

Interview with Sudhansu Misra

Interview by Polly Sonifer

**Interviewed on June 7, 1993 and May 5, 1994
at Mr. Misra's Roseville home**

PS: Sudhansu, tell me what part of India did you come from?

SM: I came from a state called Orissa State, that is on the Eastern side of India. The nearest the big city close to my hometown is called Cuttack. The capital of Orissa is Bhubaneswar. I come from 30 miles east of Cuttack. I'm in the south. It is a small town where I grew up. I was born in a place called Dhenkanal which is another 20 miles from where I went to school. I was brought up at Athgarh, so that is where I am from.

PS: When did you first think about leaving India?

SM: Since a long time -- when I was in the high school. I used to be very interested in going to some foreign country when the Britishers used to rule India for a very long time.

I was very interested to find out how a small country like that could rule the whole world in those days when the sun never set. I was interested to find out the way how the Western people lived. So, coming to America was not a dream at that time. I grew up and went to college, then I saw more and more of my professors and teachers, they were coming from abroad and they looked oh so smart to me. So, I thought I should go and find out how I can be there.

PS: So, you wanted to be smart like them?

SM: Yes, I didn't think that I would be smart like them, but I was thinking that at least I would be getting my ambitions fulfilled. So, whatever it is, I just wanted to do that. So that was starting in the early 40's that I was interested to come.

PS: So, that's when you were a teenager?

SM: Yes, that's right. At that time, in early 1940's, is when I really started my high school. Before that was the wartime, World War II was coming to an end at that time.

PS: What did your family think of your plans? Did you talk to them about your hopes to come to another country?

SM: Not from the very early boyhood, but towards the end of my high school career I think of two reasons that influenced me more: One was my brother-in-law. He was a graduate from the University of Edinburgh in Edinburgh in Scotland. At that time, during the war, he went and came back in 1939, in the middle of the war. So, he was one of my idols.

And then, also the headmaster of my school, Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh. He was one of the eminent literaturists. He came from England and became the headmaster of our high school.

PS: So, he was English?

SM: No, he was Indian, actually from Orissa. A very prominent writer of Oriya literature. But, from these two people I always got the influence that I should be coming to England, actually. So, that was in the later part of the 40's. In 1950 or so, my desire was getting more intense to go.

PS: So, had you finished college by that time?

SM: No, 1945 was when I finished my high school. I went to the college, which is in this bigger city, Cuttack, and that was until 1950 I was there. That is when I finished my college. Actually, it was 1945 when Dr. Mansingh was the headmaster. We were very impressed with how he talked about his life in England, and how disciplined the students were, how polite they were, how efficient they are, how organized and these things. It must have made a good impact on me, because in India it was a lot different.

PS: When you finally left India, did you come directly to Minnesota?

SM: 1956 is when I left India. Then at that time, I did leave India from Bombay and came to New York and Cleveland, which was my final destination. That's where I was going to school in September 1956.

PS: Did you come by yourself?

SM: Yes.

PS: What did your family think about you leaving at that point?

SM: Well, my family all went through some kind of an adventure, I think. Including me. Because, my father, he did not have much formal education, but was a very smart man. He had a good career and he was a good businessman, and he had a lot of enterprising ideas. He was able to understand the importance of having school, and particularly higher education in some foreign country. And that also gives him some satisfaction too. He was very supportive as was my mother and brothers; they were all glad of the idea of me being the first person to come out of the house and go to a foreign country. For that matter from the whole state.

Those used to be the days when there were not too many people coming abroad. It was exciting to see one of us leave the house and go to a foreign country and be really important, I guess. That was the feeling as far as the positive side goes.

They were also really sad because I was leaving, particularly when I was married only six months before. So, it was quite a change in life.

PS: You didn't bring your wife with you?

SM: No, I came alone.

PS: Where did she stay in India?

SM: After I left, she went to stay with her parents. For six months, she was with my family, and then she decided to go to school again, so she went back to her family's home.

PS: You didn't have any children then, and nobody on the way?

SM: Well, I had my daughter on the way. My daughter was on the way, but I didn't know that. I didn't know that I would be staying here when she was born.

PS: So, you didn't even know that she was on the way when you left?

SM: I wasn't too sure.

PS: Had you known that, would you have stayed in India or

would you have brought your wife along with you?

SM: Well, that is something not very easy in India. First of all, when you are newly married, you find that the husband is not very experienced. Then your families are always trying to be with your wife, so that she gets a feeling for the house and the family. So that's the way Indian extended families work. And, I was married in the old fashioned way. My parents found a suitable bride for me, and we got married. And, it was too early for her to live with me alone, so it would have been a very different thing to do at that time. So, I think that was not really a practical thing to do right after getting married and bring your wife. If I had known my wife was pregnant and I could bring her, again, I would have been more influenced by what my parents said.

PS: And they were not in favor of you bringing your wife?

SM: No, no, so I did what they told me, like a good obedient son. My mother and father had their say. We just have to obey, so that's the way it goes.

PS: I wish children here would do that sometimes.

SM: Sometimes we didn't like it, but we had to do it.

PS: What kind of visa did you come on? A student visa? Was that hard to get?

SM: Yes. Well, I came mostly to stay here for a few years to finish my school. The schools I applied didn't require any application fees, or for that matter, no TOFEL and GRE test. In those days, it was easy to get admission. So, I had admission to MIT and Case Institute of Technology. MIT seemed to have a very high cost. So, I decided to come to Cleveland to Case. To get a visa wasn't too hard, but it was hard for me because I was coming from a small town in Orissa where there were no facilities for getting visa, or for that matter a passport. We had to go to Calcutta for getting all those, which is a one night's travel from Cuttack to Calcutta. That is an adventure in itself. So, I used to go to Calcutta with my cousin at the time. I must have made about two or three trips before I could get a hang of what was going on, but I was never alone. So, I did finally get my passport and visa.

PS: So, you had been accepted into the school in Cleveland before you got your passport?

SM: Yes, that's right. I had to have admission someplace, and based on that admission, I could apply for foreign exchange. First there was the passport, and then the visa after that. And a medical test also, I had to go through that. I don't know what the status is now, perhaps people don't go through a medical test. But it was kind of challenging.

PS: Can you describe your journey? What was it like? How did you travel? How long did it take? Any special memories?

SM: That was again an adventure because in the 50's when I had admission, the safest and most usual way to travel was by ship. They were ocean liners. P & O and other lines were all full. We tried and tried. We went to travel agents, through my cousin who was supposed to be knowledgeable about all those things. Or at least, he could make his way in Calcutta about these things. He made several attempts to find whatever accommodation he could find in these ocean liners. In that period, there was nothing available. So, the ultimate thing was to find something on an airplane. That was kind of scary, since I didn't think that it was safe to travel by airplane. So, finally, when the days came closer, we just decided to go to TWA airlines. And that's how I came.

PS: So that was 1956 when you came on the airplane. Was there anything that stands out in your memory about the trip?

SM: Oh, yes! Because the day we left, we took a big group picture of everybody in the family; in those days it was a black and white camera. My cousin took a photograph of a bunch of people standing together. I was in Western clothes and everybody was kind of sad-faced and not able to cope with the separation.

PS: Were you sad-faced also?

SM: Yes, it was a big separation that day. But, I had two or three escorts to come with me off to Bombay and that's a long distance. We had to come to Cuttack, where we can take the train. To come to Cuttack, I think, there was a problem

at that time, so we had to cross the river by boat. From Cuttack, we said good-bye to some of the relatives there. Then myself, my older brother, my sister, my brother-in-law, and another brother came together. We had a little route planned out, since this train goes through Allahabad, where another friend of mine lives. I can't remember the reason why we went to Allahabad, because we had to go to Calcutta to get to Allahabad, and then from there to Bombay. So, the trip was planned that way. On the way we met this friend who was a good old friend from Benares, from when I was going to college. Then, in Bombay, we arrived and stayed in a hotel. As a matter of fact, I don't remember staying in a hotel, because the same day we arrived in the morning, and I took off in the evening. The rest of my family stayed in the hotel in Bombay. That evening it was raining just like a thunder storm, and pouring rain in Bombay. The plane that was going to take us was one of those "super-constellations", a TWA plane with three fins at the back. They used to make those at Boeing aircraft. They are all propeller driven, since there were no jet planes in those days. So, I got inside the plane. I was kind of warm because of all these Western woolen clothes I was wearing, thinking that Western countries are all cold.

PS: All the time?

SM: All the time. I didn't have a topcoat in those days, but they were all custom-made woolen clothes. And I got inside and I was sweating, and I before I realized that the plane was going to take off, it was already in the air. So, I didn't have much chance to sit back and think about how far I had really come from home. And, on the way there were a lot of other things that happened -- how I felt about eating and how I carried my suitcase in Paris to get to the hotel, and the hotel food that I didn't quite like that much.

PS: So, you had to stop overnight in Paris?

SM: Yes, but, I heard that when the plane took off, my brother broke down sobbing because he thought the airplane had gone someplace and he couldn't find me anymore. So, that's how I left India. Then, I spent the night in Paris. Of course, on the way, we stopped in Cairo to refuel. The Paris experience was not that much, because the next day. I don't remember if I saw anything or not. From there we went to New York through Shannon, Newfoundland, and then to New

York. The trip from Shannon to Newfoundland was quite long--about 9 or 10 hours. Which normally takes about 8 hours these days from London to New York. From Newfoundland to New York was another 3 or 4 hours. The amazing thing is as soon as we reached New York, we got a certificate from TWA that we crossed the Atlantic with TWA. Those days were the pioneering days -- even in the 50's!!

I arrived in New York in the morning and went to see the Empire State Building. When I came back from there, I thought I would just rest a little bit and then go to some other exciting things. It was morning in New York. I laid down in my hotel room, and I don't know how long I slept, I just slept until it was dark. I thought it must be evening time, so I want to see a movie at Times Square. I don't remember what movie it was but it was going on all night. I thought it must be 7 o'clock in the evening. When I got out of that movie house, I saw the sun was coming up. I said, "What's going on? I thought it was evening? How come the sun is coming up?" But, it was 4 o'clock in the morning when I got up to see the movie. So, at that time, I realized that it was already morning, and I slept quite a bit that day. So, the flight had worn me out.

That same evening I went to Pennsylvania Railroad and got a ticket to go to Cleveland. I thought Cleveland would be a 3 - 4 hours ride travel from there. It actually takes almost a whole day. So after starting sometime in the morning from New York I was there by 9 o'clock.

PS: You were traveling all this time, totally by yourself? Was it scary?

SM: No, it was not scary. For some reason, I was feeling good. I thought that everybody was nice. When you talk to someone they give you some answers. In India, they don't do that. Sometimes, people seem to be rude until you know them, so here, I could find my way, because I was speaking English, and of course my accent was heavy and all that, but I could communicate. People used to take interest because they see some Asian coming from a foreign country and you know there are not too many. So, you talk to some of them. You are extra polite to talk to them, and they take some interest in talking back to you. So, in a way, I was not feeling helpless. I don't know how it would have been now, because now everyone has someone they know in this country who can receive them. But, then there weren't too many

Indians here, so I had to find my way out.

Then, after reaching Cleveland, I had a person sent from the university to see me at the station. That's when I found my first friend, Dinu Nadkarni, who is an Indian, of course.

PS: So, the man who met you was already here and he was an Indian?

SM: But, I didn't know him and he didn't know me. We just met at the railroad station and became very good friends after that. That's how I got to Cleveland.

PS: What studies were you taking in Cleveland?

SM: At Cleveland, I was doing my graduate work in electrical engineering, so that's the reason I came, to pursue my electrical engineering since I had finished my bachelor's in India when I was at Benares. I stayed there for a semester, they were on the semester basis. After that I went to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

PS: How come?

SM: The reason was, I found that the Case Institute was good in electronics which is something (at least at that time) that I didn't do much in India. I was more into electrical power. I found there is a chance to go to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. I could find the courses that I need to take, and the cost was less. Case Institute was a private institute while the other one was public. But there were a lot of things that happened at Case Institute that were exciting. I didn't want to really leave, but at the same time, I had to.

PS: Did you keep in touch with your family back in India during that time? How did you communicate?

SM: All the time, all the time! Only by letters, no phone calls. My father used to write me every second day. I wrote to him every second day. Not only to my father, to my uncles, my brothers, sisters, cousins, friends. I must be writing at least 3 - 4 letters a week.

PS: Did you write to your wife?

SM: Yes! I wrote letters to my wife. I forgot about that.

That is one of the letters I used to write almost every second day or so.

PS: So when did you find out that she was expecting?

SM: I came in the fall, and Niru, our daughter was born in May 1957, so somewhere along the line, I knew that she was pregnant.

PS: But you can't remember when?

SM: I think it was second or third month after I came. She had some symptoms of the pregnancy when I was there, but I didn't know if she was having morning sickness or just indigestion or something like that. I was too ignorant to know. But a month after I came I found out.

PS: What do you remember about your first few days at Case?

SM: The first few days a lot of things happened. After I saw my friend, Dinu Nadkarni, who was sent by Dr. Sealy, who was the chairman of the department. Dinu was doing his doctoral degree in engineering. He was looking for me when I got off the train. He immediately got hold of my hand and said, "Sudhansu Misra?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "I am Dinu and I'm here to receive you and take you to my home." I said, "Fine, I can't expect anything better than that." I had a hat also in those days and my fully Western clothes, and my big suitcase that weighed about 60 or 70 pounds. It was my brand new suitcase from India. In India, the bags and luggage are carried by porters. There is not a dignified way to get out of the train while you carry your bags. But, here, all along I had to carry my suitcase and that was a new experience for me. I heard about these things in India, that here people do their work themselves. You had to pay a lot of money here to have people do your work for you. So, I was already learning how to help myself.

I don't remember how we got to Dinu's place, perhaps in a taxi. He used to live on Overlook Road near the Case Institute. So, first thing we did was to eat some Indian food, which his wife was making. He was married, and Shashi, who was from Maharashtra. So, she made me feel at home right away. She made some real hot curry and rice. Dinu particularly likes hot food. I stayed there for seven days before moving into the dormitory. Dinu was a real good

inspiration for me, because he was a real good student and he taught me to be familiar with the system of education and classes, what I should do and shouldn't do. He told me the rules.

PS: So there weren't any other Indian men in the dormitory?

SM: My roommate happened to be an Indian. His name was Mr. Ramarao. I don't remember where he was from, perhaps from Andhra. But, it so happened that he was a middle aged man, and somehow he decided to come here by himself. He must have had assistantship from a scholarship from Case Institute. We both stayed in the same room. First I was staying with a Phillipino person, then I moved to his room. He was alone in those days, so we used to talk quite a bit about India and our families. That's who my roommate was. The food, of course, was different, but we got used to that.

PS: Were you a vegetarian in India?

SM: No, I was not, but I was not a beef eater. Now, Mr. Ramarao, he was a pure vegetarian. He won't even take up eggs. So he used to eat in the cafeteria. He used to find things like salad and various things that are vegetarian, including vegetarian soup. But one day, he found some kind of meat in that, so he found out that he had been eating that as a vegetarian. He was so disappointed and feeling so guilty that he never did take any vegetarian soup again. We had a good time in Cleveland.

We had an international student group, which was run by Mrs. Bang. She was very active in getting all the international students at the university together and, we used to have campouts and every Friday or Saturday, we used to get together at an assembly place. A lot of people who were non-students also used to come and participate. So, I was feeling pretty comfortable.

PS: Was it more comfortable to be with the other international students than to be with the American students?

SM: I couldn't remember. Of course, you tend to find who is matching to your temperament. In the beginning, as soon as you see someone Indian, you feel that you are more adapted to them. Of course, I don't know if there were any other international students that I knew too much. But, one of my

roommates was Phillipino, so that's the only one that I knew. I only went to a few gatherings in the beginning. And I never knew which country they were from. I just knew if they looked like Indian or non-Indians.

PS: So, there were only two classes in your mind?

SM: Either you are looking like whites or something like that. I always thought that they were from Western countries. Americans, I didn't know exactly what the difference was at that time. In the classroom, they were all Americans, most of them were. They talked with a different accent compared to the Britishers, and I couldn't understand some of their lectures in the classes I was going through. So, it took me some time to get used to it.

PS: Did you find it pretty easy to make friendships with other Americans?

SM: Yes, I really found that was one of my desires; to make friends with Americans. For some reason, they appeared to be friendly. Beginning, maybe I was extra polite in those days, and everyone wanted to be friends. But, as time went on, I found that I was getting more Americanized so I was not that formal. When you say "thanks a lot" two or three times, then a person definitely gets the attention. So, I found that I was enjoying those days; learning the cultures and customs.

PS: What were the biggest things that were different for you from Indian culture to the culture in Cleveland.

SM: The first thing I found was mostly positive. Perhaps for the first few months, I was really looking for things that were somewhat strange and something like being in a dream -- not in the real world. So, there were things we used to hear in India that I never experienced. When I came to the real world, I felt, let me explore how people are and how they respond to. Then I started paying extra attention to how I am treated. Everywhere I went, it might have been unusual for average American here to wait for something or to get something done more than once, but for me it was much faster than I was used to in India. As far as service goes.

The other thing I saw was the different kind of environment was the relationship between teachers and students. In the classroom, I could see that they were very informal. Maybe

so in the graduate school, because the teacher was called by the first name and he used to know all the students. We were only a few of them in the classroom. Some of them even didn't mind smoking in the class in those days. Those things made me very curious to find out what was the reason.

PS: These things were very different from India?

SM: They were very different relationship.

PS: Was that uncomfortable for you?

SM: I was somewhat uncomfortable, because I was used to standing up when the teacher came into the class. That was just the kind of respect you had to give. At the same time you had to talk politely. You don't talk back to the teacher. He asks the questions, you don't ask the questions. Well, you do ask the questions, but you are not brave enough unless you are a real good student. And the classes are so big. Those are differences in my first few days of going to school. But then I got into the method of teaching it is very different here because every week or two weeks, there is a test, quiz or something like this to be given. I was also having some difficulty understanding the class lectures, the subjects were different (at a higher level), so I had to really work hard. My friend Dinu was very helpful. He was very well established by then, and he was a good student. So, he used to help me a lot.

PS: You spent a lot of time with him tutoring you?

SM: Yes.

PS: How long did it take for you to feel comfortable with English language?

SM: I was feeling comfortable toward the end of first semester. When I went to Michigan, I think I was fairly fluent in English. I knew that I was speaking English. Most of the time, I didn't feel uncomfortable with it. It was just that the manner in which it is spoken is different. I didn't have much conversation experience in India, so when I came here, I started speaking all the time in English. There were no Indians to talk to. Even the Indians didn't know the language that I speak usually. So, I had to speak English all the time, so that pushed me. In Ann Arbor, there were a lot of Indians of course. I think

the Indian student population was about 200 or so in those days. So, I spoke most of the time in English with them also. The only person there who was from my state was Dr. Prasana Pati. He was a doctor from Michigan. With him only I could speak in Oriya, which was my mother tongue.

PS: How long did you stay in Ann Arbor?

SM: Oh, for almost a year. By May, 1958, I finished up my master's degree in electrical engineering. That was the time when, in between the semesters there I had another experience to be a camp counselor in Tennessee.

In 1957 summer, between semester break, I was looking for a part time job. I found one with the Tennessee Valley Authority. I made the connection because I was involved in engineering and the TVA was a big operation in those days. Professor Carrey made the connections and I got an hourly job for \$2.45. I went on the bus to Jacksonville, Tennessee.

That was a long trip for me, going on the Greyhound bus. Going south, I was very apprehensive as what it would be like because of my dark color. I knew that in those days, they had discrimination. So, I finally got to work in the deep south. As far as I knew, I was the only Indian in that whole town. A lot of times, I used to find that there were places for blacks and white there, and they used to call them "colored" and "white" I think. Some of the restaurants and everywhere you go there are two separate bathrooms and eating places. I never knew where I fit in. I used to go into the areas where white people sit and nobody seemed to mind. They used to look at me for a while, but I was never thrown out. So, later on, I got used to mostly white community. I stayed in a boarding house that was also white. So perhaps, I was taken as a white person. They used to be curious about India and all those things. For some reason, I was well accepted.

PS: Did you ever try going into the black area?

SM: No, I never did.

PS: Can you say why?

SM: For some reason, I was not too familiar with the black community. For some reason, I didn't understand the

language they say, and I don't know. They were all doing menial jobs. My association was with the students, or with the society which was a little above this menial work. So, I didn't have much in common to go to black communities. Also, perhaps, my association with the blacks was not there from the very beginning. It just was with white Americans.

Although there were some blacks in the class. I used to talk to them, and I used to mix with them. Maybe I didn't know them that well. And, I didn't want to associate just because they happened to be black. So, I didn't have that desire at that time.

PS: Yeah, that would be a dilemma to know which are you, white or colored?

SM: Of course, I didn't feel uncomfortable among black people or something. To make it a point to go and mix with black people, I didn't do that.

PS: What kind of work did you do for the TVA?

SM: TVA, I worked as a student aide, just do something. I didn't think I do much. Just go into the office and whatever they told me to do, I did. I used to go with one of the supervisors there to some of the sites so we used to go in the station wagon. I remember the trips were maybe 50 - 60 miles. We never stayed overnight. We used to go and come back. I had wonderful experience with the staff there. They were really friendly.

PS: Did you help with testing or do paperwork?

SM: Mostly paperwork. Some of the times, they asked me to take some measurements or ask me to help in some types of testing they were doing. So, that kind of thing and mostly office work. In those days, all the testing used to be manual- they didn't have computers. That was one of the things I did. I remember the big boss there was "Mr. Cookie" we used to call him. His assistant was Mr. Benson. And one of the supervisors even taught me one time how to shoot a handgun. I never had a feeling how to shoot a handgun. And this was a very friendly man.

PS: Why did he want to teach you how to shoot?

SM: Because we used to go out on some hiking once in a while. He was perhaps interested in shooting for games or

something like that. He wanted me to find out. I barely remember that I shot once, and it was a different feeling. How it was those days, I would say, it was a nice experience. But I was not feeling too comfortable because it was all very foreign looking and discriminating. I had to first of all make my move to be getting some good impression from the community before I could really mix with them. I was not as free as it was in school. Going from north and being in the south, I thought I had a good experience.

PS: Were you uncomfortable watching people discriminate against blacks?
Did it make you feel uncomfortable to know that the blacks couldn't mix with the white in the south?

SM: No. They were always distant. I never analyzed that. I never thought that was something I should be worried about. I was going back to India in a couple of years. It is just a bad thing all over to have these two places separate so much. I used to read about all these things. The first time, I never saw what kind of ill treatment they were getting, so I wasn't aware of it. But I was always conscious that I was not white. It was really hard for me to do the same things that whites are doing.

PS: But that didn't turn out to be the case?

SM: That perhaps was there, but I was making my way into it. They perhaps found that I was not unacceptable. I made myself first of all acceptable and accepted.

PS: Yet, you had to work real hard at it? Like you were constantly working?

SM: Yeah.

PS: You stayed there for one month?

SM: A couple of months. I have some good friends, and I really enjoyed that stay too. That was all right.

PS: And then back to Ann Arbor. And by that time you had a daughter in India.

SM: Yes, I guess about that time, I had a daughter.

PS: And you didn't see her at all until?

SM: No, I just had a picture.

PS: How did you decide what to name her, or did your wife do that?

SM: That was all done in India.

PS: So, you had nothing to do with that?

SM: I think her grandfather gave her the name, Niru.

PS: Was that tradition that a grandfather would give her a name?

SM: Yes, normally. In those days that was normal. I don't know how it is now. Perhaps the parents as choosing their names.

PS: How and when did you decide to stay permanently in the United States?

SM: Only here in Minneapolis.

PS: So, in the spring of '58 you finished in Ann Arbor you had your master's degree.

SM: Then I went to New York. They used to give the 18 month training. They have since disallowed that. After school you could take some training that was part of the education. They allowed that. So, I went to New York with my friend, Dave Billharz. He was my roommate and also a good friend of mine. He had a house in north Terrytown, New York. So, I went to his family and stayed with them for about a month or so while I looked for a job. His parents were well-to-do people and I was very well accepted by them. So, it didn't happen too easily. I found a job in New York City. I used to work for a company called Electronic Transformer Company. That's where I spent almost a year. Then toward the end, I found this other place in Hoboken, New Jersey called Electrical Testing Company. They used to test out some of the appliances and products made by manufacturers. I found that job there. In the process, I was working on getting my wife over here. I had some savings by that time. So, I wrote to my father, and everybody that there was a chance for her to come over here since I would

be here for another six months or so because that's the time when I can show her some of the places here and can both get a taste of America. Then we can come back. It was not well taken. But finally, she ended up coming here too with the baby who was two years old at the time.

PS: And you had never seen her?

SM: No. We had her second birthday here in Minneapolis. We were then going to go back to India, which was the goal, but it didn't end up that way. I started working, and then my wife saw the ad about a job opening available in Honeywell and I wanted to see how the interviews went in this country.

So, the person was Al Smith. He was interviewing in some hotel, I guess. We both were walking down the sidewalk one day, and I had that ad in my hand. I said, "Well, let me stop over." And here he was interviewing me and asking me, "How would you like to come to Minneapolis?" And I said, "Where is that?" He said, "In Minnesota. Would you like to come there for a job interview?" I was about to leave for India, and my training was over. but I think that I could go for an interview. It was kind of exciting, so why not? I agreed to come to Minneapolis for an interview. I think my wife and daughter stayed with some friend of mine there. And I came alone. Mr. Smith was the hiring authority, so he said he'll pay me \$600 a month, and your passes, and offered to transport my belongings to Minnesota. And you come and work for us, and we'll apply for your immigration visa. I said, "My goodness. that's getting to be very heavy. Here we are in the process of leaving for India in another two months," but I said, "Well it doesn't hurt to go out and find a job and get some work experience." We again, took the train to come to Minnesota.

I think there was a time I came to Minneapolis, because I remember flying in one of those Northwest Strataemisers. That had a belly where you come down to sit down and relax.

So, one of those, I can't remember, it was a Boeing plane.

They used to serve good food and champagne and everything boy--that was royal treatment. So, I did come for an interview. Then, I went back and brought the family with me. But, in New York, we stayed for about three or four months together. My daughter she was small and we took her to Riverside Park and there were beautiful apple blossoms. We used to stand and look at the New York traffic and it was fun.

PS: How did you wife like being in New York?

SM: Oh, she was very comfortable, because I was there already. We used to stay in a one room apartment on 82nd Street on the West side. So we used to go and see all the exciting things in New York. We went to Radio City Music Hall and the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. Not only for ourselves. But if anybody passed through New York if we see some Indian, we thought we should be friends with him. Some of those people, they also came to our apartment and we used to give them a tour of New York. Without being experts of New York. But, I'd already been there for a year, so I knew somewhat. I have some good friends there. So, she was getting used to it.

PS: Was there a large Indian community there?

SM: Oh, if you go, you'll find Indians, yes. Not a whole lot like now, but I could find friends.

PS: Did you mostly have Indian friends in New York?

SM: In New York, after my wife came, my friends were from India, most of them, but just for a short time. But, before that, I had friends, which was Dave's family in North Terrytown. I used to visit them quite often. Then I stayed in Jersey across the river in a family. The landlady was from Austria. She was already here for a long time, so they were my friends. Then, when my wife came, I think we found mostly Indian friends, but then I didn't stay in New York too long. We came to Minneapolis, and in those days a lot of my friends are Honeywell friends.

PS: How was it working for Honeywell?

SM: It was exciting because at the beginning of the first year, I found that American life as a working person was a lot different from a student's career. I had a paycheck every 15 days or so, and they paid a lot of money. We didn't have many belongings in those days. When they moved me, all I had was a TV and a trunk. We brought those and moved to this city.

PS: No furniture?

SM: No furniture! Then I came here and rented an apartment. We bought some used furniture. The apartment

was \$115. I said to Al, "I'm not finding any cheap apartments, I'll end up taking this expensive one for \$115." It was right here on Ulysses Street. But that was high style living in those days. We had our own two bedroom apartment and furniture. Honeywell was considered a good employer, so I just found that a lot of things I was doing, I was already doing with a lot of positive feelings. So, I liked it.

PS: So, Honeywell got you immigrant and work visas?

SM: Right, after I joined Honeywell, they applied for my immigrant visa. In those days, they took only 100 applicants from India in all of United States. That was until 1964 when Kennedy became president. So, they didn't have any other provisions, so you had to be in that 100. So, I was in the preferred because I was working for the military projects at UNIX and the Honeywell Company. And then, they went and investigated my very roots, right from the school days and my high school days.

PS: All the way in India?

SM: Yes, everything was investigated because I was not only considered for immigrant, I was also going for a security clearance. Immigrant visa wasn't too hard, but the security clearance that was pretty involved.

PS: Did they talk to your teachers and family in India?

SM: Yes, yes. Family, teachers, friends, whoever I gave as a reference.

PS: What did your family think about you working for Honeywell?

SM: Nothing. They were glad. I was writing very nice things about Honeywell and America. My father had a big file of my letters. Oh, yes--he used to show it to everybody.

PS: So, he was proud by then?

SM: Yes, and every time I went to India it would be published in the local newspaper that I was visiting from America. So, he was getting good feedback. But I always let him know that another year or so, I'm going to stay here.

Hang in there. I'll be here!

PS: So, he kept thinking that you'd be coming back?

SM: Yes, and I sent him some of my earnings so he was very pleased with that. Not regularly, but the first one or two times I got my paycheck, I sent him some money. So that was very well taken. So, he was pleased, although he didn't want me to stay any longer. Every letter, he'd say, "When are you coming back?"

PS: When did you make a decision that you were staying permanently?

SM: Ten years, I think I was still as a foreigner here. I never felt for 10 years that I'm an American or in anyway connected to America, except for the good life: having a car, an apartment. Finally I even bought a house here after another Indian, Dr. Dixit bought a house. I was the second person to buy a house as far as I knew. So, we bought a small house and we stayed here in that house, but still we were not sure that we were going to stay here.

Finally, it came to the point when we were going to India first time before we bought the house. I left my luggage and bags and everything with Dr. Dixit with the instruction that when I am there (in India) and settled, you send things along; luggage and household belongings. So, he had the household which he kept in his basement. And we spent two months there (in India) and after that we came back.

PS: So you hadn't quit your job at Honeywell?

SM: It was a thought that perhaps I would find a job there in India - a good job, and then I would ask for Honeywell transfer.

PS: What year was that?

SM: That was in '62 or '63 perhaps. The first time after seven years I went back. And that was an exciting trip to India to meet all my friends after seven years, my parents and relatives. And we all went in those days the first time with jet planes. Then, I didn't realize that I'm going to stay here for another two or three years or so. So, I said back to my family, "I'll be back in another two years." My mother used to accuse me all the time, "Well, what about

those two years you promised you were coming back. Every time, it becomes two years more." So, later on, 10 years after when I went to Florida (I stayed there for six years).

By that time it was about 15 or 16 years. I still didn't think that I'm going to stay here. But, there my wife completed her master's in sociology at the University of South Florida. Then she found a job there, and I had a job there and so we were getting more and more entangled into this. My daughter was completing her high school here. She went to Gainesville to college. So by that time, we are already getting ourselves too much committed to this country. And I saw that I was not going to go back anymore.

My father was getting old and he knew that I was perhaps not coming back and accepting that.

PS: Did he stop asking after a while?

SM: He never asked me too much, but my mother was. She is even now when I go back she says, "You never came back." My father is gone and she is almost bedridden. So, by 1975 when I came back here (Minneapolis) again from Florida with the same company, Honeywell, I knew that I was not going back.

PS: So, almost 20 years of living here before you decided this is where I'm going to be. What was the hardest part about making that decision? Were there any regrets -- things that you wanted to have done in India?

SM: You mean, whether I should have gone back to India? No, I never thought that it was going to be the same life if I returned to India. Because if I didn't do it within the first five years, a lot of things have changed to the extent that I won't fit into the society back there. Besides, my daughter, she was married here already. No, she was not married by that time, 1975 through 1984 she was in school here. Not all this time. She was in Florida then she transferred over here, so I don't know exactly '82 or something that she got her masters in microbiology. Then, I think she knew Brian in Florida and they were getting more and more involved, and Brian transferred to the University of Florida. So by '84 they decided to get married. So, I decided at that time that going back to India would be difficult, since my daughter and her children would be here.

Of course, for a while it would look exciting to be with brothers, sisters, and parents, and by 1984, my father lost his ability to communicate. He perhaps had Alzheimer's

Disease. For two years he was suffering with that. He died in 1984. So, I just went many times to see him, but at the same time, I didn't think that coming back (to India) would be solving anything. Because at that time, I was just more of a load to the family.

PS: More of a load?

SM: Yes, because I would be going back to the property and the family sharing with others. For a while, it would be very well accepted because I am back and all that, but until I find my own way, I won't be able to just live on the family earnings. And for doing that, I would have to be out of town. And I was already 47 or 50 years old by then. I wasn't going to make it fast by then.

PS: So, in some ways it was easier to stay here, be more independent? Were you still sending some money to your family in India?

SM: Yes.

PS: Were you still writing them letters a lot?

SM: Yes, we visit almost every year. Every year! My mother is still alive, but unfortunately she is incapable to walk around any more. She is in a wheelchair all the time. I took the wheelchair from here. So, she's getting old. We'll talk over the phone. After the phone communication, we feel like we are almost there. Every two weeks we are talking so the phone bill is going up. Other than that I think travel to India and all these things are expensive.

PS: Let's talk a little bit about how you formed your family unit. You said that your parents arranged a marriage for you in India.

SM: Yes! You mean, how we got married?

PS: Yes, how was it that they decided who you should marry? How did they arrange it? Did they know your wife's family? Did they match your astrology charts?

SM: This was usually done in many traditions all over Asia and for that matter in some European countries. They used to have a middle-man come and give some information about the families. And, they usually are always aware of the

people who make the connections. It could be a family contact. It could be some relatives coming and telling about different available girls and boys. So, I was already marriageable age and there were a lot of proposals coming for me at that time.

PS: How old were you then?

SM: I was 26.

PS: Was that even a little bit old for marriage, or not?

SM: I could be a little bit, 24, 25 but not a lot. At that time, this was the marriageable age. At that time, I had finished my college, so that was the right area. Because I was going into taking a job and things like that. So, because I was really ready for marriage, so when the proposal came, a few of them perhaps didn't work out because they didn't match the horoscope. So, horoscope is one of the things that is given importance.

PS: You didn't meet any women until the horoscopes had been matched?

SM: That is a part that I had to go along with in that system.

PS: So, your family took care of matching the horoscopes, or did the middleman do that?

SM: Well, that usually takes place with the family. They have to show it to some expert, and they compare the horoscopes and see if it works out.

PS: Did you meet your wife at all before?

SM: No.

PS: When was the first time?

SM: I saw the pictures, I knew the history. I knew the background. I think I saw her after getting married.

PS: Not even during the ceremony?

SM: No. That was a real old tradition that you hear about and see the pictures and things. I think I wasn't forceful

enough. A lot of people used to go and see their would-be wives. But I was shy. I didn't do that. But it turned out all right.

PS: Do how long have you been married now?

SM: Well, we got married in 1955, so that's nearly 40 years. Yes.

PS: Can you describe your wedding?

SM: Our wedding was an average Indian wedding. Of course, each wedding is different from one part to another part of India. So, ours was an Oriya-Brahmin wedding. Where the bridegrooms side goes to the bride's home to get married. The distance from our home to our wife's home was 150 miles. Maybe only 100 miles. We had to travel by car.

PS: How much of your family went?

SM: My father and some relatives and some of my friends. So we were about 60 people. So, we rented a bus and a few cars. It was a big group. And all my brothers. In those days, women never accompanied the group--only the men. So, we arrived there and the next day wedding took place in the morning. My father-in-law performed the wedding at his home.

PS: Was he a priest?

SM: No, he is the bride's father. The priest was someone who conducts the wedding. There were two priests; one from our side and one from his side. But the rituals were done by the parents, and whatever the priest says, they do it. The special moment has to be found and the knot has to be tied and then you get married. Then the bride comes with the husband to the bridegroom's home which was done the next morning.

PS: Did the wedding last all day?

SM: Almost, yes. Well, the wedding is about four hours or so. Then the rituals like the wedding ceremony has got feast and other things. The guests have to be fed and they have to give their blessings. So, lots of ceremony, yes. You don't eat for at least half a day when you are getting married until the ceremony is over. The rituals take about

four hours. Then we came back to our home, and then the in-laws and everybody receives the bride and bridegroom and until the fourth day. In our custom, you don't see the bride until the fourth day.

PS: You didn't even see her during the ceremonies?

SM: No, they put a veil -- I saw her just a little bit. I think I saw her on the way to our home, but not during the ceremony. But, you don't go to the nuptial ceremony until the fourth day. After that you are in the same room.

PS: Were there any surprises?

SM: No, because it was just a very new introduction. It was surprising that you are staying with a girl. That was a big surprise. You are scared to start with.

PS: You had a separate room in your parent's house?

SM: Yes.

PS: Were any of your brother's married at that time?

SM: Yes, my older brother was married.

PS: And he and his wife were also living in the house at that time?

SM: Yes, we are six brothers and two of us were married at that time. And two of my sisters were married before that, but they were not living in the same house.

PS: Because they go to the home of their husband?

SM: Yes, their in-laws. But my father built the big house to have a room separate for each of the brothers. There were six bedrooms there. They are all empty now. Although the nephews are filling them up now.

PS: Was your wife also from a Brahmin family? That would be very important?

SM: Yes. The same caste.

PS: And Niru is your only child?

SM: Yes. The only child.

PS: Now, the first two years of Niru's life she was in India with your wife's family and then she came here?

SM: Yes, the first 18 months.

PS: Can you identify any differences in child-rearing practices between India and the United States.

SM: Yeah, there were a lot of differences. In the beginning, when the child is born in India, the in-laws are there to take care of the children. They take a lot of work in bringing up the child. The parents help and there is help from the relatives and also maid-servants. They take a lot of responsibility for giving baths and putting oil and all that things that are required for the babies. so, those things we couldn't provide here. When she came, I missed the first part of the babyhood. For the other part, I think we both were doing a lot of the work. By that time, she was toilet trained, in the sense that in India in those days, they didn't have any diapers so you just have to toilet them from the babyhood. If they get any wet, it has to be cleaned up right away. So, that way, I don't think that problem was there. I think we brought Niru in the same way as any modern child would be brought up.

PS: You mean a modern child in India or in USA?

SM: In USA. Although a lot of the facilities available now were not there in the late 50's. I don't think we had a stroller for her. We were not making too much money, in New York City, so we had to limit ourselves. Particularly in New York City with the transportation was very convenient, so I didn't have a car. A lot of places we used to go, we would just carry her and go. Food wise, we used to eat Indian food and she was also getting used to some American food, although we didn't have too much American food to start with.

PS: Did you eat more and more American food as time went on?

SM: Yes. Bringing up a child was a challenge because we were not experienced and we didn't have anybody to ask questions. Now, as far as raising a child, it was different for Niru, than for a lot of children who were coming at that

time from India because she didn't have any Indian friends in the beginning. She didn't know that many children who were from India. And, she used to go to a nursery school after she was 2 years old, and I just thought it would be better for her to pick up the language and to play with some children. In those days, they couldn't say her name properly, so they gave her the name, Nancy. So, she is known among her friends as Nancy, right up to this day. And she had a lot of trouble adjusting to what name she would be addressed as. And, anything Indian name, she used to feel awkward to say to her friends because she was afraid that somebody would laugh at her. So, she never got her name properly said. Like, Niru, we have a nickname for her; we call her Mamnu at home. Her real name is Niru and at school they call her Nancy. But we call her Mamnu. She still has that difficulty about what is her real name. Sometimes she goes to her Indian friends and she is Niru.

PS: When she was in grade school, that was here in Minneapolis, were there any other Indian children in her grade school?

SM: No.

PS: So, she was the only one and they were calling her Nancy then.

SM: Yes, she grew up among all the Western cultures, pretty much. When she was growing up there were no SILC schools or language schools. We spoke our language at home, so that much she knew. And she was very good at talking to us in our language. Then we used to go to India and she always spoke in Oriya language. She became very good at speaking the Indian languages.

PS: So, you made a conscious decision that she wanted her to be able to speak an Indian language?

SM: Because we were going back to India in two years

PS: You taught her your mother tongue, not Hindi?

SM: Yes, our mother tongue is Oriya.

PS: So, she never did learn to speak Hindi?

SM: No.

PS: Do you think that you ended up being a different kind of father because of raising a child here than you would have if you have been in India?

SM: Definitely, I think we have to bring her up in the Western ways in some ways and also to keep the Eastern culture and background in the family. But we didn't do that too well, because there are not that many Indians in those days. So, all we could show her was the amount of experience that we had being Indians. But, a lot of things about the culture, like the language, the religion, these are things she didn't learn. She is interested very much. Her daughter is getting some training now because of the resources now. But when we were here, there were not that many organizations to belong to. When she was small, we used to take her to the Unitarian Church and that's where she was going to the Sunday School.

PS: Did you also go to the Unitarian Church?

SM: Yes, we went there. When we came to Minneapolis, we knew a friend there who was very active in the Unitarian, and that's where we went for about five or six years.

PS: And you chose that because it was pretty accepting of other religions?

SM: Yes, we thought that was a non-denominational type of religion. Those people who were our friends convinced us that this was the thing to accept. They didn't call it a religion. They called it a society. They seemed to like us and we had a good feeling of being accepted there. There were a lot of things that they did socially and camps and things like that. So, we did that. But then we got involved into Indian religions.

PS: As more and more Indians came?

SM: Right.

PS: Did living in the US affect the division of labor in your family?

SM: Yes, definitely.

PS: Your wife worked and got a master's degree? Would that

have happened if you had stayed in India or gone back to India?

SM: Perhaps it would have, yes. But I doubt if the environment in those days if she would have had that opportunity. Right now, people are getting into that more and more. But if she would have shown an interest, I think I would have been very supportive of it. So, that is one thing that may be helped by coming here. It helped her as much as possible to finish her school. Family life otherwise was very different because I had to help her in anyway I could do.

The process of making a decision, I feel it was still on me. She was not used to that kind of life to start with. But as time goes on, she is getting into more and more professional life, making decisions. She still looks forward to me to make a decision. But we are sometimes making a joint decision, so we are doing it that way.

PS: Are these decisions about things related to the family?

SM: Yeah. Such as household maintenance or management or the business that we have. Whatever is happening. I like to talk to her all the time, but she may not be saying the final word, but she is always has her opinion.

PS: If you had lived in India, would she have felt free to have an opinion as much?

SM: In a way, they do. Although a lot of times they are not allowed to, in our country. Perhaps I would have done that. It all depends on individuals, I think. Culturally, the husbands take more decisions and more domination in India because the wives are being exposed to children and the family more than the professional world. But as more and more people are getting into college, schools, and various professional lives. They are making a lot more decisions. So, what it would have been then and what it would be now, India has changed a lot. Even we don't find ourselves to be fitting there.

PS: So, if you went back now to India, you might not fit in very well.

SM: No, we are looking at the old customs and traditions and what it was 40 years back. India has become too

crowded, too many people, things have changed.

PS: Are all of your brothers still living there?

SM: Yes.

PS: So you are the only one from your family who has come here?

SM: Right.

PS: Does that ever feel kind of lonesome now? Do you wish you had more family around?

SM: Not really. They would have been welcome to come. Actually a brother of mine is a doctor and I wanted at one time to bring him over here, but he didn't have so much interest as he is my youngest brother. But, it would have been a different life altogether. One of my brothers was in Germany. He is another one who came out of India, but he's back now. My family is kind of a close-knit family. They like to be among each other. I'm at a stage now where I enjoy that for maybe a couple of months. And then I don't think that I miss them too much. Because the phone is there. We stay in close contact.

PS: Have they ever been to visit you here?

SM: This brother who was in Germany, he visited us. And then that's all. Nobody else.

PS: Have they ever wanted to come?

SM: Yes.

PS: But they just couldn't?

SM: They can't. Even Marga, my oldest brother, said that someday he'll come and visit.

PS: About as soon as you move back to India, right?
(laughter)

SM: Now at that time when my parents can't come. I don't think they will come. It would be too hard.

PS: Even just to come for a visit?

SM: Well the question is one of affordability. They can't raise that kind of money to come to America for a visit. And, my older brother is pretty much retired. I'm the next to him. Two of my other brothers are getting to the retirement age. Actually one of them is retired and is staying in his house. So under those conditions, it is not possible to afford all the money it would take to travel and stay here. So, I doubt it. Although I'm sure they would all like to come.

PS: We have several sections remaining about Indian Organizations. Were you part of forming any of the Indian associations that grew up here in Minneapolis?

SM: I didn't form any, but I was very actively involved in the India Club. I was one time the president of India Club. I got to be a member of the council of the Asian Pacific Council. But now I am involved with the SILC school. But, before that in Tampa, Florida where I was for six years, I formed an Indian Association there because the association wasn't there. The India Association was formed during the time I was there.

PS: Tell me a little bit more about being in Tampa. I don't think we covered that in your work history.

SM: That was in 1969 when I moved to Clearwater, Florida. Tampa, Clearwater and St. Petersburg these three are next to each other. So, we lived in Clearwater and this was a transfer from Honeywell and we went to live there.

PS: So you were still a Honeywell employee?

SM: Yes. And, after moving there, again that was a very non-Indian society there. Very new and even the time I moved in 1969, Florida was not too thickly populated; even Clearwater had a lot of open space. So, when we moved there, we had just sold a house here, and we wanted to build a house there. So we went to look for a builder, which was our first new house for \$27,000. That was a big step in the process of getting to be affluent here. So we got a new house, and the job was still with Honeywell. I was feeling pretty secure, until later on the job situation was not that secure. Florida was always having difficulty maintaining the business of whatever contract they took. It was always coming apart. So, I was having difficulty keeping the job

open all the time. But as far as the life goes in Florida, it was interesting. Both my wife and I liked the weather. Niru was finishing her high school. Then we used to go to Gainesville quite a bit because there were a lot of Indian students there. So, we used to go there. In the process, my daughter decided to go to the University of Florida.

PS: Niru?

SM: Yes. My wife Indu, was at the University of South Florida, that was in Tampa. This was a distance of about 18 miles one way. And she was just learning to drive even in Minneapolis. When we were here, she had a very short distance to drive to go to the University. And there, she had to drive 22 miles over Tampa Bay. That was a big challenge to go to school and drive back in the middle of the night sometimes about 10 or 11 o'clock at night. So, somehow that life was open and she got a job with the state of Florida. She was an adoption social worker for an adoption department. So, that's how the carrier went, and again in Florida we were getting a little bored, I think. We were bored because it was almost the same weather, and I thought that culturally Florida wasn't that much developed at that time. Also, a lot of construction going on all the time. A lot of tourists. And it seemed like we were there as regular residents, and the others were enjoying there. So, a lot of people from out of state. So, that part wasn't too exciting towards the end, but we never thought that we would be moving back to Minneapolis again.

So that's the part that came as a shock. That's the only job I had was to come back here to Honeywell. Otherwise, my wife didn't want to move. We had that house and everything, so it was a tough time to leave Florida. We couldn't sell the house in time. We just had to settle for a small amount of money. Not the whole market price, so we had to settle for whatever we could get. We got a small house here. That part of Florida was not too exciting. Otherwise it was a new excitement to go into a place where the sun is shining every day.

PS: Very different from Minnesota.

SM: As far as Florida goes, shall we continue on later?

(May 5, 1994 Continued interview: Session Two)

PS: Last time, we finished talking about your family and so on. Can you tell me about some of the Indian organizations that you may have had a part in forming, both here and in Florida?

SM: I touched on that a little bit last time. I was active in the Indian Association which was the India Club at that time. I was the president for some time. But before that, after I left Minneapolis to go to Florida, I was also involved there to do some community work among the Indians. And that was mostly to organize the Indians there, so that the Indians in three cities, Clearwater, St. Petersburg, and Tampa, knew that there were over 200 Indians in that area. So, I started getting the group together. We started by showing Indian movies at the University of South Florida. That's how we got started. We also had various cultural programs among the Indians that were located there in Florida.

PS: And, how many Indians were in the community there at that time?

SM: At that time, within a radius of about 50 miles there were about 200. Some of them were refugees from Uganda also. So, there were Indian refugees from Uganda. Total, I think was an estimate of 200 or so. The problem there was to cover all this area across Tampa Bay and the gulf coast, which was St. Petersburg, and Tampa to gather them together and to make them realize that there is nothing existing at this time. And we should be active. So, that's how it started in Florida.

PS: Can you tell me about the Associations here in the Minneapolis area? Did you start the India Club?

SM: No. When I came back in '75, I again kind of started anew because a lot of things that I had left when I left for Florida were already different. People have grown older and a lot of new people had come to the community. I didn't know anything about them. So, some of things I used to do in Florida were different than what was here in the Twin Cities. To some extent I was somewhat unhappy to come back here because I already established a lot of friends there in Florida. So, for a while, I didn't keep any touch here in the Indian community. But, the old friendships gradually developed that I got more and more involved.

One time, I used to play tennis, and I'm still doing some of it now. Among my tennis friends there was a person called Padu, his name is Dr. Padmanaran. He works for 3M and he and I got to be good friends. We used to play tennis also.

He mentioned about India Club and he was involved at that time. I attended a couple of meetings at that time. Subsequently, he became the president, and when he became the president, he asked me if I would be part of the board. I acted on the board after his interest as the program secretary for the India Club. So, that's how I got involved with the India Club in 1976.

PS: What was happening in the India Club under your presidency?

SM: After I got one year as a board member, I became the president in 1987, which was a very active year. That's the year when the ambassador of India, Ambassador Kaul visited the Twin Cities. We had a play that was a the first time of Rabindranath Tagore's play. I don't remember the name of the play, but it was successful at Northrop Auditorium. We also had Festival of India and India Day at Landmark Center. We had different cultural associations.

But the main feature that I would like to mention that hadn't happened before was to associate the India Club with the Council of Asian and Pacific Minnesotans, which is a body of Asians in the Twin Cities as well as the whole of Minnesota. That was formed by the then governor, Rudy Perpich. That being the official representation of Asians in Minnesota, I thought this would be the right time for getting in touch with them. So India Club was represented there through Jack Desai.

PS: And what was the goal of that association?

SM: The Asian Pacific Council of Minnesotans is a body that was formed by the governor to be a minority organization like the blacks or Hispanics. This is a new diversified group of Minnesotans that was formed to represent the Asians.

PS: On what issues? In what areas?

SM: Oh, political problems, refugee problems. There are a lot of southeast Asians coming to Minnesota and also the discrimination issue, the human rights issue. All sorts

problems that could be problems for the minorities. That way, we are also culturally related and sometimes we used to get together when some of the dignitaries came like the ambassadors. We had a good representation of other Asians.

So, those things were coordinated between the different Asian groups. I was very interested in getting the Indian community involved in that. Then I knew Dr. DeLeon, who was the director of the Council of Asian and Pacific Minnesotans. He is a state employee.

PS: Has that association continued?

SM: That is still going on.

PS: And, is the India Club still represented?

SM: Yes, it has become more and more intensified. Every year we have a program for awards ceremony and every year we have two representatives from the Indian community who give the awards for the community. One thing is that there is always a representative from the Indian community on the Asian Pacific Council and right now it is Dr. Cherion. I was the representative for three years after I finished the India Club. So, that is very active, and Dr. DeLeon is still the director and there have been a number of issues that have been addressed by this council. We were at one time representing the problem of elimination of the Southeast Asian studies at the University of Minnesota. That was the focus of excellence to bring up the university standards. During that period, they were talking about eliminating some of the departments, one of which was Southeast Asian studies. So, we were very active in representation of that particular department.

PS: So, did it stay?

SM: Yes. Maybe by coincidence because the Search for Excellence program didn't go through at the whole university. After that President Keller had to resign. So, some of these things became coincidental. But, it was still there. At this time also, that problem is coming up. A few weeks back I find that the issue of Southeast Asian studies are going to be eliminated in the current budget cutting proposal for the University. Dr. Junghare, who is the only faculty member left now in that particular department. That kind of thing is scaring us, that we may be losing that department again. We'll see how it goes.

PS: So, you can win the battle once and still have to fight it again.

SM: Like the legislature; every year it comes up.

PS: Have you experienced any conflicts between the different groups within the Indian communities?

SM: Nothing outstanding. Nothing that is unusual with people of various backgrounds and particularly in India where every state has got its own unique type of background. They are to some extent different from state to state of India. But, here, I haven't seen any major conflicts. Except for those normal things. The only thing I remember is the creation of these two religious institutions in the Twin Cities.

PS: Which two?

SM: The Geeta Ashram was formed and a lot of people were participating in that in the mid-70's when I came back from Florida. It was going on in private homes. Then, something happened and that group split. They did form another religious temple called the Hindu Mandir, which is located near Central Avenue. Geeta Ashram is another organization which is in Brooklyn Park. So, these are the two institutions that kind of split up the community to some extent, I think.

PS: At least the Hindu religious community?

SM: Yes, yes. And they were for some time not cooperating among themselves. How it is now? Well, I think it is still separate but not as much against each other.

PS: Do you go to either one?

SM: I got to both of them. More so to Geeta Ashram, than Hindu Mandir.

PS: Which events are held in the community that show the pride or unity within the Indian community?

SM: Mostly the cultural events. I have noticed since I came here that in the early 50's, but more so later on in the mid-70's when the Indian population started to grow

here the type of events that actually brought them together were mostly cultural events. They are not very politically active, and they didn't have any political issue that could have been an accomplishment for them at that time. So, mostly what they did was dance, music.

PS: When you say dance, do you mean people watching someone do dance?

SM: No, they were participating and performing. In the 80's it picked up particularly because of the two excellent dancers in the community, Raneer Ramaswamy and Rita Mustaphi. They were struggling to establish themselves and I think it did happen in the 80's. They have schools and take students and now they are doing pretty good.

PS: And it's the children who do most of the dancing, right?

SM: Children are who they are teaching. There are adults who are also dancing. These two adults are also dancing. They started to promote by their own dances. Also Indrani Malik, she is another accomplished Kathak dancer. So, these perform dances, like Kathak, Bharatanatyam. But these students are mainly schools for children. So that's one thing that brings us together.

Another place where the Indians are very strong was to educate their children in the old traditions of India. For that, they started the School of Indian Language and Culture (SILC) and that picked up pretty good in the mid-70's and early 80's. A lot of parents are very active in participating and volunteering to teach their children there. That school is still going very strong. Those are the good things that have evolved.

PS: Are there any differences between the Indian organizations which are purely social versus those that are there for the preservation of culture?

SM: The cultural part I just described.

PS: Those are tasks. Are there some that are just purely social organizations?

SM: Social organizations, by that you mean those who just get together to

PS: Hang out?

SM: Yes, hang out! (laughter) That is a very necessary thing and it has been one way of life here for the Indians.

Once they come they find out who the Indians are and they get to know each other and meet at different places in different houses. They have potluck dinners, parties. Many nights I have spent, particularly on weekends, among the Indians. When I came in the late 50's early 60's there were not that many groups of people from India representing the different states. We used to get together, most of us at the same party from the different states.

PS: Is it separated now by language groups or geographic area of India.

SM: Now, it has been separated by language groups and geographic areas. Of course, most of India is separated geographically because of the language. So, that is how the Tamilians get together and the Bengalis' and Punjabi's , and they have their own group where they feel comfortable. They speak the same language. Socially, groups are very active.

Sometimes so much so that all the Indians don't have time to participate in other activities (laughter). They're always busy doing something of their own; eating or having potluck dinners or going to weekend events among themselves.

PS: The tendency then is to group by geographic area and language group from India rather than religious group or occupational group, or what part of town you live in here?

SM: Well, like I said, the language is based on the different geographical regions, so when geographical regions meet together, chances are they speak the same language and food is somewhat similar for those who are getting together.

So, generally that is true. People of different geographical regions; by state for example. That's a good way to identify by what state. So like, Bengal, mostly are for Bengalis and Gujarat is for Gujaratis and Maharastra is for Maharastrians. So, when you look at these group of people coming from one state, most likely they speak the same language. And that's how they get together mostly nowadays.

But in the early 70's or late 60's when I found that the Indians were few in number, then there are not that many language groups or divisions among the states. We were about 200 people and we used to know each other pretty good.

PS: Within a particular language group, do people tend to separate based on their caste that they held in India or their economic status here?

SM: No, caste or economic status don't enter into it at all. Most of them are fairly similar in their economic status, at least as of now. It might change later on. They are professional people that are doing some jobs here for some companies, and I don't think that caste has come to play at all in social events.

PS: What do you see as the major benefits of belonging to these Indian organizations for you personally or your family?

SM: Which organizations do you mean?

PS: Any of them. What do they bring you? What do they give you?

SM: You mean, why should I belong to an Indian organization? or Hindu Mandir? or Geeta Ashram?

PS: Yes.

SM: Well, in a way, a sense of getting my identity and in a way its a sense of security. I think I'm more comfortable to communicate and find the same social events that I can understand. I suppose that's the main reason; the feeling of comfort. Just like in a family, I would rather be with my family every day than to be in different families. Everybody might not like to be out of their own community too much. That's still a matter of a cohesive community.

PS: What about when you are forced to be out of your community? What if the rest of the Indian community suddenly disappeared and you could only associate with white Americans, where would be the points of discomfort?

SM: When I made that statement before it was not made for me alone. It was the Indian community; the way they are behaving among themselves. For me particularly, I was alone when I came and I had to make my own association and mostly with white American people. I usually enjoyed that. I was very happy that I could learn some of the various culture background and customs and everything of this country. If I

was left alone now, I won't be at all out of home because I feel sometimes I am at places where there are no Indians even now. So, I prefer that sometimes I go fishing with my friends from Honeywell. I go for lunch and other activities that my other associates used to do, where there are no Indians. But that is not a problem.

PS: Okay. Can you identify any disadvantages that might come from belonging to Indian associations?

SM: Belonging only to Indian associations and not to any other? I should say yes. And luckily, they are getting aware of it.

PS: What would those disadvantages be?

SM: The disadvantage would be isolation. For instance, for hundreds of years, people are here in this country and I have seen ethnic groups that haven't been able to blend with the rest of the community and they are having a problem. In the sense that they are still looked at as if they are strangers. So, that kind of things might develop if they do not mix in with the rest of the community. The idea of having a melting pot in this country, although it is slowly disappearing, is a very good idea. The Indians recently have been getting into some activities like Foodshare or to support some political organizations, or being active in politics. So those things are improving slowly. But, there is still among Indians, it is my feeling and observations that Indians would rather mix with white Americans than with people of color. But I think those are disadvantages to watch out when you mix with people. You should be kind of general, not isolating all the time.

PS: You mentioned already that you were active having friendships with some of your co-workers from Honeywell. Are there any other community groups, that are not part of the Indian community, that you were active with?

SM: Like I said, the Asia Pacific Council, though they are Asians, they are not Indians.

PS: Were there any professional associations that you belonged to?

SM: Oh, I think I am a volunteer with the United Way. Is that a professional association? (laughter)

PS: It's a community group. That qualifies! (laughter)

SM: I think I do evaluation for them for the last year I've been doing that. I'm a member of the Park and Recreation committee for Roseville City Council. So, I am a commissioner there. What other things? As far as that goes, I think I am in touch with the Hennepin County Department of Adult Housing and Community Services because of the business we have. These are not professional organizations, but they are activities that I'm involved with outside of Honeywell.

PS: Well, the next section is just about your work history. You've talked just a little bit off and on about your work. You didn't hold a job in India before you came here? You were still a student?

SM: Yes, I did, but for a very short time. It was an entry level electrical engineering job.

PS: Then, when you came here and finished school, you went to work for Honeywell?

SM: After school, I went to work for Honeywell after finishing two other jobs. Both were very small.

PS: Was there any other company that you worked for other than Honeywell?

SM: Just the first two companies: one the Electronic Transformer Company in New York and the second was in New Jersey, a testing company.

PS: So how many years total did you work for Honeywell?

SM: Thirty-one years.

PS: Thirty one. That's a long time

SM: 1959 through 1991.

PS: So, now you have your own company?

SM: Now we have a business which is serving people through the department of human services for the Hennepin County. We do take people who are chemically dependent, who have been treated for chemical dependency, and we house them in

our facility. It is called HATI (Health, Awareness, Trust, Involvement) House, which is a residential facility for 22 individuals. We keep them for a time, whatever length they want to stay there. It is a board and lodging facility.

PS: Is it like a half-way house?

SM: It is similar to a half-way house except that we don't provide any treatment. It is a sober house for those who have been treated for chemical dependency. So, that's our business now.

PS: How did you get into that?

SM: My wife, Indu, she was a social worker. She got her master's degree in sociology from the University of South Florida. Then she was adoption agency supervisor over there. Then after coming here she came to work for the State of Minnesota. She was a nursing home social worker. After 10 years working in that department for the State of Minnesota, she wanted to get into something which we can have as our own. So we looked into nursing homes and those things were expensive. We were looking around and a request for proposal came up for this type of housing in a suburban community. So, that we answered in 1988. She was interested to work in that field and I was about to leave Honeywell, so I said, "Well, let's try that." That's how we got into that.

PS: Great! You worked for just a short time in India, and most of your work has been here. Can you identify any differences in the way that work gets done in India versus the way that work gets done here?

SM: You know, that's so long back that it's hard to compare. We're talking in 1956 when I came here. Things have changed tremendously since that time. That was the post-independence days after Indian independence. At that time, it was pretty bureaucratic at different levels of management and we were all working pretty much for some kind of government agency or other. It was all with the government there. Here it is all private. Coming from that environment into this environment, I saw that things are done much more efficiently.

PS: And you appreciate that efficiency?

SM: Yes. Efficiency was very high. Of course, the work is a lot different. The pay was a lot higher. So, those are the factors that causes the incentive to work here. Later on, as time goes by, I found that jobs are really insecure here. In the beginning, it wasn't. In the mid 70's through mid-80's things got really unstable.

PS: Is that different from India? In India, if you got a job would you have it.

SM: In India, if you got a job, it stays with you your whole life. Still, a government job, it's very difficult to be laid off or anything like that. There the jobs are secure, although there are fewer jobs. To get a job is difficult. So those are the kind of differences I experienced. But, nowadays there a lot of private companies in India and things are much more secure there too. People are getting good pay.

PS: Are people being laid off from the private companies in India as much as here?

SM: I don't know about that much.

PS: Do you ever think about how your life would have been different if you hadn't come here? What do you think your life would have turned out like? Would you have settled into a government job ?

SM: Yeah, I could compare with some of my cohorts there and those with whom I grew up. They have been in their jobs for the last years. They were working until they are 58 years old and they retire. I am sure I would have been working for some kind of government job and retired perhaps from some position that would have been high up in the working life. Once you retire, then you don't have much to do. Here, you have a lot of other avenues open even after retirement. Family-wise, I would have been much different because of the relatives and immediate family being nearby. With them always around you, its a much nicer environment as far as society and family life is concerned. I think we don't have too much of that here, but we do have it there (in India.) So, those have been the differences. Here we have to build up everything, to create everything to make it livable. There, it is already there. So, just leave it like that.

PS: Do you have a sense of whether your being an immigrant from India had any impact on your peers or your supervisors or co-workers in the work settings?

SM: Do you mean discrimination or anything like that?

PS: Maybe not discrimination, which is a negative word. I don't know if you experienced that. But, was there any difference; did you ever find yourself asking, "Why are they treating me differently?"

SM: In the beginning, I knew that I was being treated different. People were positively curious about me, as to why I came here and what India is like. I didn't speak the same way, so my accent was always different, so I had to repeat sometimes what I had to say. But, I didn't have any negative feelings, if I was born here or if I came from India. Only thing is later on, when jobs were getting scarce, I was feeling that I was not secure enough on my job. So, when that is happening to others. So, if I want to say that I was discriminated, again that's not fair. Those are the kind of things that people can think because you are from a different country or different nationality, you have a better chance of getting laid off. But, others I don't think. If you are doing your job.

PS: We talked earlier about your daughter. What were the values that were most important to you that you wanted to pass on to her?

SM: My daughter? Well, I would like to see that she is hard working, that she would bring up her children so they would also be pretty hard working. They should value education and a career development type of lifestyle, so as to establish themselves in this society. Because I know they are not going back, so she is also married to someone from this country, so it is important for her to be well-adjusted into society and take actively in the customs and cultural backgrounds of American society. But at the same time, keep her heritage like she is doing at this time taking part in the Indian community and Indian culture, customs and background.

PS: She is the president of India Club this year, isn't she? Do you feel proud of that?

SM: Oh, yes, yes. She is busy with her daughters and

everything else.

PS: She arranged her own marriage. She didn't do an arranged marriage.

SM: Right.

PS: She married a white American. How did that feel at the time it happened?

SM: Well, it was hard to adjust to. It was not because it was not arranged but because it was a really different cultural custom that we didn't think it was going to happen. She kind of pioneered, and became the first girl (as far as I know) to marry a white American. So, it was a hard process for me. We found out Brian is getting very comfortable in our family and we are comfortable with him, so things are working out okay.

PS: But, that initially, went against your family values? Against your values that she should have married an Indian person?

SM: Right. Right. Because that way we would have been able to have less problem in dealing with our cultural customs and backgrounds so we would be familiar each other much more. We could have kept up the tradition the way it was before. But, in this country everything is changed.

PS: Do you feel like Niru has mixed some Eastern and Western values together?

SM: Oh, sure. She does that very well. She has a number of American friends and when she was working she was doing very well in her job because she was educated here and comfortable in the culture. She had the advantage of growing up in this country. Those kind of adjustments that she didn't have to make that we had to make. But at the same time she is very Indian, and the more older she gets, the more Indian she gets. She is teaching her daughter Indian dance and she is on the council.

PS: A lot of the organizations, like SILC, were not around when your daughter was young.

SM: No.

PS: How did she get her Indian values?

SM: She wasn't much except for our families and social get togethers we used to have. We used to take her to India every time we used to go. At times, she also went by herself.

PS: Does she speak an Indian language?

SM: Yes, she speaks Oriya. On some occasions she has gone on her own during her young days and so she picked up the language pretty good. And every time she goes there she stays for 2-3 months. At one time she stayed there for eight months with her mother and that's when she learned the language.

PS: And how old was she when she stayed for eight months?

SM: She was perhaps twelve.

PS: Have you seen changes in the Indian community over the years. You've been here for a long time. I know you said that when you first came it was mostly young men who were studying at the University. How have you seen it changing over the years?

SM: Well, it has changed from young to old, like you were saying. People came here when they finished their school and thought they would study here and go back to India and work there. But now, those people who didn't go back, they stayed here and they have become old. They have children, their children's children and the grandparents. So the Indian community is growing and recently I have become myself to that grandparent life. I am thinking there is a need for those above 55 to have their own association. So, I have been working on that and formed a group for 55 Plus for people who are original immigrants from India and those who have become retired or grown old. They are participating and some of the families, those who are coming from India, they have brought their parents and they are also part of our group.

PS: Do those older people who have come when their children brought them over, do they tend to learn English?

SM: Some of them have been working people who had English as part of their school, they speak English. English is not

the official language, but it is a language that people communicate with.

PS: The stereotype is that those who come to join their 40 year old sons, that they may come when they are 70. For them, adjusting to the new culture and the new life here would be alot harder. Have you seen that?

SM: Yes, that is true. They are somewhat lonesome. Some of them don't drive and they are kind of isolated. They are confined to their homes and spend most of them time in the confinement of that home only. Particularly with Minnesota weather, it is not very comfortable. A problem that we see, and that we have talked about, is that the older generation has to get support, not only for Indians but for all the Asians, as a matter of fact. So, I worked with the Metropolitan Council with the Asian Commission. They were addressing these problems of ethnic background people - those who are getting old -- and they cannot speak the language and have transportation problems and they don't fit in the nursing homes like the other American population is. So, what can we do? So, we decided to at least form some type of group among Indians. So, that's how it started since last December. It is hard for them.

PS: That's the 55 Plus group?

SM: Yeah. Some of them are coming to our meetings and very happy and obliged that something like that has happened.

PS: Well, the last section is about family ties. Are you still in touch with a lot of your family members in India?

SM: Yes, My mother is still alive. She's not doing well physically. My brothers are all there. I keep in touch with them, particularly because of my mother. She is bed-ridden. I enjoy the long-distance telephone call. It is getting so easy to call India, which was very difficult in the old days. We just didn't have that luxury of calling India so many times. So, we do keep in touch. Every two weeks I call India and then I do not have the same kind of sentimental feeling about the family and the relatives now as it used to. Because, in the beginning, up until the last 15 years or so, I was more attached to the family in India because my father was still alive and my mother was very active. In the course of time, they have all grown old and they have their families. So, the interchange among

ourselves as it used to be among brothers and sisters is kind of getting dissipated among our own families now. Also, I have to think about my life here. So, its not as intense as it used to be, but I do keep in touch.

PS: The last section is about retirement plans. You've already retired. It's been three years? How was it adjusting to being retired, American style? Well, you're not really retired if you have your own business.

SM: That's true. I retired from Honeywell, and I have my pension and that's one thing. I got social security last year and that part is good, because, as you say, I still am working in the company that we have. I don't feel at all just retired in the sense of being retired out of work. But, I do feel that I am retired from my daily routine world and that is the part that I enjoy the most.

PS: So, your time is your own now, right?

SM: Right (laughter) I can get up and have interviews with you any time I like. There is nothing scheduled. And then, sometimes the pressure is less than when I had to go to Honeywell every day and deadlines have to be met and stress. That part was not so great. And then, my grandchildren, I play with them sometimes and if I can go and take them out to someplace or other that they enjoy. I wish I could go out of town a little bit more to different places.

PS: Like to travel, go on vacations, you mean?

SM: Yes. Yes. But because of the business that cannot be done too often for too long. We do that for sometime.

PS: So, you had not planned to go to India to retire? You'll stay here. Your family is here and grandchildren are here.

SM: Yes.

PS: Is there anything else that you would like to say or share that I didn't ask you about for the India Club Oral History project.

SM: Well, it seems that the Minnesota Historical Society is something that I didn't know until I saw it last Sunday with

our 55 Plus Group. We had a trip and went to a lunch. It is a beautiful building and the history of Minnesota is displayed there. A lot of effort has been made to create that place. How the state of Minnesota evolved from 1813 when it was not even on the map is something worth looking into. Various people of various backgrounds, particularly from Europe came here and settled and had a hard life, of course. But culturally, they have adapted to this country, but they have not forgotten their own homeland. They still retain their heritage. Now, the time has come for other ethnic groups to be a part of this state. I see an influx of Asians now, and among them are Indians who are quite a few in number in this state. It is important to record our history. I'm glad you are doing this project now.

PS: Thank you. I appreciate your time in talking with me today.

India Association of Minnesota Oral History Project (Phase 1)
Minnesota Historical Society