INTRODUCTION

The oral history interview in this volume is one of fifteen interviews that continue an oral history research project initiated by the India Association of Minnesota. In 1994 and 1995, the stories of fifteen immigrants of Asian Indian decent were recorded, transcribed and made part of the permanent collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. They are available through the Library of the Society's Minnesota History Center.

In 1996 the second phase of this project began to track the adjustment and development of the children of the narrators interviewed in the first project. Although the majority of these interviews are indeed with the children of the first generation, it was not possible in all cases to interview children, so some additional narrators have been included to provide balance and perspective.

The second generation narrators were either born in the United States or came here as very young children. At the time of the interviews the narrators were between 18 and 40 years of age, with the majority in their mid to late twenties. Most of them grew up in homes which were bi-lingual and in some cases even tri-lingual. They faced the challenges of understanding two cultures as young children. They found that the social lives of their parents revolved primarily around the Indian immigrant community, while their school lives often included few if any other Indian students. Some endured racist remarks from their classmates and/or teachers. Most have proven themselves to be apt scholars who moved through college and have proudly taken their place as young professionals. They firmly believe in their skills and in their ability to contribute to American society.

A major focus of these interviews was the passing on of cultures and values from one generation to the next. Many narrators also shared impressions and stories of visits to India. Some became fluent in two or more languages. Many can understand but cannot read or write their parent's spoken language. Some have embraced the food and dress of their parents, while others have become mainstream "American."

A recurring difference between the original immigrants and their children appears around the social issues of dating, marriage, and child-rearing. While the first generation largely followed the traditions of arranged marriage and traditional gender roles, these shifted dramatically in their children's generation. Several of these young narrators have married non-Indians. Most have chosen to marry for love rather than to follow a tradition of arranged marriage. Many did not yet have children at the time of the interviews. Those who did spoke of their concerns about sustaining their Indian culture and transferring information on language, food, and religion to their own children.

It has been my pleasure and privilege to interview these fine young people. While there is a danger in all generalizations, I found them to be a group who savored and appreciated their Indian roots, while planting their own lives firmly in American soil. In common

with the children of other immigrant groups in America, their life situations have been described as "living on the hyphen," unsure at times whether they are Indians living in America or Americans of Indian heritage. The hyphen between Indo-American is the place they gracefully occupy.

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