very touchy, sensitive situation. It divided the Indian students amongst themselves into factions. Consequently, one of the factions alleged that the election was rigged. Then, the University's Senate authority got involved in it, and held investigations. I don't know what the conclusions were but the press picked it up once or twice, and had some articles published and investigations, inquiries and so on, but I don't know what the final outcome was. The whole Indo-American Club was dissolved, and a new Indo-American Association was formed. That continues up to the present time.

PS: So nobody ever resolved what the rift was?

IA: I was out by that time. I don't know what ultimately was the finding. I had gone to one inquiry meeting that was held by certain faculty members, and the testimony was quite hilarious that was given.

PS: It was hilarious?

IA: The allegations each faction was making against each other. It was more for spectators, it was hilarious.

DA: The language being used, translating Indian phrases literally into the English language to describe the scenario.

IA: The incidence that were alleged and so on and so forth, but beyond that, one thing was there. One body was representing the Indian culture. The difference now is we have got virtually a miniature India here represented by

different groups. At that time it was so cohesive. You never looked at yourself as coming from Bombay or Bengal or coming from Punjab. You were an Indian, that's all. "Are you from India?" You would ask someone and he would say, "Yes." Later on you could probe and ask where they were from, but the thing was the feeling was he was from India. But right now the community has become so large and diversified so much.

PS: Do you see that as positive or negative that it has diversified in that way?

IA: I cannot say that I am negative to it and at the same time I wonder. I think it is a natural phenomenon.

PS: It is just a part of growing?

IA: It's a part of growth. In some respects the different cultures India is known for are already preserved; they are not being lost. This diversity of cultures is very good. There are so many things in India. India is a unique kind of a nation, a unique country, too. In spite of all its diversities, it has maintained its cohesive structure for so long. Most of the countries in those situations have disintegrated.

PS: And lots more countries are having civil war.

IA: Exactly, exactly.

PS: What kind of associations do you belong to at this point now?

IA: I'm not a member of any particular association. I have my feelings of support for the Indo-American Association for the University of Minnesota. India Club which was later on formed in the late 60s or early 70s, I think the nucleus was laid in the late 60s, and I think it is a part of the International Institute, I support that very much. I'm not a very active member of that organization. Then there is a Sikh Association, which is primarily a religious organization. They have established a temple which they call a Gurudwara which means Door of the Lord. I belong to that one and I go as often as I can because I perform the singing of the hymns.

PS: You yourself are not a Sikh?

IA: I'm not a Sikh. The Sikh religion is a little bit intricate. It started as a sort of a sect of Hinduism, but then it culminated after about two or three hundred years into a separate religion. I don't think at that time it was regarded as a religion but a separate, in terms of Christianity, another denomination of Hinduism. It started as such after about two or three hundred years of its inception. The Sikhs wear the turbans and all are ordained in a ceremony. The Sikhs decided it was a separate religion and the government gave them identity as such. My belief is that it's no different than another denomination of Hinduism. There are so many denominations in the Hindu faith. The Sikhs for political reasons, considered it a separate religion. As much as Buddhists also claim themselves as separate religion. So I think for political reasons they were given that status under the laws.

PS: It was the Sikh who assassinated Indira Gandhi and there was a lot of ill feelings that were created.

IA: Yes. And that was created very unfortunately by certain militant groups in India. It's such a mess it's a subject that can be treated very differently with in-depth study. It's very sad. Otherwise I think the communities, the religions are so supportive of each other. It started as a sect to protect the Hindu faith from the operation of the Muslims in history. If you go back, you find that is why it started. And further more it started to bring the lower caste people who were being mistreated by the higher caste people some identity and treat them on somewhat of an equal basis. That's how the denomination started, as a reformist movement, more or less. By and large, I think the basic beliefs of the religions are the same. Just like in Christianity. The denominations started as a reform movement. Certain bad practices some people felt were being practiced by certain people and so therefore they should reform those practices and then it became a denomination.

PS: Tell me about your singing.

IA: I come from a family where singing was a favorite activity. My parents were very interested in Indian music, as was my older brother, who passed away about seven or eight months ago. He was a very good musician. He got himself trained in that art. He was virtually a born artist. Imbided himself and had a very nice voice. I was

inspired by him as we grew up. My sisters were also good singers. I picked that up, just for my own pleasure, not for professional purposes or anything. And I trained myself. I took some basic training in college. I learned some classical music there and went on as an amateur musician. I did not know how to play any instrument, especially the harmonium, which is a common accompanying instrument for a singer. My brother could play. We had two or three harmoniums in the house, but I never practiced to become conversant with it. So I used to sing without the harmonium or my brother would accompany me or my sister, but I never played myself. When I came here I started to sing a lot, at functions, at friend's parties. Then I used to miss my harmonium. There was nobody to accompany me when I sang. Nobody here had one or knew how to play. Then in 1973 when I went to India, I told my mother I wanted to get a harmonium, and she bought me a very nice one.

My mother said, "You just go and practice." And I said, "Will I be able to do it?" She said, "Practice makes a man perfect." Sure enough, I came here and started playing. I knew some basics. I started practicing and it has been almost 20 years now and I am very conversant with it, very comfortable. I play anything I pick up with a little practice and some adaptation. I brought some books on Indian classical music and with the basic training I had, now since I've been retired for the last four years, I've studied those. It's one of my major activities in my retirement.

PS: So you sing for the Sikh community?

IA: I sing at the prayer meetings which are generally held twice a month on Sundays. I lead the congregation for the hymns.

PS: How big is that community?

IA: We have an average of 90-100 people and on festive occasions there can be 300-400 people.

PS: Do you sing for any others?

IA: Then I go to the Hindu temple also. I do the lead singing called kirtan; Music of the Lord. I do the kirtan at both the places. I used to do a lot of light classical music singing, contemporary movie songs.

PS: Are you the voice on all those movies?

IA: I never did playback singing. My brother was a much, much better singer than I am. He had done a lot of that in his earlier years before he entered his more professional life as a manager of the Burmah Shell Company.

PS: So he really was on the movies?

IA: Oh, yes. He had produced two or three of those movies, in the early forties and mid-forties. He was an inspirer of music in our family. Very good musician. The Hindu Mandir, I go there, but not regularly. I go if my friends sponsor a meeting. Generally for every gathering they have, there is always a sponsoring family. So they ask me to come. But I am not that regular over there because I can't be in two places at once. If they have some festive functions I go there.

PS: Do you get paid for performing?

IA: No.

PS: It's pure volunteering?

IA: Pure volunteering, for love and devotion. I had suggested at one place to have a free-will offering. There is something like that in India where professional singers would go around and sing and people would make an offering, and that's their living. Since this is customary, I suggested they do that here and then let that be given as a donation to the temple. But I don't know what they did. I didn't need that. When I sing it is an offering to the Lord.

PS: Who are the people in your social circle? Do they tend to be Indians, or are they a mixture?

IA: Most of them are generally Indians. You will find this among Indians. They congregate together very much. They are very hard to socialize in non-Indian circles. They'll do that, and this is my personal observation, subject to controversy. It is my observation that Indians try to socialize among themselves. I think it's pretty natural in small communities and quite natural as a human being. But they will socialize also if they are left in non-Indian

circles. I have known quite a few of my friends who have lived in smaller communities where they are the only Indian and they socialize equal well. They have very good American friends and maintain close ties. But by and large when the Indians get together they will converge into that circle.

PS: And do they group by language groups or geography?

IA: Hindi speaking people generally socialize among themselves. When I say "Hindi-speaking people", I mean people from Rajasthan, Punjab, United Province and others, since they all speak Hindi in addition to their respective vernacular languages. These people you will find converge together. There are no provincial ties or barriers among them. If you are from Rajasthan and I am from UP, we will mix very well, regardless of vernacular language. Put, Punjabis will feel more comfortable with Punjabis because the Punjabi language is very widely spoken in all classes of society in Punjab as compared to other vernacular languages such as Rajasthani or Sindhi. This may change in the generations to come.

PS: What was your mother tongue?

IA: Mine was Sindhi.

PS: When you choose the social group you feel most comfortable with, which one is it?

IA: Because we lived in so many places, I picked up a lot of languages in India.

PS: How many languages do you speak?

IA: I speak Sindhi, Hindi, Gujarati, which is the language my wife speaks; I speak Marathi, which is the language of Bombay; I speak Punjabi very well because I grew up in Punjab, and English. I think people that grew up in post independent India, especially northern part of India, are very Hindized, even though their ties are with other states.

PS: And the official language of India right now is Hindi?

IA: I think so. Yes.

PS: But a lot of business is conducted in English, anyway?

IA: Yes. The structure of India is such, the federal language is Hindi, no doubt, but the state subdivision is based on linguistics. This was done right after the independence of India in 1947.

PS: Tell me about any other community groups you were a part of either as a leader or as a participant like professional associations, community organizations . . . like the YMCA:

IA: I was very active in my professional societies; Minnesota Bar Association, Health Law Section, because that was my specialty in my practice. Another specialty was worker's compensation, in which I was also very active. In the Insurance Industry, in the Blue Cross system consisting of 62 plans nation-wide. I was very active in the National Othes Party Liability Group. This group monitored policies and procedures where people had multiple health insurance policies. I was also the hearing officer to resolve Medicare disputes. That was a very enjoyable experience coming in contact with senior citizens. I was a hearing officer for 17 or 18 years. Toward the end of my profession as an attorney, before my retirement, I was almost ready to take an appointment as a judge in the Worker's Compensation System. But, then I became sick and did not pursue that. I was a community advisor to the Indo-American Association. I was also a member of Apple Valley Human Rights Commission.

PS: Is that why you retired, because of poor health?

IA: Yes.

PS: And how long did you work for Blue Cross Blue Shield?

IA: I worked there almost 24 years.

PS: Was it nice to retire or did it feel that you were put out to pasture?

IA: At that time, my initial reaction when I was told by my doctor that I wouldn't be able to go back to work . . . he would not feel comfortable to let me go . . . I felt ridiculous. I thought, "How can that be? I'm just about to change my profession. I'm going to become a judge now. I'm not going to go and sit at home!" But then after I had gone through so much, I said, "Fine", and in a couple of months I found this was the best thing that had happened to me. I realized that I had missed so much, but I had never

realized that I was missing it. I should have done this a few years ago. I have never had one moment of regret. In fact, after this happened with my health, I started picking up strength, and I was even told by my colleagues to come back and do some work for them on a part time basis. And I said, "Are you crazy? I would never do any work or consultation for compensation, then I would be subservient to them." I wanted to be the master of my own time.

It was not bad at all. The years have been enjoyable. When I retired in 1990, my son graduated from high school, he went to college and my daughter went to graduate school, so we were just the two of us. A new relationship started developing between us; our whole life just the two of us at home was like when we first met in Bombay and started dating. In that relationship, our goal was to get married with parental consent and blessings. In this new relationship, the goal was to get our children through their college education and get established in their respective professions. We were now socially and economically well secured. So, the tensions that go with any feelings of insecurity were not there. Of course, we have to always take care of our health.

PS: Do you feel like you've had a nice, easy life path?

IA: For four years since retirement. There were struggles prior to that --- health, struggle to raise our children, to save for our children's education, to be physically away but mentally with our parents because our parents were lonesome and we had constant worry about their health. My mother passed away in 1976 and my father passed away in 1985. So there was a nine year gap that the two were not together. At least they both were with my sisters and my brother so there were people around them, but her parents didn't have anybody. They were always struggling themselves. And they were very handicapped because her father was blind. He had lost his sight when he was about 60 years old. Her mother was everything for him; she was his sight. Very educated, very alert people, he died at the age of almost 90. It was just after his 90th birthday. A year before that I had gone to India and he walked with me almost a mile and a half at my speed which was about 20 minutes a mile, which is a very good speed. Very active and alert. He was so alert, no memory loss, never asked, "What do you call that, what do you call that?" He never had that moment. And I'm very observant of these things because I've always been around

people and I never observed these things in him. Many older people have such momentary memory lapses. He was always very alert.

My father died when he was one month short of his 90th birthday. He had a lot of these memory losses. He would often grope for words to complete sentences.

Dolly's father was alert right up to the last minute. He was blind but he could draft a whole trust agreement, even though he was not a lawyer. He used to write it and then he would read it to Dolly or me and say, "Would you correct that?" He made a lot of trusts for his son because we told him all his property is of no interest to us. So he better make preparations for him. He was so thoughtful that he made all the trust agreements which he wrote all by himself, and the banks we used to go to in India, the lawyers would ask if I had drafted these and I'd tell them, no, this is Mr. Kotwal's drafting. When we went to India we would always take care of his pending bank work. He would wait for us to arrive and then tell us what he needed to get done. When the bank people started to read through his drafts, they would sometimes point out some short-comings and we would ask them to read the entire agreement. The bank people would soon realize that he had already covered the short comings in the following paragraph. They would then say, "Oh! He is always ahead of us." He was very active and my mother-in-law was his biggest support. She was also very alert and organized.

PS: So that's how Dolly's going to age, right?

IA: I hope so.

PS: What are the most important values you feel you have passed on to your children or that you feel you have passed on to your children as you were raising them?

IA: When I raised myself in this country, I realized one thing, that the greatest thing that happened in this country (and I did not study the history of this country, and I am intending to do that now), but I realized when I traveled every nook and corner and saw the farm life in Minnesota for five years, and even when I was with Blue Cross traveling as a Medicare hearing officer conducting hearings all over the state, I realized how the farming community and my association with the seniors who were on

Medicare and Social Security gave me a lot of history that they had lived by through their parents and ancestors. And the values that they have and built this country from virtually nothing. I used to ask them if they saw the Indian wars, did you or your grandparents see Minnesota go from a territory to a state, how was it, what was it. People told me how the state capitol was formed by stealing the law which would have otherwise made St. Peter the capital. I wondered how that could have happened. There were no trains, no railroad, people used to travel by horseback, so I saw how people built the farms; from horse-drawn plows to tractors. So when I saw the dignity of labor and the value of labor, everything they had to rely on themselves. I saw what those values were and with that I realized we also had a cultural heritage that was so rich and ancient. Plus the practical aspect of this culture. The synthesis of that would be the greatest thing I could give my children. So I raised them with the marriage of those two cultures. So I never worried about whether they were practicing a certain thing that is practiced in India or they are respecting me, or bowing to me, whatever that means. I've never worried about those things. I've seen that they've become sensible people who differentiate between those two cultures, and not pull those two apart but bring them together. And they have been very successful.

PS: Did you teach them any Indian language?

IA: Yes, because my wife and I would talk Gujarati but we would mostly converse with them in English because they were most comfortable with that. But whenever we would talk Hindi they would understand but they would not respond. And we wouldn't insist; we would accept that. If we felt like talking to them in Hindi they understood that also so that was good enough. This is another example of mixing these cultures together.

PS: What organizations or groups have been a part of to help your children maintain their Indian heritage?

IA: I haven't formally insisted that they come to the temples with us or come to the Gurudwara. We used to go to the Indian movies when they were being shown at the University theaters. We would go pretty regularly when they were small and they would come with us. They would get the picture of Indian life, which is not very representative in the Indian movies. But then we would take them to India and

they could differentiate very well with reality and fiction.

PS: Can you articulate the particular values your children have gotten which are uniquely Indian and those that are western?

IA: Sensitivity.

PS: And that's an Indian value?

IA: Yes. They see that here. Both of them in that respect are not overly conservative or liberal, they are very practical.

PS: And that was your families' values?

IA: That's right.

PS: Any other value that you can think of that is particularly Indian?

IA: I haven't forced them to concentrate on Indian clothing, Indian foods; we have never done that. I've told them the value of Indian cooking, Indian spices, herbs, why we eat that, how good they are, what is the good parts of the eating habits here. There are some bad eating habits here, as well as, in India. In other words, I have brought about the consciousness in them. Because I have been conscious, very, very conscious and very alert to that, so I feel that knowing that they understand.

PS: Have you taught them the music?

IA: No, that's one thing I just could not force them into. I did not find any interest in them so I did not try to bring them into it.

PS: And yet that's something very dear to you?

IA: Yes, it is very dear to me, and they never interfered or criticized me. They were very proud of that; I could see the pride in them. But I let them be what they want to be and that's what is in this culture---let the child be what he is. In India, because my father did this thing, my grandfather did this thing, descendance --- that's the way it should be; but I never did that. I thought that that was wrong so I always encouraged them to pursue the activities

that have interested them. They have been quite successful in that respect.

PS: When it comes time for your children to marry, they are 23 and 29, I would assume that you are not going to arrange their marriage for them?

IA: I am not going to take that burden on myself.

PS: Do you have a feeling one way or the other whether they marry inside the Indian community or marry a white American?

IA: No, not at all.

PS: Is there anyone you'd be uncomfortable with them marrying? What if they chose to marry an African American?

IA: Not at all. Not at all. Not in the least, I would not worry about anything as long as they love each other and they understand each other. That's the purpose of life, that they understand and love each other. That strength should be there. I have no feeling about that at all. I think their mates should be equally loving.

PS: Are you eager to be a grandfather?

IA: Oh, yes, anytime. I love children. We both, as a matter of fact, love children. But we feel they should have them when they are prepared.

PS: Those are the questions I had about culture values, and you said there was one other area that you wanted to share with me.

IA: I wanted to tell you how my parents were married. My grandfather was a judge, as I said, and my maternal grandfather, my mother's father was a police officer. So they were very good friends. They had both seen each other's respective children. My maternal grandfather had four daughters and two sons. My paternal grandfather had no daughters, he had only two sons. So he had told my maternal grandfather that I am going to take one of your daughters, and this is the one (that is my mother), I am going to take her.

PS: How old was she at the time?

IA: She was a grown child. So from her childhood time, he had told him and when she got to be about 17 or 18 and my father was about 21, the marriage was arranged. The mothers agreed, they were friends too, and so the marriage was arranged. It was formally announced. My mother had never met my father or talked to him. She had seen him; he was a very tall, handsome person, and she was petite, pretty woman. My father used to always tease my mother that my grandmother had another friend and when they both were pregnant they would tell each other that if each had a child of the opposite sex they would get married. They both agreed. But things happened this way: my father was born one day later than that lady's daughter so that woman was one day older than my father, and in no way was a marriage arranged if the woman was older than a man. Even if it was just one day. So that marriage, right from birth was ruled out. So whenever they would argue, my father would say, "I wish I was born one day early." And then we would say, "No, no, no that won't be," and we used to laugh.

Then my mother used to always tell us she'd seen my father, after the marriage was announced, when he used to pass by her house. Her sister's would always wave and call her and say this is the guy you're going to marry. She would look out the window but he never raised his face to look because that was not supposed to be.

PS: How did their marriage turn out?

IA: Very good, very solid, no problems at all.

PS: Did your grandparents on both sides match the astrology charts and all that?

IA: Oh, yes. Astrology charts were all matched. That used to be very common. I don't know how that is now because since the last 35 years I haven't kept up on that.

PS: It's still happening with the people I know from India.

IA: I know my astrology chart was made, and it is in India somewhere with my sister. She also has one but we never looked into that. It's another ritual and I don't believe in rituals very much. We never went through that. The fact that the grandparents were so close, was a factor that brings in some more solid marriages. If the grandparents are not that close from the beginning or from earlier times,

the marriage is a little bit different.

PS: Did your families get to be close after you two got married?

IA: No. They didn't know each other.

DA: Just formally, they'd exchange pleasantries or sweets on special occasions. My parents were never very outgoing. In fact my parents didn't have totally arranged marriage. They grew up together, they lived in the same building, and they fell in love. My father used to tutor my mom in math.

PS: They broke the rules, too.

IA: Right.

PS: How is it that your parents came to be willing to let you --- you said that they were liberal and it didn't matter that much --- so how did they get to be liberal when their arranged marriage was so (traditional?).

IA: I remember my father telling his friends, when I was in my teen years and in college, "I have brought my children up as my friends, they are my best friends. And I have full confidence in them. I am their father, I have full confidence in them, but from now on they are my friends, my best friends." And he had that attitude. Because of that I had confidence and knew my father would always support me, never oppose me. If I am in difficulty, he will support me. If I make a wrong decision, he'll help me. It's not that he'll criticize me and question why I made a decision. That is not going to happen. He will always support me because it is my decision. If it is wrong he'd tell me how to correct it. That is the feeling I always had and with that feeling I knew my parents would support me in my marriage. And they said it was fine if I was happy and love her then they would give me their blessing.

PS: That's fairly unusual in your father's generation, right?

IA: In my father's generation it would have been. But I was in a different generation. If you are saying in terms of my father's generation to bring up the children like that, yes, it was, but because he lived away from that community, he lived away from Sind, he lived in Punjab, he lived in

Jodhpur, a cosmopolitan environment, so I think his values changed.

PS: So that was the factor that changed his values. Had he stayed in Sind, he would have probably been more traditional.

IA: He could have been but knowing my father, I think he was a rebel by nature, a person of his own will. He had his own value judgments and he supported those.

PS: And yet when his father arranged his marriage, he said, "I'll do what you want."

IA: Yes. And my grandfather was not a very stern person, he didn't rule by the cane or anything, he was very tolerant, very educated but supported that. If I had my grandfather now and he was the patriarch I feel he would have done the same thing. He would have said, "No, his value counts the most, he's an individual. It's a whole genetic factor environment."

PS: Now you're retired and you're singing a lot and studying and traveling.

IA: I don't travel that much because of my health. I am always concerned. If I travel, I seek proper advice and then go. I have congestive heart failure so I'm always worried about heights and traveling in the high altitudes.

PS: Do you think you'll get back to India again?

IA: I hope I will. I'd like to make one more trip. Hopefully, this year or next year.

PS: You said your brother passed away. Your sisters are still there?

IA: My sisters are there, yes, and their husbands and their families---nieces and nephews. That's about 35 years of the story of America and living over here and the marriage of two countries.

PS: It is a fascinating story.

IA: We feel that our children carry that on with traditions and successes we have faced. We hope they will have more in

their lives.

PS: Your daughter is graduated from law school and your son is finished with his bachelor's degree from the University. What was his topic area?

IA: He majored in economics and political science.

PS: Following in Dad's footsteps.

IA: My daughter is studying for the Minnesota bar exam and once she clears that she will start with the attorney general's office for the State of Minnesota as an assistant attorney general. My son has just started in New York with the firm of Morgan Stanley, which is investment banking.

PS: Is there anything else I haven't asked you about that you'd like to share for history?

IA: I would like to give you a copy of my family history and genealogical tree dating back to 1754 which my father gave me 20 years ago. I would like it to be made a part of my oral history. I feel one thing in life, that you had talked to me about, I noticed in our family, ancestrally we had our own house in Sind that was our own house and our own land, and I think that was disposed of and sold just before the war. My grandfather was all alone and it was too much property to maintain; a big house. He sold that and rented a small house and traveled. Half the year he would live with one son and half the year with another. He lived with us and my uncle. In between, after that house, we moved from that place, and my father was traveling, we never had our own house, we never bought a house. We always lived in a rented house or an apartment. In Bombay and to this day, it was always a rented apartment. When I bought my house, this is the only house I've owned, I realized how in this country people have valued land and homestead. I really felt how meaningful it is and the feeling that goes with it, from the practical standpoint to the psychological standpoint. I really felt that was a great value here. People are fortunate that they can do it in this country. And there are millions of people without a roof over their head in India.

PS: There are people here without a roof. Not as many.

IA: I have felt, comparatively, many of those who are there

because of choice. If they want to be they can have a roof. There are so many opportunities for those people even. But some are able to take it, some are not taking it by choice or by circumstances. Nevertheless, the opportunity is there. In India, they don't even have those opportunities because the land is so scarce. The circumstances are such that they just cannot. How fortunate that the opportunity is here and the feeling that goes with it. I have felt that. And I value it very much.

PS: How long have you owned this house?

IA: We bought it in 1970; twenty four years.

PS: And you'll be here.

IA: I hope so.

PS: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today. It has been a delightful interview.

DA: Thank you.