

Interview with Ranee Ramaswamy

Interviewed by Polly Sonifer

**Interviewed on November 17, 1994
at Ms. Ramaswamy's Burnsville home**

PS: Hi, Ranee. How are you today?

RR: Pretty good.

PS: First, can you tell me a little bit about the part of India where you came from?

RR: I am from the south of India. I was born in Kerala which is the southwest and raised in Madras which is the southeast of India. I lived there until I was 20 years old.

PS: Tell me about your family there.

RR: I come from a Hindu Brahmin family; my father was a professor and a pretty well-known scientist. My mom is a homemaker. I have one brother. It was a small family, but we had a joined family system there. My father had two brothers and a sister and his mother and we all lived together for a while until they all grew up and got married and left. It was not until I was in 9th grade that it was just the four of us.

PS: How was that?

RR: It was wonderful in some ways when I was a kid because you always had cousins who could come over but I didn't realize how hard it was on the mother, who had to do all this work every time the whole family came together. They had a lot less privacy in their lives. But, as a kid, all you saw was the gathering of a whole bunch of families and everybody having fun. In many ways, as a kid, it was great, but in some ways it was hard. You don't really get your mother just to yourself. You are disciplined by everybody in your family. Those are the drawbacks if you think of them as such. But, I always thought it was great after I came here to see how people are very possessive about their own things. I guess we grew up in families which had so many people that there wasn't any possessiveness about things;

nothing was yours. Everything was ours.

PS: Including your parents?

RR: Yes. So, this was wonderful in one way because you never ever said, "this is my room or my table or my bag." When I hear the kids, especially my own daughters say, "This is my room, I don't want anybody sharing it," it bothers me because that's not how I was brought up.

PS: It was much more of a community.

RR: I wouldn't call it community; it was much more just family. Because in different parts of India there is more community. In Calcutta, I guess there is more community. Where we grew up there is more of a family. I don't know if you are calling a family a community or a village.

PS: And your brother is younger than you?

RR: Yes. He's five years younger and he lives in New Jersey.

PS: Are your parents still in India?

RR: Yes. They visit me every year.

PS: Tell me about your schooling in India.

RR: Well, I went to one of the best schools in Madras which was a Catholic convent school run by European nuns. My father always thought that I should be able to speak English very well, and they wanted me to be well-versed in all kinds of arts. So, I went to a Catholic girls school and then went to college to study arts and drawing as my ancillary (my main subject.) Even though my parents sent me to the best school in the city, they really didn't have any plans for me to be a career person; they never thought of me as "becoming somebody" or being a professional. It was all towards me getting married. I did drawing and painting because "what's the use of doing chemistry and physics?" I'm not going to work anyway. I only went to college because I was engaged when I was in pre-university. In India, you do 12 years of school, then one year of pre-university, and then 3 years of BA. I'm not married anymore; I'm separated now. I don't know what to call him, my ex-husband or whatever, but anyway, his family wanted me

to finish college. And that was the only reason I finished was they were not ready for the marriage yet. So, I was engaged for four years. I guess my parents really didn't realize that I had enough in me to become somebody.

PS: It sounds like they were fairly traditional in their outlook.

RR: Extremely traditional!

PS: Did you at the time rebel against that tradition?

RR: No, I didn't. Because from the time you are six years old my parents believed in horoscopes a lot. We took a yearly visit to an astrologer in the village in Kerala that my grandfather came from. So, everything was planned according to what the astrologer said. My father had a double Ph.D.; he travels all over the world and writes books. When I talk about astrology, I don't mean he was an uneducated man. My grandfather was a doctor, my great-grandfather was a gynecologist. I come from an extremely educated family. But they would go to the astrologer and he would predict, "Oh, she will get married very young." So, all I heard from the age of 5 was that "you have to get married soon, you'll have a family and women working is not all that great, women should never be in women's clubs and doing social service work. All this is just a waste. Only those who don't do anything at home do any of that stuff." So, constantly, I heard this and that's how I thought. There was no individual thinking. My grandfather wanted my mother (who is a very intelligent person, a great singer and a wonderful artist) to go to college and get a job. But when she did her pre-university, she got into BSC (into chemistry.) Her brother didn't get a seat so she gave up her seat for him, but not because she really wanted to, but because she didn't want to study. Even though she was talented, she didn't want to get a job. She wanted to get married. Her life's ambition was to get married young, and she thought that was the most important thing for a young woman to do. So, she projected that on me. I didn't think of it that way at that time, but now, I do. At least, until I was 28 or 32 years old, I always thought a woman's place was in the home; that a woman never went and worked. So, I hated working. I believe I was almost hypnotized; you absorb what your parents say.

PS: We all do. So, you studied arts and drawing?

RR: Yes. And dancing was something that I loved a lot. It wasn't something that my parents were very excited about; it was OK. They never thought I was going to be a dancer. Every girl gets to learn some art form; again, that's with the goal of getting married. It's a qualification. My daughter has a BA, she cooks well, and she can sing or dance. These are qualifications to get married. I studied classical music when I was five years old and I hated it because I was a very energetic kid and I couldn't sit. We had to sit like this (*demonstrates the cross-legged lotus position*) and "repeat after me," as the teacher said. I just hated it! My friends would be waiting outside, and I wanted to run and play with them. But, it was different with dance. I loved that and I forced my parents to give me dancing lessons. I got lessons from the worst teacher you could ever get. I come from Madras which is the seat of Bharathanatyam; that's where everything evolved. But, I never got to really see a performance nor learned from a good teacher, because that teacher would not come to my home. Sometimes, I ask my parents, "How come you didn't send me to a good dance teacher?" My mother said, "There wasn't anybody to take you. It was a joint family. We didn't have a car, we didn't want you to go by bus." I was so protected, so naturally, they chose a teacher who would come to my home. And she wasn't very good, so I learned up to 17 years of age from a teacher who I can't brag about. So, I learned dance and did drawing and painting as my college degree. That's it, and then I married.

PS: And when did you marry?

RR: I married when I was 20. I was engaged when I was 17. A week after I finished my college, I got married. I left for a small suburb of Calcutta and lived there for about six years before we came here. I had my daughter while I was there.

PS: And, your marriage was arranged?

RR: Yes. It was arranged when I was 17 through horoscopes. That was the main criteria; the horoscopes matched really well. We got to see each for 15 minutes and we were engaged for almost four years and had no correspondence of any kind. That's it; then we got married.

PS: How did that feel at the time?

RR: At the time, it was fine. I was a very romantic person at 17. I was an artist and I'd seen movies. What do you really know at 17? I didn't know any men. I was especially sheltered. Talking to other people in the community now, I find that my family was even more orthodox than other families. My mother never stepped out of the house. My neighbor, who was my mother's age, she went all over. But, my mother felt that the best thing a woman could do was to never go out. She shouldn't go shop or buy groceries because that was cheapening herself. So, she stayed at home all the time. She never even saw the outside world.

PS: And you stayed home with her, except to go to school?

RR: I went to school and came back. I was supposed to come home at four o'clock. If I stayed five minutes after, my father would be right outside waiting for me. So, I really didn't get to see the world. My father was a teaching professor and we would have students at that time who visited out house, but I wasn't even supposed to open the door if a man came to the house. I wasn't allowed to go to a store and ask something. My father would do it instead. So, I grew up practically not even knowing how to buy something. If we went to a restaurant, my father made me sit in the position where you can't be seen; only your back.

We went on a vacation once and a whole bunch of college boys were also in that spot, so I didn't get to see this town I went to see because there were boys around. That's how I grew up. I had no male cousins my age. I had no idea what a man was like, except for my father and my uncles who were older and my brother who was 5 years younger. My mother was very protective. If we went to a wedding, she would say, "Always stay by my side because you could end up in trouble going near the men." It was always over-protection, which taught me that men were not good. What happens is that your expectation in marriage is a good-looking face. I was not supposed to tell anybody that I was getting engaged. It is very secretive; what if it doesn't happen? The engagement can break. So, my friends would ask me, "Was he wearing tight pants?" That was the criteria for a fashionable young man; wearing tight pants and he had hair on his forearms. (laughter) That's it! For me, he should have a mustache. I had no idea that there should be compatibility; that you should talk. Nothing! My idea of a man was totally romantic. Of course, when I saw the photograph, I said, "I don't want to marry this guy because

he doesn't have a mustache." I was part of a family in which a lot of things could be said. I had a very close relationship with my mother and my father. There are many Indian families where the communication was not there at all. If there was communication in many ways, at that time, I didn't realize how it was important. I came back from college one day and his picture was sitting there, and my mother said, "The photograph is here." I looked and said, "I don't like him at all; he has no mustache. I don't want to marry him." My mom said, "Well, don't come to any conclusion from a photograph, because you can never judge. We'll see him in person and if you like him. If you don't like him, you don't have to marry." So, it was all looks. My parents never even asked his parents what kind of job he had. They knew he was an engineer; but they didn't ask what kind of job he had or how much he made or nothing! When I saw him, I did like him. I think I always had an inferiority complex. Being in a big joint family, you really don't know your place; you aren't given a very important place. So, I thought I would get married to some ugly looking guy. It was just the opposite because he was a very good looking man and well-educated. In my mind, I had built up that I was only worth marrying a clerk who wasn't good looking and had lots of family members and didn't care for me. But, when I saw him, he was very good-looking and was an engineer. I liked his face. I had to sing for him.

PS: You had to perform for him?

RR: You had to do all that. It's like the whole family comes and you are dressed up and you sit there. They ask you to sing; that's to see if you had speech problems. You had to serve them food so they can see that you walk okay. You don't know the person, except that you have asked people, "Do you know this guy? My daughter is going to be married to him. Is he a good person?" Some people will say, "Yes. He is good. He doesn't have any of these bad habits." So, that's how you find out about him. Then, his parents said, "The boy likes the girl, but let's wait because he might go abroad. He's not sure, so let's wait for four years." That let me finish my education. I liked him a lot, and I wished that I could write to him. I remember once I knew it was his birthday and I made a card with two little birds on it. I didn't really mean anything by it. Seventeen in India is like 10 here; even 10 is too mature here. Maybe even only five years old. You just think Love! You don't even know anything. But, my parents said, "You

can't say this. This is not right. The two birds suggest something." That's how much anything to do with feelings was not encouraged. So, I made no contact, and he never made any attempt to write. After three years the parents talked about dowry, which is an important thing in our system. I don't know if you know about that. At that time, I learned that Raj (my fiance) had a skin problem. That was the main reason why they postponed the marriage for three years, but they didn't tell us. They thought it would go away; he had psoriasis, which is very dry skin. Now, I know a lot about it; it's not contagious or anything harmful. They didn't know what it was, but they didn't want him to get married until it went away. So, that was the main reason to postpone the marriage. Because of that, I got an education and I'm glad. When my father was called about the dowry, they also mentioned the skin problem. Raj said, "If Ranees doesn't mind, otherwise, we can call it off." To me, for three years, I was mentally married to this person. It really didn't seem like a big thing. My father talked to his doctor. I thought, "Well, what if he gets a heart attack two years after we got married?" You can't do anything about it. To me, I already decided that we were married. It's not like you date or get to know each other. You take these things very seriously.

PS: And, he was the first boy that was offered to you.

RR: That's it! Once the dowry was settled, it was an exorbitant amount of dowry!

PS: Did you know as the girl how much dowry was being given for you?

RR: My father called from out of town and said, "They want this much." I remember saying, "No, then I don't want to marry." I felt bad, I didn't want my parents to spend so much money. But, my father said, "The most important thing is to get the daughter married to a good family, so their responsibility is over." It's like a business venture; like seed money for something. So, we got married 23 years ago.

Then we went to a small suburb of Calcutta. Actually, when I got married, we went to my in-law's place which is in South India about six hours south of Madras at a place called Trichy. I am completely against arranged marriage now -- I wouldn't recommend it to my enemy, unless you thoroughly find out about the two families. What my husband's family got was not what they wanted. They wanted

a woman who would cook, clean, work, and be like a very responsible mother. I was a child. I was 20 with the mental maturity of a 12 year old. I was extremely playful, funloving, and artistic. This completely didn't suit their family at all. Even though my parents are old-fashioned and traditional, they are not orthodox. They didn't have to wipe the floor with cow dung; that is a different level all together. Because my parents came from such an educated family, they believed in lots of old, unnecessary things, but not the cow dung. So, the first day I got to clean the floor with cow dung.

PS: What is the significance of that (the cow dung)?

RR: Cow dung is supposed to be so purifying as a cleaning disinfectant. I remember my eyes filled with tears. I don't know if everybody would react like that; it was a lot of self-pity. The very first day I had to grind rice in a stone, which I had never done. Even though I was in a joint family, we had a servant. My father wasn't very rich, but we always had some small luxuries. The servant never ground rice because she was not a Brahmin, but my mother did. I never helped her. She never asked me to help her. I remember I had to do that, and I had tears in my eyes if I had to carry water. It was a completely different family and I never fit into it. We have this thing where when you have your period you are not clean and you have to be away from others. That was that way in my family too. You had to stay out in a particular room and you can't go touch everything. If you touch somebody, they have to change their clothes and take a shower. You can't go into the kitchen and cook. I guess this was done in the early days so the woman could get some rest. But, it was carried so far that it's not even funny. At my in-law's house it was okay for me to do this work if the servant didn't come. A tradition was kept only if it was convenient to keep it. But, if they had 20 houseguests and you had your period, it was still okay for you to go get water from two streets away in a pot. You didn't have to tell anyone that you had your period. I'm a town person; I wasn't used to all that. I never fit in there. When I was married, I would walk into the house where all the older people were sitting and they would question me, "How do you make this? how do you cook this? how do you do this?" Here I had been to a convent school and college and I always came home and read books. That kind of freedom was given me at home and I wasn't made to work.

PS: So, they probably perceived you as rather spoiled?

RR: We talked about the joint family, there is some good and bad. The good thing is that kids get grandparents but my mother suffered a lot because of her joint family. My mother's mother-in-law (my grandmother) became a widow at a very young age. My father's dad died when he was 12 years old. They had four young children; his youngest brother was 28 days old when the father died. So, she turned her hatred; she didn't want her son to get married. My father saw my mother and fell in love with her. In those days, my grandfather was the family doctor and they belonged to the same village. So, my father asked my grandfather, "Would you consider me as a son-in-law?" and that's how they got married. But, my grandmother was against the marriage, because she thought that if my father married, he wouldn't take responsibility for these other four kids. So, she saw to it that my father never even spoke to my mother; they never even talked. And my father was terrified of his mother. My father would ask my mother a question, but if my grandmother appeared before she answered, my father would run away, terrified. It was as if they were doing something that they shouldn't be doing. So, they never went out. That's how they grew up. I did not want that kind of family. All my life, I thought, "I'll never fight with my husband. I'll have this close relationship with my in-laws." This was my deepest thoughts. I had these ideals from books and movies. I remember talking to my father-in-law with so much enthusiasm once. So, I was talking to my father-in-law and I overheard my mother-in-law's sister saying, "Why is she talking so openly with the father-in-law. It doesn't look nice. It's not right." The thing is, I didn't see myself as this married aunt. I saw myself as a kid. It hurt many times. I didn't have to stay with them for very long; only a month or so. Then, I traveled with my husband to his place. We were in a small town 25 miles from Calcutta. I didn't speak Bengali and I didn't know Hindi because I was from the south. I had never traveled anywhere alone. I'm a talkative person; I talk from morning till night and I have so much to say! My husband never talked; not a word. He was the kindest person, but he wouldn't say a word. We are eight years apart in age. To me, he was the first man I'd been with. I'm talking about arranged marriage. This has become the biggest thorn in my life, so right now that's the hot point. When I got married, I had this big dream of romantic ideas. When you bring up a kid

who never talked to a man, you get married to somebody, and you let them spend the first night together. I think that is the worst thing that anybody could do to a young girl's psychology. Those men in India are also brought up to never be with any other woman. They get to be 28 years old, and the parents decide when they get married. I think it might be different in different families, and they might have changed a lot (since I've been gone.) For me, I think it formed a deep scar in my life having to be with a man the very first time I was married. To me, talking meant a lot. I was very disappointed, even though, compared to many men in India, I think my ex-husband was very kind. The one thing that really bothered me was that he would never talk much. I really was very fond of talking. He would leave at 7 o'clock in the morning and not come back till 10:30 at night. He would go to work and then he would go to his friends house to play cards, and never think of me sitting at home with no television, no books, nothing. I was very close to my parents; they were my only friends. I remember walking around the house and calling out for my parents, "MOM! DAD!" because I had nobody to talk to.

PS: And there wasn't any mechanism for you to make friends in that suburb of Calcutta?

RR: Well, I lived in a house that was away from many houses and there was no one close by. The people who lived upstairs didn't speak a word of English.

PS: So, you had a language barrier.

RR: When somebody came to the house, I would hide. If I opened the door, I would have to talk to them, and I didn't know the language. It was something I had never heard before. After the first year, we went back to visit my in-law's place for my sister-in-law's wedding. I had just missed a period and I was pregnant. This just shows again the incompatibility of the families; they didn't really give any importance to me as a pregnant person. I was so hard worked; going up and down the stairs. I was also the youngest person in the family. I had a miscarriage as soon as I came back. After three years, I had my first daughter. I remember even though in general the marriage worked, I think in 23 years, we never had a companionship or friendship. We never talked ever. My daughter and I became very, very close; just like my parents were to me. My parents constantly, up to today, are very close to me. I

think it was only three years ago that I finally grew up. I really became my true age only three years ago.

When my daughter was three and a half we came here. I made all the decisions in the house. I even dreaded when I wanted a child. If you have a person who buys a house or get married just for the sake of doing it, but they don't do anything to maintain it. That's the kind of person my husband was. He always did his duty. He was a born real Hindu. He was like a lotus flower. I always say, "You pour water in lotus leaf and it falls off. It really doesn't touch the surface." We also had to support his parents, even though his father was working. Raj had always done that. Actually, my father has done so much in his life. He educated his two brothers and a sister and got her married and paid her dowry; got me married and paid my dowry. He educated two other brothers and took care of the ill grandmother until she was 75 years old. But, he had nobody to help him. My ex-husband was educated by his grandfather, who was a pretty big man in Jamshelpour. His father didn't actually do much. But, constantly, we had to send money. I guess he had said to his parents once that he didn't want to get married, because he couldn't help them anymore. They said, "Oh, it's okay. You have to get married." So, after we got married one fourth of the pay was sent to them. I remember that I was in Calcutta for three years without a sweater. Calcutta could get pretty cold. He was an engineer and we still couldn't make it. And, I was untrained in the art of housekeeping and would finish any money he gave me in ten days. I would sit and cry because I didn't know what 25 cents was worth when I was growing up with my parents. I didn't know. Now, my daughter can go around the world and take care of her entire family at 19 years old. But, my parents always said, "We love you and we'll give you what you need." My father always said, "Don't worry. Give everything to your in-laws. Don't worry; I'll support you." I hate having a grudge. My mother is so bitter about her life. All her life, she never went out with my father because my grandmother was around (keeping them apart.) After my grandmother died, if my father said, "Now we are alone; let's go out." Her constant reply was, "I didn't do anything when I was young. I don't want to do it anymore." She never went out alone with my father until I was 20. Not ever! What did I do? I did the same thing. I never left my kids. I never have had a baby-sitter for my kids. I was always here for them. If I went out, I went out with my kids. I never did anything without them. But, I didn't realize I was also very bitter.

We were helping my in-laws, and a point came when my in-laws were planning to retire and come and stay with us. Just to tell you how bad the situation had become, I remember my in-laws visited me and I had spilt some sugar on the floor and I was praying and trying to pick up that sugar before my mother-in-law saw it. That was so much fear. I just couldn't live with it. Since my grandmother was a terror, both my father and my mother were afraid of her. My father would never let her handle anything. Because I was brought up in that situation, I was naturally scared. If I was at my in-law's place, and they got up at six, I would get up at five; not because anybody asked me to. I thought they would be angry with me if I didn't. It was just an in-built responsibility. I was so scared that they would come and stay with me and that would be the end of my freedom. Constantly, my mother reminded me that freedom was the most important thing in a person's life; without freedom, there is nothing.

PS: Yet, she didn't have it.

RR: She had not freedom, that's why it was so important. She never said that companionship or friendship or love was most important. To her, freedom was most important. So, I was happy that even though we didn't spend time together or we didn't talk together, I had the freedom to live the way I wanted. I had friends. The reason that we came here was to escape from my in-laws. This was my plan. He had applied to immigration before we married and he had a chance to come here. I'm a go-getter; today I am what I am because I'm a hard worker and I have a strong will and I get what I want. Actually, I was the push behind everything that he did. He would have been happy riding his bicycle and staying in a small town. That's it. He had no interests. I was the opposite. I had so much drive, but in India I would have been a nobody. So, we came here. I remember the final paycheck from his office, his parents came to take money from that too. They were actually treating him like a prodigal son. They had no affection for anybody. I have never seen a family like that in my life. When we came to the United States we bought a house. He told them, "I'll give you money now, but I don't know if I'll be able to give you money immediately, because we'll have to settle down and we don't have jobs yet." It's a scary thing; you go with a child and wife and find a job. I was 26 and he was 34. So, we came here and I took up a job as a filing clerk. It was

hard for me but I found out that I got every job for which I interviewed. Sometimes I took two jobs because I was so enthusiastic about getting a job. I would paint and I sold a lot of paintings. I put in ads and I did commission portraits which I sold for \$35 a painting. I did all these things. He got a job and we bought a house. It's not easy to settle down. Then, his father sent us a typed letter. Typed letters are bad in India. It shows that you aren't close; you write when you are close. You only type official letters. So, he had written to his parents telling them that we had bought a \$64,000 home (this was 16 years ago.) We had only paid \$1,000 downpayment. They wrote saying, "If you have the money to buy a \$64,000 house, you haven't helped us enough." They quoted the Bahagavad Geeta where the parents were the most important things in life. His father had really hurt him. I took that letter and said, "You have to answer that. Tell them that we are having to leave our daughter at the Montesorri School." It used to hurt so much to have to leave her there while I went to work. Remember, inside me, it was bad going to work; I hated it. There was no communication in their family. I urged him to tell them how much work he and I were both doing to make ends meet. We haven't bought a \$64,000 home; it won't be ours for 30 years! He said, "You do it!" I think the man is the link between the woman and the husband's family; he should act as a counselor. Usually 90% of Indian men stay out of it; they want their wives but they don't want to make any ill feelings towards their parents, so they just stay back. This is what makes people unhappy. So, for the first time, I took the initiative and wrote a nice letter. I'm very verbal. My sister-in-law who got married a year after me was having a second child. I wanted another child, but I couldn't afford it. So, I told them that; this is how life has been. It's been so much work, and if we could, we would definitely give you money, but we really don't have that. I have such a great communication with my parents, I hope that its okay to write this to you. They got real upset and I got another letter saying they don't want anything from us.

I'll go back a little bit more. My father doesn't drink or smoke; he's pure vegetarian. My father had found out before we got married, that Raj was a tea-totaler. But, the day I got married, I found out that he did smoke, and drink and play cards once in a while. To me that was the worst possible thing that anybody could do. But, it was all so secretive. His servant would come and bring a bag of things; and there would be some beer bottles in there. And, I would be so scared. His friends would come in the evening

and I would sit with the wife of a friend who was about 12 years older than me. The men would sit and play cards and drink, and I felt I had a villain for a husband. Now, knowing what it is, a glass wouldn't do anything. But, nobody educated me and I wish he had. I created such scenes after those things were over. I remember saying I would put my hand inside the rickshaw and have it chopped off because I didn't want anybody to think that he was a bad man. My bringing up was so important. Kids need to learn what is good and what is bad; especially what level of it is bad. All this created such a big distance.

We came here to United States and had my second daughter after six years. When I came here, I was very active with the Tamil Association, and they knew that I had studied dance. They asked me to perform at the University Indo-American Students day. I was thrilled. I hadn't danced from age 17 until 26. I had quit because when I was 17 my father said I couldn't perform anywhere so there was no point in learning. In Calcutta, it was so far away, I couldn't do it. I remembered two dances which I performed on stage and everybody liked it. I found that I still had it. From 1979 on, I've been going back to India every year to study more. And I found the best teacher, because now I could do it. My father had a car, they send me to the place. Everything fell together only after I came here. I started teaching the little kids and I was very community involved and I had lots of friends. I had a life of my own actually.

PS: So, when you came to the United States, did you come directly to Minneapolis? What year was that?

RR: Yes, in 1978. I was very active with all the Indian organizations; did volunteer work and was the life of the party everywhere.

PS: Did you know how to drive?

RR: Yes. As soon as I came here I learned how to drive.

PS: So, you learned a lot more skills for getting around than you had in India.

RR: Yeah. It was just in India I was not allowed to do things; I wasn't stupid or anything. I just wasn't given the opportunity or the green signal to go somewhere or do

something. In 1984, I went to perform in India and my father said, "Don't advertise this, that you are Dr. Ananthakrishnan's daughter. Just say that you are Mrs. Ramaswamy." Even at that time he thought it wasn't great for me to dance on stage. That was too public. But, they have been very, very supportive. Every time I get a grant or anything like that, the first thing I did was call my parents. Actually, my mother was my very close, constant companion because she didn't have anybody. She had only me. She told me, "There is nobody in this world that I love as much as I love you." Even though I was married for 23 years, I think my mother was closer to me than my husband.

PS: When you went back to India to study dance, who did you study with there?

RR: From Alernel Valli who is the leading exponent of a very classical style of dance. She is younger than me; she is a child prodigy. She has dedicated her entire life to dance. She's been here many times and is a great dancer.

PS: And how long did you study with her each time?

RR: Four months every year.

PS: Did you take your kids with you?

RR: Yes. Every year I took my daughters out of school but since my father was a professor, he would have a tutor come home and teach them. So, in every way, my parents supported me completely. The one thing they constantly did without knowing was that they were everything to me. That independent thinking of "you are a family" wasn't there. For me, my family was my parents.

PS: Did they know or understand that you were somewhat disappointed with how your marriage turned out?

RR: They always knew. Everybody knew. They would say, "What's happening there?" Even when they came here they could see how much we (Raj and I) talked or how little contact we had. But, they always had the feeling he's a nice guy. That's what kept the marriage going for so long was my belief that freedom was the greatest thing until I started thinking that I needed a companion. So, my two kids are extremely close to me, but I don't hold them back nor tell them what to do. I let them make their decisions and I

support them 100% in what they do. I give them suggestions if they ask me. I think what I'm trying to do is give them love but not hold them.

PS: That's important; roots and wings.

RR: I think that is something we have learned from both cultures; they can depend on me completely, which is one of the good things in my culture, and to let go, which doesn't exist in Indian culture.

PS: So, the things that were adjustments for you when you came in 1978. I assume there were a fair number of other Indians in the community. How was it settling in?

RR: The first day I was invited to dinner by another south Indian family. The first couple of days, I thought everybody was so artificial. I hated it here and I wanted to go back so badly. When you are young in India, you hear about snowy mountains and skiing and hear music all over. What you see is totally different. As soon as I landed in immigration, I hated it; the big long line. I felt like I didn't belong here. Actually, I felt that way for almost 12 years. I only lived here for eight months, and lived in India for four months. I loved India. Every time I came back I argued and fought to go back to India again. My parents said, "You would never fit in here. It's nice when you visit because we give you everything. When you come there is a car and it's fun. But think of living here. Remember you couldn't buy a bottle of jelly when you were here. To pay electricity bills you have to stand in line. You haven't lived here for so many years that you wouldn't have people to stand in line for you. You won't be able to do that." But, it was a romantic thing with nostalgic memories of India. Now, my career has gone off so well here now. Even if I had the chance to go back to India right now, I don't think I would. I'm established and I'm doing things with Indian culture which nobody has done. I actually take Indian culture to little towns. In Greenbush, Minnesota I teach them how to do floor paintings and Indian dance and music. I would never get the chance to do this in India.

PS: Because in India you would just be ordinary? Because everybody knows that stuff there.

RR: Yes. Exactly.

PS: So, here you are special. It took you 12 years before you felt like you lived here and belonged here? Do you still continue over the 16 years you've been here to go back to India for four months?

RR: For the past three years I haven't gone back for four months because my daughter can't leave the high school for that long of a time. I went to India in January of '93 when my teacher took us to Japan for nine performances. So, that was my last trip to India. But I had not missed a single year going back until the last three.

PS: Does your teacher do a special class when you are there for four months?

RR: Yes. I take private lessons from her.

PS: Is it four or six hours a day of lessons?

RR: Sometimes more than that. Some days I don't get a class, but others it is four or five hours in one day. Then I would practice. My daughter is also her student. She started with her when she was eight years old and did her first debut recital with her. So, she has a really strong mentor who has helped her put her roots down so deep. Now, she feels like I do; nostalgic memories for India and love of the culture, but in one way she is luckier than I am. I am rooted a lot in tradition, but my beliefs have changed now. Yet, I feel guilty because they are not the same as they used to be. But, my daughter's ideas are from here, but she has true attachment to India but without the guilt. For me, I keep thinking, "Maybe I don't belong there because they won't accept me" because my visions and ideas have changed. I have broken a marriage and they won't accept me there. I'm afraid of India now, even though I love it and its culture. I feel I'm a misfit and that hurts extremely.

PS: Yes, very painful. Hard stuff. I'm impressed with how hard it is. Tell me more about the dance you do.

RR: I do Bharathanatyam, which is the classical dance of south India. They say the origin is 2,000 years old. But there is only proof from 17th century on that it exists. They really don't have much proof. Its a full and complete dance tradition. Even though there are five different classical dance traditions in India, Bharathanatyam is

considered to be the oldest among the classical styles. It doesn't concentrate only on one element. I know that each classical style has its own strengths. Some don't have much story-telling; some have mostly rhythm. In Bharathanatyam when it is done well you have it all; extremely complicated rhythms, whole body movements, story-telling. Of course, there are dancers and there are dancers. It was only 100 years ago that this dance was only done in the Hindu temples by Devadis who were the servants of God, who were really temple prostitutes because of the caste system. It was only they who danced.

PS: When you say temple prostitutes, what does that mean exactly?

RR: Well, this caste of women were married to the idol when they were very young; maybe 7 years old, and they spent the rest of their lives dancing to the festivals and celebrations. But they were also concubines of the priest or the king or some other big man. They really didn't marry; they have a private life of their own, but at a certain period in Indian history, they became temple prostitutes. At that time, in Greece, they had the temple priestesses. It wasn't anything that was considered to be bad or good. When the British ruled over India, the kings ceased to exist. Then there wasn't anybody to support the temples, so the Devadis became prostitutes. This actually colored the whole art form for a long time. I was talking about this to a woman's historian in Wisconsin, and she said "each of the Devadis had power or wealth depending on how much land she had. If they had more land, they didn't have to go out and be with many men, even though they were 'kept' by maybe a village head."

How it worked was, the Devadis had two lives; one was that they were temple dancers. But, as women they really didn't get married. They were not officially married by anybody. They were somebody's keep.

PS: Did they have children?

RR: They had children, but if a king had a son by a Devadis, that child couldn't be prince. So, they had their own life.

PS: Did the kings support the children?

RR: The king would support the temple, and the temple would support the Devadis. So, they had different degrees of Devadis. Some were very well-versed in all arts and educated and they didn't sleep with everybody. So, that was their life; they were not legitimately married and didn't have that respect in society. But they also had respect in society in one way in that it was okay because that was their caste. In India, each caste had to do something, and no other caste danced except for them. The men in their families became teachers and the women in their families danced. So, no other caste man would ever marry a Devadis woman because she is prostitute caste. At one time, they were higher but they became lower when the temples lost their revenue from the kings because they were no longer paid by the temple. So, they became common prostitutes. At one time, all the songs they sang were completely devotional; they always talked about the gods. But, to make a living, the words were changed to describe the men that supported them. So that's the period that colored Indian dance for a long time, and no other caste of people ever learned this dancing. Until 100 years ago, Rukmini Arundale (who died about 10 years ago at age 86) she married a Scottish man. She was a Brahmin, upper caste woman like me. Her family was very political and she went to Europe with her husband and met Pavola, the ballet dancer and fell in love with ballet and wanted to study with her. Pavola said to her, "You have great art forms in India. Why don't you go and study you own art forms?" So, she returned to India and went to a couple of Devadis, studied Indian dance and did her first performances when she was 30 years old. All the famous male singers boycotted her performance because a Brahmin woman was not supposed to dance. So, today, this largest institution in Madras India which teaches dance was formed by her. She got the best dance teachers from all over India and brought them to teach in this center.

PS: Were all of these teachers Devadis?

RR: Well, the women were.

PS: Were there men who also taught?

RR: Oh, yes. Lots of men. Men actually taught the dance, and women were the performers in those days.

PS: How did men teach the dances if they had never

performed them?

RR: The men? They learned the dances of this particular dance style, they just never performed it on stage. Now, there are a few men who dance. Again, I don't know how much of this is true. They really don't talk about it much. The amount I know is only what I've learned since I came here. It was always "dance is bad" and nobody knew why; they never talked about why. Now, if the women were prostitutes, they were dancing to entertain. So, it is only because of Rukmini Arundale that I am able to dance today. Slowly, it started. She cleaned out the songs; although nowadays people say that what she did was terrible. That was a period of India that is now gone. Whatever took place, whether it was good or bad, it took place. So what the Devadis did at that time doesn't exist anymore because nothing was written.

PS: So, she erased part of history?

RR: What is good and clean? I read a paper by a Brahmin girl from India who had gotten married in an arranged marriage, broke the marriage and is now studying dance in New York City. She has written this beautiful paper about Indian dance and what is good and what is bad. If those Devadis had one life; if they were performing, that was their work. What they did in their private life was private. None of us are just dancers; there are a hundred things that we do that are apart from dancing. Men who were patrons who supported the art form are still saying, "In what way is it different now?" She write that they should never have done that because it was an oral tradition that was completely erased. Now you don't even know who is a Devadis anymore. Even though the caste system exists, there are hardly three or four old Devadis dancers who are still alive. Now, it's completely Brahmin dominated right now. There are 6,000 Bharathanatyam dancers in Madras who have no performing opportunities. Within forty years this has happened in India.

PS: And they can't perform because they are Brahmin?

RR: No, because there are no opportunities, no venues to perform.

PS: Why don't they make some?

RR: Because there are 6,000, there are too many!

PS: And they have all been studying since they were little girls?

RR: Yeah! They are all youngsters. People get married and then they forget it. So, I mean the 6,000 dancers are youngsters who have studied and have no place to perform. So, just to show what dance was and what it is now. Dance wasn't done by anybody except Devadis and now look- there are this many dancers and no place to perform.

PS: And is there any tradition in India of men and women dancing together socially like we dance?

RR: I know there are folk dances. I know that in the south, men and women don't dance together. The south is much more conservative than the north. In the north, because of the Persian influence, it is much more liberal than the south. The festival of Holi, we don't do it in the south at all. I remember when I first married and moved to Calcutta, and the first time I saw men throwing colors and touching women's forehead. We just didn't do that; men didn't touch women. Even in Calcutta, a man from another south Indian family took me and my daughter, Aparna, to the doctor. He took a second rickshaw and had me and Aparna sit in one because he wouldn't share the rickshaw with me. That's how conservative south Indians are. Even though things have changed a lot, you always think that India is still like that.

PS: In your mind they haven't.

RR: Let me tell you about the dance style. It uses hand gestures which are very intricate, and specific. There are 28 single hand and 24 double handed gestures to tell stories with facial expressions and emotional interpretations. Beautiful body movements, and intricate rhythms.

PS: And what are the stories about?

RR: Most of the stories are from Hindu mythology. Again, we deal with nine different emotions, such as love and anger and humor and all that. But love is the predominate emotion in all the dances, because that creates all the other emotions. The main theme of every story told in my style of dance is devotional love. But it is brought to a very

earthy level. In most of the dances, the dancer yearns to be united with the Lord. She is waiting and he's not here.

Usually, she is the human soul wanting to unite with the Divine. Usually, there is another friend she is speaking with who is the friend or priest who helps the human soul unite with the divine. So, its always symbolic; even the Hindu Gods. Everything that they hold is not just an object; it always symbolizes something. This dance was done as entertainment but also as education for the masses. The scriptures were only allowed for the Brahmins, so the rest of them couldn't read or write, so this was audio-visual entertainment. They were narrated stories. In order for that level of people to understand, it was brought to a much more human level. They could understand a woman's yearning for a man better than a human soul's yearning for the Divine. But the dancer should know that its not a man she's dancing to, but she's dancing to be united to The Lord.

PS: Is there a lot of eroticism in the dance, or not?

RR: There are pangs of separation but its all overwhelmingly merged with devotion. It doesn't look like you are doing anything. The words are things like, "At a time when I'm in love with you, why are you do indifferent?" Those are the emotions which are taught. Would you call that erotic?

PS: No, I wouldn't.

RR: It's longing.

PS: Which never gets satisfied?

RR: Right. She is just begging for union.

PS: Do you ever dance out the union?

RR: Sometimes you dance that Krishna is there and you are playing together. There are certain pieces which are called lighter songs, which talk about common everyday problems of human life. Like, if a woman says, "You promised to give me a nose-ring and you didn't give it to me." Those things too are danced. But, these are mainly to show the emotional interpretation of the dancer. It's easier to do anger and love, but its hard to do deeper levels of emotions such as anger. There are many different kinds of anger; mock anger, real anger, and so on. That psychological interpretation of

different emotions is very very hard and not many people do it very well. You need a very mature dancer to handle such situations. My teacher is great! She had taught us a couple of pieces, but nothing like what she does.

PS: Have any of these Devadis which are still in India ever written down any of the dances?

RR: They are uneducated so they cannot write.

PS: They couldn't even tell it to somebody who could write down the moves for them or videotape them or something?

RR: This is a great question. Balasaraswati, who was one of the most famous last Devadis who also taught at Wesleyan University in Connecticut for a long time. She just died about 10 years ago. Nobody had done any film of her. Satyayit who is a very famous filmmaker did one film of her when she was about 60 years old by the beach. I guess her sari was lifting all over while she was moving. But, nobody has any film of her at a young age. She was supposed to be a legend at storytelling. This morning I was talking to my musician about this. He studies with a Indian sitar player who is famous. He was saying how there is selfishness in the Indian mentality. "I would rather go to the grave with my music than to give it to somebody." There are many teachers who don't give 100% because they want to keep it. I have some of it too, which I am getting rid of now. I have a student who wants me to teach her a piece, and I don't want to, but that selfishness is because I'm here and I have no chance of getting another piece until I go to India. But, I said to her "I'm sorry but I do that piece in the schools, and you do the same thing in the schools. If I teach you that, I won't have anything special to do. But, I'll teach you another piece." But, I don't consider that wrong, but there are not very many people who give 100% of their talent to their students. My teacher gave me and my daughter 100% of her dance. When people see Bharathanatyam being done they always find there is something different in what we do. That's because of her style of perfection. She gave it to us, so I try to give it to my students. She might not give everything she has to me; maybe she doesn't think we are worth giving it to. But, there are old masters who have died without passing it along and no music is written. The topic came up by talking about Wagner and Hayden. Somebody else was said to have played just like Hayden who lived 100 years before Wagner. My friend, David

was saying, "See its possible because music is written and in India its not."

PS: And there is no system for writing it down?

RR: No, no Indian music is written. The teacher teaches you and you learn it the same way.

PS: There is no notation system in existence?

RR: Songs you can write, but how do you write the melody? You can write the notes, but suppose somebody composes something. Now you can tape it but its oral tradition. The teacher passes it on. Choreography is never written down, and the old teachers never did. What about all those old Devadis who died and no Brahmin person danced, it all went with them.

PS: Among the Devadis, did the older women teach the dances to young girls who joined the temple at age seven?

RR: Yes. Because that was their job; that was all they did was dance. So, their kids were always learning dance.

PS: So, it was their own children who carried it on. No one ever put a new child into that system.

RR: They couldn't, because other castes didn't do it.

PS: Complicated systems.

RR: Yes, it is very complicated.

PS: This is fascinating to me. Tell me about how your dances have unfolded here, what have you done with your dance, and the honors you have received.

RR: Okay. As I said, I started out at the Indo-American Society doing two pieces, then I went back to India to study more. For a long time, when my younger daughter was 10 years old, I actually was more of a community dancer than anything else. I would dance for all Indian community functions. In 1983, I met my teacher (from India) here when she came to do a residency. A professor from the University had seen her in India and thought she was great and brought her here. Both me and my daughter (who was 8 years old at the time) took lessons from her. She thought my daughter was

excellent and said, "Bring her to India and I'll teach." That's how we got started going there. I was learning from two teachers at the same time for a while, and they had two different styles. So, slowly I got established. The first time I was presented by the Minnesota Dance Alliance at the Ordway in 1984, that the first time Americans saw me. Before that time, everything that I did was Indian community functions. I wasn't paid for any of my performances; it's volunteer. You always try to make it the best possible, because you want to be seen on stage. I got connected with the Minnesota Dance Alliance, became a member, and applied for their grants and fellowships. Now, I have six McKnight fellowships. I remember doing three of them for very traditional classical Indian dance. I didn't even know how to explain to them the vocabulary and all that. I was so community focused; nobody in the Indian community ever asked questions. But here, people wanted to know; is this your choreography? what does traditional mean? I didn't even know when you say traditional that it meant that me and 100 other Indian dancers would do the same thing. It's not like that. You take a piece and do a traditional choreography to a piece and two Indian dancers would do completely different choreography to the same piece. It took me so long to put the words right; to make them understand what I was doing.

PS: Yet, when the Indian community watched you and you did all the hand gestures, did they understand what all the motions meant?

RR: No.

PS: Did they understand all the story lines were if you didn't tell them?

RR: Well, some of the story lines I would explain to them. But, it was entertainment.

PS: So, it didn't matter whether they understood everything.

RR: No, no. They all came, we all ate, we all danced. It was all of that.

PS: But, you didn't all dance. Only you danced.

RR: I mean there were also folk dance or singing groups. It was always a variety entertainment. We did two years of

Ordway. Every year, I started working on new things. I said, "Let's get Busarraw and the Spanish people and the Middle Eastern people and lets all do a piece together." So, somehow, things became a little more pushed and I got more involved with the Minnesota Dance Alliance. I owe it all to them is what I'm trying to say. They have been wonderful. The more the others saw the performances, I started getting more audience. Rita (Mustaphi) and myself started this company called Nrityajyoti. We did things together. Sometimes she would bring her teacher or I would bring mine. We would perform together. But, we were both going to the same pot of gold, so we had to take turns. We couldn't both apply for the same year. That was one problem. But, we really did some good things for the community. Two or three years ago I was given that Council on Asian Americans in recognition of their 1992 Leadership Award for Arts. (brings out a pendant and shows it to the interviewer). For two years I received the National Endowment for Arts for choreography. I've had McKnight six years. I received Jerome Foundation Travel study two times. I got the Minnesota State Arts Board Cultural Collaborations, Minnesota States Art Board Arts on Tour this year, Culture on Tour this year. I've had at least five Metropolitan Regional Arts Council awards. I was a finalist in Bush a couple of years ago. I was nominated for Diva Performance something, which was a national honor that the Minnesota Dance Alliance nominated me for.

But, now three years ago I worked with Robert Bly which changed my life completely. Minnesota Dance Alliance again did this. They had their extended play series and I remember my student had a book called Mira Bai Versions; a book of translation of Robert Bly. She was holding it in her hand. I asked her, "What book is that?" I read it and I just fell in love with those six poems and I wanted to do that do badly. Do you know who Mira Bai is?

PS: No.

RR: I just take it for granted that everybody knows. Mira Bai was a poet in the 16th century who was a princess. When she was a kid her mother gave her a statue of Krishna, who was her favorite idol. One day, somebody was getting married and she asked her mom, "Who is my husband?" Her mother was busy and said, "Krishna is your husband." Mira Bai took it so seriously that she could not live with her husband when she got married because she was not being

truthful to her Krishna. Her in-laws thought she was crazy and she was administered poison which didn't do anything. She was in such complete devotion to Krishna when she drank that poison and was thinking about him. This is the story, anyway. She walked out of the house when she was in her 20's and spent the rest of her life making poetry about Krishna and walking around all over north India. According to Indian tradition, only the Brahmins were supposed to do rituals because they had the scriptures. They were the only ones who were allowed to do prayers and rituals. She actually is responsible for creating the Bhajans, the devotional singing as a devotional way of prayer. That's when the masses began singing as a way of prayer in India.

PS: So, Mira Bai was not a Brahmin herself?

RR: No, she was a princess, a Rajput, north Indian. Kings are not Brahmins. They are the warrior clan. These poems were most amazingly translated by Robert Bly. I didn't even know who Robert Bly was. I had a friend, Cliff Sloan, who is an ethnomusicologist and a wonderful man. The first paid job I got in the Twin Cities (in Morris, Minnesota) was gotten by Cliff. I remember that I didn't trust him because I was so scared of men. He had long hair and I would see him in concerts. The whole family went to this little place to dance. Cliff is a very, very good friend. He has been a link for me between Indian and American because he knows a lot about Indian culture and other Asian cultures. He is a family friend. I called Cliff and said, "I have no male friends, but I can call you a friend." And he replied, "I'm honored." This was the first time that I felt I had a man as a friend. He said, "Call up Robert Bly! He's a very famous poet and he's from Minnesota. Just call him up!" And I said, "Can I just call him up?" And he said, "Yes! Just call him up!" (giggles) And Robert Bly said, "Yes, I'll do it." I was just shocked!

PS: What exactly did you propose to Robert Bly?

RR: I said, "Hello. I'm Ranees Ramaswamy and I'm a Bharathanatyam dancer. I read your poems and I just loved them! I would love to dance to them. Would you read it?" And he said, "Sure, why not?" I had nothing to say. So, I said, "As soon as I finish this grant, I'll call you." I wrote the McKnight Fellowship and got it. When I called him back I said, "Would you do this?" He said, "Are you going to use my musicians?" I said, "They aren't Indian

musicians, and I'm a South Indian dancer. I don't think so. I think we need to get a mridynjist and a violinist from Chicago. How much do you charge?" He replied, "\$4,000." So, I said, "Okay. Can I call you back?"

Then, I called Cliff, "Cliff, he wants \$4,000 and I don't have that money." I realize now that he only said that because he didn't want to do it with only a violinist and mridanyi because he has worked with his own two North Indian musicians for ages. That's a big story. So, Cliff said, "Don't worry about it. Just audition somebody from the Guthrie. They can read the poems and you can do it." I honestly didn't know how to go about that. Another student of mine had Kabir tapes and I played it and was completely and totally floored by the music and Robert Bly's reading. And I resolved, "If I have to sell this house to get Robert Bly, that's what I'll do. I'm going to have Robert Bly and his musicians." From that day on for almost a year, all I heard was that music constantly on tape. Wherever I traveled I heard that music and I was traveling a lot due to all the school residencies that I did. I almost was Mira Bai. Kabir is another poet who was born a Muslim and brought up as a Hindu. He praised the Hindu God Ram, and Robert Bly has done a whole book of Kabir poems. Then I called Marcus Weis, a tabla player. For a long time wherever I went to dance, he was always there doing music for somebody else. So, he would always say, "So, when are we going to work together?" He's a drummer and always looking for work, and I'm a dancer who's always looking for work. I would always say to him, "Someday, Marcus, we should work together." But, it never happened. We would only see each other once a year or two. The Minnesota Dance Alliance had picked me to do the extended play season. I told Louis Robertson that I'm going to get Robert Bly to do this, but with the \$4,000 I didn't know what to do. But, I called Marcus and said explained the situation. Marcus said, "Don't worry about it; I'll talk to him," because Marcus had played for Bly for 20 years. Marcus said, "You know, David has moved here so you might want to give him a call. He's a sitar player." So, I called David and left messages for him. Then Robert Bly and I talked again and he said, "Well, come on over today and we'll talk about it." So, I took my car and got lost five times and finally got there and he's sitting there with his secretary and he said, "So, what do you want to do?" I really didn't have any idea what I wanted to do. I had also made a deal with a video person to tape the performance and that's why I didn't have any money. The video guy was going to make huge pictures of

me and my expressions that people wouldn't see otherwise. So, I would stand in front, and Robert Bly's reading, and the video would all be coordinated together. I didn't know Robert Bly hates videos and all technology. So, we were talking and he finally said, "Call me in a month when everything is ready. Just confirm once more and I'll do it." By then David called me back and said he was in town and would do the music too. Everything came together, and when Marcus and David came to do the rehearsal. I had seen David since 1978 I had heard him play at the Hindu-American Society and I was so moved by his playing. It was the same guy! He had not been involved for seven years and had just moved back to the Twin Cities! I said, "I know you! I've seen you!" We did the rehearsal and it was the most moving experience I ever had. The music was gorgeous. We had a North Indian singer, Usha and we did the show with Robert Bly with one rehearsal. The opening night it was so great! It was sold out. People were crying! It was the most fascinating experience I'd ever had in my life. I didn't want to get any more coupons or go to the grocery store. I didn't want to live a normal life anymore. Something happened to me during Mira Bai. I became famous because I worked with Robert Bly. Everybody came to see me. I started getting jobs just like that because they understood the English poetry. Before that, I was dancing to Indian music and Indian words, but now suddenly the words and the feelings, and the temple and everything came alive. So, I got booked for a lot of jobs.

Then, I went to The Great Mother conference. I've been going now for three years to this conference that Robert Bly has. I danced there in front of 100 artists, psychologists, philosophers. I used to live to go to India for four months. I think now I lived to do this one performance at the conference. People were there with tears flowing down their faces. It's been great. I did one at Manhattan Center with Robert Bly. So, I did that show in April 1991 with Robert Bly. I was supposed to do three nights; one night live and three nights with taped music. The first night Robert Bly was there and the second night I did with the tape. It felt so empty. I called his musicians, "Would you guys play. We'll do it without Robert Bly, but we can do the singing part on the tape." Marcus said, "That's fine. I'll help you out. You don't have to pay me." The same thing with the singer. When I called the sitar player, he said, "Well, this is my livelihood. But, I have a project. Will you work with me on that project?" I said, "Sure!" Once that was over, he brought the project, which

was Ragamala, which actually also made my career go up and up and up because of that collaboration which I did. Ragamala are paintings from 16th century India. Ragas are melodies. During the Muslim period, Islamic artists gave form to the ragas and they made them as male and female children. They painted them on the walls. Later on came poets who look at these pictures and wrote poems. So, David had just done a thing where he played the Ragas on the sitar and he read the poems and showed slides. He got the American Institute of Indian Studies fellowship. He went to India and came back. He's been playing this stuff for 23 years. So, he showed me the slides and his idea was to have commissioned paintings without the human figures, and have me be the figure. So, it incorporates all the elements of that particular raga.

PS: So, you become a moving painting?

RR: Yes! Its copying emotions of six different ragas. It was just exquisite. Actually, for the past two years I have been eating because of those ragamalas. We've been touring like crazy with it. We've done it twice here and got the most beautiful reviews with it. Once we did that, we (David and I) formed a company called Ragamala Dance Theater. With David, he's never done anything in his life; he's a very internal person who plays with Robert Bly and Joseph Campbell and all these famous people. He's read books for years and done all the work and thinking all these years, but never ever did anything on stage.

PS: What is David's last name?

RR: Whetstone. He's a genius. His ideas are fabulous. It just so happened that he asked me. I had always been looking to do innovation, and it came at just the right moment. When we did Ragamala, then the Institute booked us to do Puppetmaster, so he wrote something with the Buddha called Puppetmaster. This is a 45 minute narrative which again people in the audience were weeping. Children's Theater people came. It was just gorgeous. Again, it just took me step by step out into more and more innovation. We did a piece called Dawn with symphonic music. The beginning of Dawn was for eight dancers. Then we did the Canticale of Mary which is a full opera dance with four famous operatic singers in the Twin Cities; Elizabeth Cumoet and Dan Dressen with symphonic score. We did it at The Southern and got a great review in the dance magazine. O'Shannenessy called us

and said, "We'd like you to do the O'Shawnessy series this year. Everywhere we call, we keep hearing about Ragamala Dance Theater." Now, its like I'm the choreographer and he's the artistic director and he has specific ideas about how the company should go on; what we want to do artistically. Now, I have one less job. All I have to think about is complete dance. Indian dance is more abstract, more pushed, but has all the great qualities. See, I didn't know anything about Nijinsky or Balanchine. But David keeps telling me, "watch Nijinsky." He keeps giving me books and says "read these. Do this! Do that! Watch Balanchine! Grow!" So, I've grown tremendously in three years. It all happened when I went to a poetry reading of a famous poet who just died. I had never been to a poetry reading before. Robert Bly was there and he talked something about Wagner. I didn't even know who Wagner was. I felt so bad that I made sure I heard MPR everyday. Now, I know every musicians first name. It's like a child taking a first step; everything is opening up. I can now talk about this music because I know about it. So, I was slowly educated with poems, books, Tolstoy. I used to watch the most scary movies; the more blood the better. I used to only go to that kind of movies and read those kind of books. Now, everything I have is philosophy and psychology. These are beautiful books; Magistar Ludi, Dostoyevski. I just grew so fast in three years that its unbelievable. I'm an adult now! I wasn't an adult before. Now, when I do Bharathanatyam choreography its got something of Balanchine. My piece of Ises, the Canticle of Mary, is about the feminine. It's about Eve and I took the whole Ises piece from pictures from Nijinsky and people thought it was just fantastic. So, my work is really so fulfilling to me, because I'm a choreographer and I work with eight dancers. Its like a mother hen with eight little chickens around and they are my little babies.

PS: Are all those dancers people that you have taught?

RR: Yes. They are all my students. Now, I get students when I teach at the colleges. They call me to do workshops, and I pick out dancers from there who learn from me. They have regular classes where I teach them technique. Whatever they have learned, they've learned from me. Some of them have stayed with me for years. So, I have a performing company of eight. Right now we are talking about dancing at St. John's Cathedral in New York doing Mary next year.

PS: Are most of these students Indian girls?

RR: No. I have two of my daughters and two other Indian girls who perform in the company. There is one more girl who is going away to college next year and she is not interested in these innovative projects; she wants to do only traditional. So, she doesn't do it, even though her mom came to the show and said, "this is Bharathanatyam. It's got everything in it." The rest of them are Americans. I've got one young Japanese man who started studying who is excellent.

PS: These are mostly college-age students?

RR: Yes, college age, except for my younger daughter, who is 13. Everyone else is about 18. The oldest person in my dance troop is 34. Well, actually, the oldest person is me (laughter), but the next oldest is 34. The rest are all college kids.

PS: Do you still dance a lot at the Indian functions?

RR: This year I didn't even know; nobody even called to say that this was happening. I remember the days when I used to be responsible for the Landmark Center and call people. I found that I wasn't even told to apply. (You are supposed to apply now.) This year, nobody called me.

PS: How did that feel?

RR: It felt very bad. I wanted my students to perform. I felt really bad but I wasn't going to call. My daughter said, "Well, Mom, you call them." But I thought, if they don't want me, I've done it for so many years, they don't want me. But, next year I will see to it that my students perform. They need to see what I do because I do extremely, very classical traditional dance and that needs to be seen on stage. Actually, one of my students danced at the other functions of the Indian community, but again, she was contacted separately. Nobody contacted me and even asked if I wanted to be part of it. I heard from one of my Indian students who is also a friend that others think that I don't do any more traditional work now. Even when I did traditional work, I hardly got a handful of Indians at paid performances; usually about five or six. There are a couple of people from India Club who have been coming for a while and have always been supportive or they have a daughter in

the troop. This is true for me and the other performers have the same problem when it comes to going to a paid performance. It is always not supported much by the Indian community.

PS: So, the Indian community thinks they should get it for free?

RR: They were having all the functions where they can get it without paying for it. It feels really bad. I was selected to be on the steering committee of the Minnesota Dance Alliance and they are talking about audience development. I felt really bad that I don't have an Indian audience. I was taking Indian dance further out and presenting it. Having these four major opera singers sing for Indian dance is such a big step. We are going to have live music at O'Shannessey; we talked with the Minnesota Choral who is really interested. Of course, we have to pay them. But I really wish that the Indian community supported this since they are one of the very affluent immigrants in this country. I was even thinking that I should write a personal letter and mail it to the people on the India Association mailing list; not for me, but so that it looks good to see that somebody from their own community is doing something. You should come and support it. Ninety percent of our audience are the local people; and Indian are hardly 10%. I have in the past talked to the Indian Music Society to support Americans who do Indian art.

PS: How does that go over?

RR: They don't. Because, as I said, David and Marcus have been playing here for 23 years; they are professionals. They don't have any other job. David said that sometimes he couldn't even buy an apple because he was so poor. How could you make a living? Today he has 10 or 12 students who are all Americans who are learning the sitar. They all buy a sitar which costs \$2,000. None of them are rich; they are all poor. He teaches at Carleton and Macalester. We are quite okay doing these performances. No Indian man would keep this as a profession and suffer through it. They are all professionals; engineers and doctors. Though they might take it up for fun; but to do it so seriously and yet not be recognized, I think is terrible.

PS: So, the Indian community gives lip service to the arts, but they don't really support them?

RR: I think so. It's okay if I have many times gone to the India Club to ask, "Can you be an organization through which we can apply because you are a big organization?" They say, "Fine. As long as there is nothing involved; no financial things and no work, we'll do it." So, actually, Rita and I have come up a lot on our own; audience development, getting jobs, bookings; everything! Today I'm really proud because it's like running a corporation.

PS: It's a small business.

RR: Yes. Everywhere we go, we are so respected. Dance Magazine respects us so why can't they be proud of us? Also, you said that I danced in the Indian community so much. Maybe its part my fault because I used to be so close to the Indian community. I suddenly pulled away because it's been only a year since I've been separated. I don't know how that's accepted. Maybe its me. I don't go to any of the concerts that are happening because I don't want to show my face there. I haven't done anything wrong, I know that. But still, its very personal and my own feelings. My daughter says, "Mom, you should do this. You are still that same Ranee that everybody knew." But, its not every day that this happens. It so happened that, it just happened. huh?

PS: I understand. I do. So, do you feel like being separated or divorced in the Indian community is just not accepted because it happens to so few people?

RR: Yeah. It's like I don't know how many are. The personal impact is a very selfish thing. In my case, I didn't induce it. It just fell apart because I got so involved in my work. If you build something up, it doesn't break down. But, if nothing was built up and all of the sudden you are not there; you are constantly gone and suddenly you are expected to have a romantic passionate life. After the age of 42 its not possible. So, to me, it seemed I just couldn't do that. I could live like this, but I just couldn't do that anymore. This is my life. I'm so happy now actually. Cliff said, that people talk to him and say, "Poor Raj." Maybe I shouldn't be happy because that's normal. But, I am happy; I'm very happy doing what I do. All I do is WORK! I work 24 hours a day. I know that I hurt my parents a lot also. They said, "So what. You guys just don't talk to each other. It's okay. Just live together."

But, it's so stifling and why should one person suffer? It just fell apart. I don't think that it's the right thing to do according to Indian beliefs. Like my parents said, "You've lived together for 23 years, so what if you keep living for a few more years?" But, I didn't believe that. I believed that once certain things have been said and done, there is no going back. Once the line is too bad. It's just like porcelain being cut; you can't patch it up. There is no way. If there was something very strong that we had before, we would have grabbed on to that. But, there wasn't that. We were always this. It's hard to start something after too long.

PS: So, you were very involved in the Indian community and then suddenly stopped.

RR: Nobody called to ask why or what happened. It's like death. When somebody dies, you don't know how to approach that person. Maybe they think that I'm too proud to go there; that I've changed or that I don't think of them as family anymore. That's not the reason; the real reason is that I'm afraid. I've always wanted to be a good person. That's one of my big drawbacks; I want everyone to like me constantly. That's hard and you just can't do that. I don't know if they will like me anymore. With my parents too, they were extremely heart-broken. They don't know how to handle the situation; they haven't told anybody in India. They believe the horoscopes and an astrologist who says that everything will be alright. They think that even after 20 years of separation, people have joined together. So, it's hard for me to go back to India. I have a grant to go to India to work with Joe Chualla, the famous tap dancer here. We have a project called The Englishman, which is again the story of the Devadis during the English period. When the Englishmen came is when the Devadis system was abolished. It will fit the dance so perfectly with the two styles. We already did a collaboration and people just loved it. He is a Bush Fellowship recipient and the National Endowment and all that stuff. He is very well-known here. So, it's funny; I'm 42 years old and my parents are here and I'm afraid to tell them that I have a grant to go to India to a collaborative work with Joe Chualla.

PS: Because they would frown on you traveling with a man?

RR: Yeah! This is a very professional, but outside in the American community, I'm a professional dancer. She has

achieved this and this and this and this!

PS: But, to Mom and Dad, it's different?

RR: So, I just told them I'm planning to come to India.

PS: But, not who you are traveling with?

RR: No. Of course, I'm taking my students and daughters with. It's still the dependent child within me. This is hard for me to deal with; the two different aspects. They can't deal with my independent grown-up person because now I know that I love my parents, but I have to do something for myself as an adult. This time when my parents came, I said, "You put me in this marriage." My parents said, "Well, if you didn't want to, we wouldn't have done it." I said, "I didn't know anything at that time." But, people grow and they grow so apart. They asked me if they could do the same thing with my daughter and start looking for a boy for my daughter Aparna. I said, "NO!" I think they are afraid of everything and what's going to happen with my kids. They expect my kids to marry the same way I did. I stopped them (my kids) from making traditional families because their parents are separated.

PS: But, you wouldn't let your daughters have an arranged marriage anyway, right?

RR: I wouldn't say no if they wanted one. This was my concern and I did talk to her about what she thought. I asked her, "If we get separated, if that spoils your future, would you ever forgive me for that?" She said, "If that guy doesn't want to marry me for what I am, then I'm not interested in that marriage." My daughter and I have such a wonderful communication that I can call her up at anytime I'm hurt and she'll counsel me. It is the same with her too. That's where I am right now. Every time I have to go to a concert or something, I've not gone anywhere now.

PS: For a whole year?

RR: Yeah. It's just suddenly like Raneer disappeared. But I have tons of friends; mostly American friends. I do have a couple of Indian friends, but a lot of American friends.

PS: Did you have that before?

RR: Actually, I did. The ironical part was that for 12 years I never had an American friend. I always thought of Americans as different; very different. I thought I could never have them as friends. (laughter) Then, I started doing school work, going out of town, and staying in small towns, meeting all these wonderful people. I knew that they were not different in any way, except that their culture was different and they looked different. A lot of them were like me. The more I did it and the more people I met, the more friends I made. Now, I have a whole bunch; and a really good support system. Anytime I'm hurting, all I have to do is make a phone call. Anytime I want help, all I do is call. I have people around me.

PS: That's nice. So you've created your own extended family here.

RR: Yes. Yes. I think they understand me.

PS: And these are the American friends?

RR: Yeah. They are artists too. So, actually, I'm torn between so many different lives. Even as an Indian artist; an artist is different from everybody else. Being from another culture is such a contrast. I also think I've always been an extreme person. It was either this or that!

PS: I understand. We're not getting through these sections, but this is so wonderful! Are there other things that you want to talk about that I haven't asked you about yet. Perhaps about passing on values to your kids? Or, how wonderful your kids are? A lot of people spend a lot of time talking about how wonderful their kids are. If you want to talk about that. . . .

RR: My kids are great. I think the best thing that's happened to me in my life are my kids. They've been extremely proud of me, which is one wonderful thing. They look up to me, which is great. My older daughter is a very mature individual who everybody likes. When I was a kid, I wasn't very fiery. Now, I am. But, my younger one is fiery already. She has her own sense of values. She is more Americanized than my older one. She was born here. My younger daughter just started performing with me. She wasn't very interested in dance; she got into the Children's Theater. She auditioned and got into that. She was fascinated by the new music. She didn't like the

traditional dance, but she got into Mary and she just totally loves it. I think the closeness between me and my older daughter is because of the work we've been doing together.

PS: And you don't have any trouble being her teacher and her mother?

RR: Not at all. My younger one, a tiny bit. As her teacher, it's harder. (giggle) But also I tell her, "If you want to be with me, then you must be in the company." I travel so much that if she's part of the company, she gets to be with me. Otherwise, I find students who can stay with her. I'm constantly gone. But, she is so adjusting. She doesn't complain, which is very important. I try to be there for them as much as I can.

PS: How much of the time are you traveling?

RR: Every month I'm completely gone at least five or six days. If I go three days to Iowa and three days to Duluth. Sometimes it's a week residency in Winona. Evenings if I'm performing somewhere and Ashwini doesn't want to go or I'm in some kind of meeting. I also teach for Carleton and we have rehearsal for 15 days every evening. So from 7:30 - 10 o'clock I'm gone. So, if she's not part of it, she's going to be sitting home alone. Because most of my students are college students, they can't come during the day. But, during the day, Ashwini is gone to school.

PS: It's a balancing act. Are there any particular values that you want to make sure your kids get, or that you feel they have gotten?

RR: They have respect. One thing that Indian culture is the respect of elders and teachers. In one way, it is good. In another it is bad. The respect is great; fear is bad. In India, it's more fear than respect. You are afraid of your parents or in-laws or teacher or older people or authority. I was brought up with that and I still am afraid of all these things. Which makes life for me here very hard. If somebody says, "So, why are you doing that?" I get extremely panicky and my face and everything changes to fear. But, I would like my kids to retain the respect that we have for everything. When you go to the dance studio and you start dancing, there is so much respect for the teacher. You don't have to show it with any external things

like lighting the incense or anything. Its an internal thing. I know that my older daughter has it; and I know that my younger daughter doesn't. I hope she gets it also. It's the respect for the art and the teacher; for older people. Here, they have more of a friendship, which I admire totally. I wish my teacher was a friend of mine. But sometimes there is a line of difference; the respect slips a little bit. Maybe its also because I've wanted to be liked by others, I've let the teacher become my friend. If my kids retain that respect and love, I'll be really happy.

PS: Have you continued to be part of the Hindu religious community here?

RR: I've always been a Hindu. I'm a very God-loving person. I have my own alter, I pray everyday, I meditate, I'm a believer in a stronger power that guides me through everything. But, I am not a temple person. I've never actually really gone to the Hindu temple on Saturday. It's too distracting seeing people; it's more of a social thing. In India, it's different, you go to a temple and you have the feeling of a temple. Even in India, we usually go every year on a pilgrimage to a certain big temple. My father runs to temples a lot. But, I believe more in praying. One thing that's a big change in me; I used to want to pray for things. I'd pray for a dining table, a car or a baby doll for my daughter. But I don't. I think that was part of the religion; praying for material things. I think that my career and my job and satisfaction in life are more important. I've changed. I don't pray for things anymore. I just pray. That's been a big change that I've noticed in my life. I'm not praying for any particular thing. We have prayers for different things and my mother used to teach us all these things. Pray to get married. Pray to get a son. Pray to get this or that. Because of all the problems that we had, we went through two years of severe of problems before the marriage ended. During those two years, I completely gave up on religion because I thought "God is mean to be doing this to me." Then, one day I walked into my alter and looked into the book that I've been reading all my life. It said, "Pray to have a son, to have a good husband, and all this." And I said, "I've been praying for all these things. God gave me everything I really wanted. I've had all these things. I got them, but I didn't know if they were good for me or not." So, I'm going to pray, but I'm really not going to ask for anything because I don't know what is good for me or not. So, I guess in one way,

I've grown religiously in understanding religion in a way that I never did before. For example, at the Great Mother conference, I made a lot of friends and there was this woman. I talked with her and said, "I broke so many rules; I'm not married anymore. I'm not supposed to do these things." And she said, "You know, its easy to follow when you have somebody who gives you a religion. But its harder when you have your own set of values; your own beliefs. God is never going to punish you for that. It's harder to have your own than to follow. It's easy to follow." She had such a beautiful way of saying that. I think I have my own set of values which are from both cultures. I still have lots of important things from Indian culture that I don't think I ever can or will give up. But sometimes, its even hard to say what they are; they are so ingrown in me.

PS: Most of us cannot articulate our values. (laughter)

RR: I have given my kids - notice I'm saying I have given my kids instead of we has given the kids - because I think I was more responsible in whatever they have now is more from me than from both of us. The other day I went to school conferences. The teacher had both the kids because they went to Burnsville. She said, "Can you give me the recipe?" So, I have done really well raising the kids. There are many Indian families where the kids are so dissatisfied because they don't communication with their parents because their parents are not ready to accept any changes in their kids. They will say, "You cannot go to prom" but the kid goes anyway but the parents don't know about it. You must reach a point where the parents trust the child, but give them that freedom to grow up the way the other kids are, you already have done something for them. I have an Indian friend who calls me constantly. Even though she's not supportive of what happened, she's supportive of me. She likes me a lot. So, I tell her, my daughter often says to me, "Mom, you were not given the choice to do what you want. You are complaining and blaming it on your parents and that's fine because they did it. But, if we make our own decisions, we don't have anyone to blame; we blame ourselves. We should be given that choice. If it's good or bad, you can tell us, but in the end, the decision is our own. You only have yourself to blame." I believe it, but it depends upon the kids too, who you can trust and who you can't. Like my friend said, "If you say that, then they will go and date some American person and they'll get pregnant and it will be your fault." But, you know your

child and you know their capacity. If you have a child who doesn't understand, like I was 12 years old; my parents had led me to whatever I did. I don't know what else I might have done. But, you know your child's capacity. If your child is that mature, you should let them decide certain things for themselves after you have taught them the value. You can't hold on to them forever; you just can't.

PS: So you've given your children freedom as they are ready for it?

RR: Yes.

PS: And they haven't let you down so far?

RR: Not a bit. I know a lot of children whose parents want them to go to an Indian music concert, but they won't go. They always complain. Aparna, my daughter goes to every concert, not because she has to or because I want her to, but because she loves to. She has developed watching me. It has never been thrust to her; not you have to! This is the culture! You need to now the culture! It's been open and offered to her and she has accepted it.

PS: That's a big difference. Do you think you'll continue to go back to India to visit? You are going for the residency.

RR: I'm going to India and a friend of my parents are coming here and they want me to find housing for them. I called my parents and said, "I don't know what to do. I can't find an apartment for 15 days. I don't want to keep them in my house." My father said, "Just tell them that your husband is away and you can't and you don't know what to do." So, I knew that they hadn't told them. What do I do in India when I go? I'm still scared to say if I don't know another Indian person, I put myself in this really bad position to tell them "I'm separated." (in a whispered voice.) I'm so happy, why am I saying it that way? She has her own life. What does she know what I want in life? But I don't feel that way. So, if I go to India, my parents are not telling anybody that anything has happened. I don't want to lie. That's what bugs me most. If I don't lie, then they will be hurt; they have to face a whole bunch of people. They are extremely old fashioned and I don't want to hurt them. I don't know what to do. I sometimes think of going to India without even telling them. Just be all over

India without them even knowing I'm there.

My teacher wrote to me, "I'm completely with you. Whatever your decision is, I'm on your side. I support you 100%."

PS: This is your teacher in India?

RR: Yes. She's never been married. She's 37 and when she came here, she stayed with me for two weeks. At that time, Raj and I were not talking to each other at all. We took walks and the last day, I told her in the airport because I was so scared. And she said, "Ranee, you could have talked to me! She knows many families in India like that." India has changed and people are getting divorced. But, my family hasn't changed. It's not India. India is not going to look at me in any way.

PS: But your family will.

RR: And the people around are going to. So, I was afraid because my teacher is most important to me. She doesn't think that what happened was bad. I don't know how long I can dance. Maybe if I keep my body, and I take care of it really well, maybe another five, six or ten years. I can teach. But, this house, we have to sell after five years when my daughter goes to college. When she goes, I am by myself. Actually, my thinking has changed so much from other Indians. My mother came and she said, "Don't sell this house so your kids can come." I don't think of it like that. I think of me living alone in a small apartment; just walking around the lake; going to these shows. That's all I want. But Indian mentality "your great-grandchildren will come; save it for them. Their great-grandchildren's marriages will take place; save it for them." I cannot anymore communicate with any other Indians because I cannot think that way. I want to be alone. I just want to be by myself. My kids are grown up. I don't want to be a burden to them; I'll never go and live with them. But, if they want help, I'll do it. They can come and stay with me if they want, but I want just a one room apartment somewhere by Hennepin where I can walk around the lake. I drive all the way so I can walk around the lake. I think, I want to live there. This place where I'm living is temporary place. I don't feel this is mine. I don't know why, but I have completely changed. I used to be a person who used to go garage sales; from 8 in the morning, I used to cancel appointments so I could go to a garage sale. Or I would go

shopping and buy anything I see because it was cheap. I'm now so fulfilled with what I have that I don't need anything. Its hard for people to understand that because I don't think they have reached that stage. Why was I saying these things?

PS: To say how you don't fit in with Indian people anymore?

RR: Oh, yes, going to India. So, sometimes when I'm not able to dance, if there is no more interest in learning, how am I going to support myself. Sometimes one part of me thinks that I will go back to India and be my teacher's assistant, because she is alone. She's very rich; very well-known. She travels and she is the only daughter. Her mother fought with the entire family to make her into this professional person. Maybe I will assist her in India. My parents have a home in India; they aren't going to be alive for a very long time. They have some money, but they don't have anybody. Their two children are here. Maybe someday I'll go back and live there and continue as an assistant and do what I do. And, I still will be happy doing that.

PS: Even if your daughters stay here in the United States, you could live permanently in India?

RR: If I don't have any means of support, what would I do? An artists life is not easy. It's very hard. I don't make every month a set amount of money that can sustain me. I know that I can support myself till June. After that, who knows? Even with that, I went through this; that's fine, I can take care of myself. Because all I miss from when I was in a family was that there was somebody to put the garbage out. I can do that myself.

PS: That's a very unusual attitude among Indian women, I think.

RR: I was never dependent. I feel that in life, every body should be a little possessive. A man should be possessive of his wife and vice versa; literally. "It's mine." And when that is not there, you lose. Its like your kid; you're not holding them back, but the feeling of possessiveness makes you take care of that thing really well. There is only one thing in life that I really regret; it's that I lost my youth with no real companion. Maybe nobody has it; but I feel a lot of people do have that companionship or love.

PS: Like a soulmate?

RR: Yes. And, we had all the opportunities to be one. We didn't have anybody around to stop us from it, but it was just not there. I don't feel that we both didn't have it. I feel I didn't get it.

PS: He got what he needed, but you didn't get what you needed?

RR: I didn't get what I wanted. At one time, it was really strong that I felt I was a loser. That one part of me was gone and I rebelled and I was really hurt. But, I don't feel like that anymore. I think I'm also a survivor. I went to good counselors and talked to a lot of people. I think in the end I came to my own decision that I'll live one day at a time. Like my daughter said, "Don't think of yourself as a victim, Mom. Men don't think like that. How many people would give their lives to have what you have."

PS: Here you are; a famous dancer.

RR: Oh, I don't know.

PS: You're making a living at it. That's rare!

RR: Yeah.

PS: Are there any other things you would like to talk about?

RR: Are there any other things you'd like to ask?

PS: I've just really enjoyed this time with you. Are you satisfied?

RR: I think so. This was great. I love to talk so that was no problem!

PS: You do a fine job. This has been great. Thank you.