Nayana Ramakrishnan Narrator

Polly Sonifer Interviewer

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PS: This is Polly Sonifer, interviewing Nayana Ramakrishnan, on April 3, 2001. Good evening. How are you tonight?

NR: I'm fine, thank you.

PS: Good. Thanks for taking time to come and talk with me about for the India III Oral History Project. First of all, what part of India did you come from?

NR: I came from Maharashtra, which is in the western area of India. I came from the city of Pune. That's where I had lived just before emigrating here.

PS: Where were you born?

NR: I was born in Bombay.

PS: How did you get from Bombay to Pune?

NR: Well, actually, I was born in Bombay because my grandmother lived there, so my mother delivered there because there was family to help. And then soon after that, my father—actually, for the next five years, he went to Pune, which is in the southern part of India, and we lived there in a small cottage and that's where I went to school.

I think we left there when I was about five years of age, and we moved to Hyderabad for about six months, where his office was relocated, which is the Nutrition Institute of India. That was the only one at the time, and that was relocated to Hyderabad. So we lived there for six months, and then my father came to the United States and we moved to where my grandmother was living and had a house, in Pune, for about one and a half years while my father was here and we were waiting to get our visas to this country.

PS: How old were you when you came from India to Minnesota?

NR: I was exactly seven and a half years of age.

PS: What was that like for you?

NR: Well, it was certainly different. I had no conception of what the United States was, and definitely not what Minnesota was. We came here on January 26, 1961, basically one week after John F. Kennedy's inauguration. Not that I knew who he was or anything of the kind.

But we came in January to Minnesota, which was quite a shock in itself. My father had said it was cold. Our concept of cold was more or less Pune, Pune cold. Pune is located in a mountainous region, so it's more like a hill station, so we had to wear sweaters there. That was the extent of the cold that we knew about.

So if I ramble on, let me describe what clothing we had. Although my father said, "Make sure you have warm clothes," in most of his letters, what we did was, my grandmother took some of my grandfather's, who was deceased, his woolens, and had them altered to fit my sister and I, and sweaters from cashmere and we had little coats. Our outerwear was a cashmere shawl turned into a jacket for us.

In terms of shoes, that I cannot really remember, although I know that my feet were very cold so I can imagine they were just—I don't think they were slippers. I know we had socks. But they might have been open-toed. And actually, we landed in New York first because there was no such thing as KLM [airlines] coming into Minneapolis at the time—and Boeing or all of New York or something—all the airlines were on strike at that time. I think it was a Boeing strike or something, and instead of coming into Minneapolis then—you know, we were routed to come to Minneapolis; however, because of the strike, we were sort of shuttled around in New York between—there was no JFK [airport] at the time, so I remember the word LaGuardia and some other airport.

We were shuttled between those two, and I remember for two days we could not leave New York to join my father in Minneapolis. We had a hard time in New York because we really did not know anyone, we were not expecting to stay there. We were expecting to continue our journey on and be picked up by my father.

PS: So where did you stay?

NR: They put us up at a hotel that I recall was a very nice hotel. Everything was large, that was my first impression, coming from India. But they put us up in a hotel and we saw TV [television] for the first time, in our room. We didn't know what to order. We were very hungry and we were supposed to do room service and the bellboy who brought our suitcases up, he said, "Oh, you can order by room service," but we didn't know what room service meant.

And so we didn't do that for a while and then when he came back with more bags, he said, "Well, did you order from room service?"

We said, "We don't know what room service is."

He said, "All you do is you pick up the phone and order your food." So we didn't know what to order because we didn't know what kind of food. We were only sure of what our food was and we knew that that was not American food.

So my mother, who knew English but not very well, she picked up the phone and dialed and they said, "What would you like?" and she said, "Sandwich." They said, "What kind of sandwich?" She said, "Tomato." That's the only kind of sandwich she knew about, so we got tomato sandwiches, after this long journey. And on the journey my mother had heard so much from Indians who had actually taken a plane and so many people were trying to be helpful and tell her, "Well, make sure that your children don't eat on the flight because they'll throw up."

So what happened is, she did not let us eat on the flight very much, so we were just absolutely hungry when we got to New York. And at that time it was not a nine-hour journey or whatever. It was a very, very long journey. So I remember that we just were famished and the first thing my mother did is we went to a restaurant in New York, before all these other things were sorted out.

We walked into the restaurant and, again, didn't know what to order, so it was 6 a.m. or 7 a.m. in the morning and there was a black waitress there, and she must have looked at us and decided that we needed help. So she said, "Would you like pancakes?" and we said, "Pancakes? What's pancakes?" Anyway, that was a breakfast food, we found out. We had heard of cake. We had cake in India.

So we said, "Cake, that sounds good," so we ordered that, and she brought these flat-looking tortilla-type cakes, for us, like something called *dulces*, and we said, "This doesn't look like a cake." But anyway, we ate that. We liked it. We were eating it plain and then she came over and she said, "Oh, no. You should put syrup on it," and she helped us do that. So we had our first meal, and then after coming into the hotel we had our tomato sandwiches. So I do recall that.

I do remember we took a public bus from one airport to another because we did not have, I think, taxi fare or something, or certainly my mother did not want to spend that much money, or I don't recall really why. That was the first time we were exposed to anything and there was a drunk on our bus and we were very uncomfortable with that. I wasn't, because I didn't know what that meant, but my mother was very scared.

The bus driver actually helped quite a bit. He threw him out because he was constantly talking to us, sitting next to us, and obviously doing inappropriate things. We were terrified and my mother couldn't say anything, so this bus driver was very helpful. I do remember that, as a memory, as a flash.

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And I do remember being very cold. Everybody says, "Oh, what was New York like?" Well, we didn't really think about what New York was like. We just were trying to avoid slipping and

falling, so we never even looked up and saw any tall buildings at all.

PS: So it was cold and snowy there as well, that January?

NR: Right, exactly. So then we came to Minneapolis. I think I've lost what your question was all about.

PS: You're exactly answering it. So when you first got off the plane in Minneapolis, what was that moment like?

NR: Oh, it was great. My father was there. We saw him from a window. The current airport was not built at the time. You know that little tower that's still there? That was the only thing I remember. That, to me, was the airport. It was an observation tower or something. We saw my father looking from above, because people couldn't come straight to the plane or something at the time, or whatever. We were so relieved to see him, especially my mother. You could see she was visibly relieved to see him.

Then we got out of there and my father said, "I brought our car." Well, it was a major thing, having a car. We'd never owned a car before. We saw all these cars in the parking lot. I was expecting one of them to be ours, one of the red ones or, you know, very spiffy-looking cars. My father took us to this old Dodge and I had a little disappointment. This car looked too Indian, like something that I had already seen, whereas the other cars looked very nice. That was my first impression.

I did not remember feeling cold at the time. Maybe we'd become used to it or something. My father had brought some coats of some friends to us at the time and I'm sure that helped.

PS: You said your mother spoke a little bit of English?

NR: Yes.

PS: Did you speak any?

NR: Yes. My sister and I both were in convent school, so we knew English. However, it was the convent English. I still could not understand American English at the time very well, unless they spoke very slowly. It was a different English, but we did know English.

PS: How old was your sister?

NR: She was eleven and a half.

PS: So she was quite a lot older than you. Are you the only two children in the family?

NR: My younger sister was born here about two years later, after we came here.

PS: So you're spread way out.

NR: Right.

PS: Why did your father decide to leave India?

NR: That's a little hazy to me, because I was a child and I didn't really know the politics of it, but I believe he was unhappy with the work that he was doing, or the fact that he was not being promoted, as he should have been, for his experience. He was a Ph.D. and he had some other younger people working, promoted. He was a hard worker and a good researcher, etc.

Actually, what happened is, he would have stayed, except for the fact that many years before—my father was in this country for about two years, in 1953 and '54. He came here as a, I don't know, was it maybe a government exchange program, and he came to do research in Cleveland, so he was in Cleveland for about two years.

He met several people, and one of his bosses, he joined the University of Minnesota as head of the Department of Anatomy. They were going to set up the Department of Anatomy and he was asked to be the head, and at that time, he remembered my father and he sent all the paperwork and gave him an offer, whether he would like to join. My father did think long and hard about that, I think. It was a major step to leave your country, to come here on a piece of paper. He didn't know really what that meant. But it was an opportunity, although my father, I don't think was a big risk-taker, he took that risk. Maybe it was just the right time for him to leave. So it was very unusual in those days to go outside of India.

PS: What year was that?

NR: He came here in 1959, the second time.

PS: Were there any other Indian families here when you arrived?

NR: There were no families but there were students. There were about two or three students that we knew about. I don't think there were any others but there might have been. Oh, and there was one family, meaning husband and wife, was here but had left. You know, as students, you do that. You stay for a while.

But we were the first ones who came there to stay. We didn't come as students, to finish our Ph.D.s or anything like that. We came as the first family to live there and work. But there were, yes, I do recall a few students.

PS: What kind of visa did he come on? Do you know?

NR: I think he came on a green card.

PS: And he never had any thoughts about, shall I stay or shall I not?

NR: Oh, yes. At the time, he did. At the time we were told that, would you like to go to the United States? We were given a choice by my grandmother. Or would you like to stay with me here and your mother can go there, and then she'll come in about a year, a year and a half. They were unsure what to do with us, whether to transplant us or whether they should just stay there for a year or a year and a half and then come back. Because once the kids come too, then there's less of a chance of coming back.

PS: To India?

NR: Right. I remember my grandmother gave us the choice that we could stay there and continue with her, or go. My sister and I both said, "No, we want to go to America, we want to go to America," not knowing what that meant, but it was a big deal.

PS: What did you imagine that America would be like?

NR: I didn't have any thoughts about what it would be like. Just everyone seemed to give us a lot of attention when we said that, especially in school. When we said, "We're going to America," my teacher would say, "You're going to America. Wow." And then she would tell the class. Or any time anybody heard that, that we were going to America, they gave us more attention than whatever. So I knew that going to America was something very special. That's about all though—I was a seven-and-a-half-year-old.

PS: But you hadn't seen any picture books or read stories about America, or you didn't have any ideas about what America was like?

NR: Right. Not too many, not too many. I don't think my parents thought that we should be prepared for what we would see. Where parents go, the children go. They said, "Well, whatever it is, we'll adjust to it." The thing is, my father was very good at—within his department, he was very close to the people there. Everyone used to say, "Oh, when your children come, do this. When your children come, buy a house." They used to guide him quite a bit because he also was completely unfamiliar with this country and what to do, but everyone was extremely helpful to him. So no, we had no idea what America meant.

I remember playing a game with my cousins because we were all very close as a big family unit, and we made up a plan. "We are going to Minny-sota." I mean, our own language. "Minny-sota." Whatever that meant, they were just words.

PS: So you knew for about a year and a half that you were going to go?

NR: Yes, that's right. We thought so. The year and a half, actually, it should have been a lot less time, but for a lot of visa complications. The visa office in Bombay. My mother would go from Pune to Bombay on the train because they'd call her to answer some questions. She'd go there. Sometimes you had to bring everyone who's going, so then she'd have to take us also, and then they'd ask her a bunch of questions and she wouldn't know how to answer them so she would send a letter to my father, asking these questions. And then he would find whatever paperwork and send it back, and then four months later they'd call her again and say, "Oh, there are still a few more questions that we have, or a few more documents that we need."

So they really kind of made her life miserable. I remember her crying quite a few times, just because she was frustrated. She was being led around by them. I think the visas finally came, and I remember, it was a very joyful event. Everyone was saying, "Oh, you're going, finally going," etc., and so we were also happy. I didn't know why, but, you know, we were children. It was my mother that took the brunt of that.

PS: So it was the end of January when you came to Minnesota and it was cold here. What are some of the first things that you remember after you arrived?

NR: Well, within a week—I'm not sure certainly what day we arrived, but very, very soon, I remember going to the school that we were going to. My father wasted no time having us stay at home to do anything like just watch TV, which was all we were inclined to do in those early days. We didn't want to go outside because it was too cold and we didn't have friends to talk to. So basically eating, sleeping, and watching television, the first early days.

So my father took us to the school that—there were two schools. I was going into elementary school, obviously. My older sister was going into high school because she was eleven and a half. [The local school, Marshall High School, had grades six through twelve.] They gave me some tests and I took the tests and they decided that I was really two grades ahead, but socially, I should not be two grades ahead. So they put me back one year.

PS: So what grade did you start in?

NR: I started in third grade, but I should have been in fourth, for my level. But I was still one whole year younger than all the other children. Otherwise, I would have been two years younger than all the other children. That's totally a no-no here for social reasons. Obviously, the education system in India is much more rigorous.

I remember that after they did that, I was an extremely shy youngster so I hardly spoke, so obviously I was not going to go two grades ahead. But I was, I think appropriately, placed in third grade, at seven and a half.

PS: What school did you attend?

NR: It was called Marcy Elementary and I'm not sure if it exists anymore. It was in the southeast area, very close to the University of Minnesota. We lived in a duplex in a very old building, which was a duplex. It had two bedrooms, a kitchen, just the basics. So yes, I do recall that the administrator or the principal spoke to us, and I was the only minority in the whole school. They said, "It's going to be difficult for her. She doesn't know the language that well, even though she—written and vocabulary and those things, you know, academically, she knows her language and her math and science, etc."

I tested very low for other things, I think, must be. What they did was they tried to find some kind of peer mentor and they found a girl named Mary, whose father was a U.S. congressman, who lived in that district. Don Fraser's daughter. I don't know if you know who Don Fraser is. He was mayor of Minneapolis but before that he was a U.S. congressperson. His daughter was asked to be my mentor because she lived two blocks away.

So what she had to do, her job was to bring me home every day, and pick me up and then drop me for lunch. At that time you came home for lunch. They didn't have a cafeteria. So she had to basically—she had to come early to pick me up from home to school, and then at lunchtime, drop me at home, go to her house, eat her lunch, come back to my house, pick me up and take me to school, and in the afternoon, drop me back at my house. This went on for about a week, until I started to know my way around. But until they knew that I knew my way, they kept me mentored, which was probably a very good idea, otherwise I'd have been lost in the snow.

PS: Did you become friends with Mary after a while?

NR: You know, I didn't. I do recall, it was mostly a very silent thing. She was doing her obligated thing to pick me up. And one day I just really did not want to go to school. I was watching "Felix the Cat" when I had come home for lunch and I just, in my own Marathi language, I said, "I'm not going to school, I'm not going to school," and here was Mary, witnessing the whole thing. And I remember, her eyes rolled.

Because I think I just probably did not like school, initially. I really did not have friends, and I just sat in a corner and only when I absolutely had to speak, I spoke. Not that anyone was unkind. They wouldn't even tease me. I was really that different that I don't think that they would even tease me, because they didn't know what to tease about it. Everything about me was different.

PS: Were you wearing traditional Indian clothing at that time?

NR: You know, I wasn't. I was wearing frocks. They were supposedly Western clothes. They were homemade frocks from India, with cottons and with lace, and that's not the kind of clothes that the children there used. And my parents, at that time, obviously, they were just getting settled, they did not put a high priority on making sure that we dressed the way other kids

dressed and looked the way other kids looked.

Every morning my mother would wake us up and she'd plait our hair, braid our hair. Two braids for each of us. She gave us a breakfast, and she gave us a sandwich [for lunch]—well, not in elementary, but anyway. We did look different. We did act different.

I do have one little story. Since I was not much of a talker, very shy, once when school was going on, it was either the first day or the second day, there was a little girl named Wendy Smith sitting next to me and I said, "Where's the bathroom?" And she said, "What?" She didn't understand.

And these are the first words I've spoken to anyone, and she said, "What?" and I said, "Where's the bathroom?"

She said, "What?" I had to go very badly, and I screamed it, so the teacher even heard. "Where is the bathroom?"

She said, "Oh, the bathroom." And she said, "Right there."

I asked, "Do I have to tell the teacher?"

She said, "No, you can just go." So she did understand me. Thank God I knew that much English. So I went and used the facilities.

But that did make me talk. Otherwise I was pretty silent. I would do my work. If there were papers to be written I was very good. I was a regular bookworm so that was not a problem. But I just would not speak because I just did not feel comfortable speaking.

PS: Had you been a shy nonspeaker in India as well?

NR: Yes.

PS: So that was your basic temperament, as a child.

NR: Yes, correct. I think this made me go in my shell even more. I don't know when I started emerging.

PS: How long did it take before you felt more comfortable using English and more comfortable in the school?

NR: If I knew the answer to something I would raise my hand or something. I don't think the first year I did very well because we had actually come in mid-term. School started in September and we only joined in February because we had come January 27th or 28th to Minneapolis. So it

was early February when we started school, so we just had a few months.

Somehow those months just went. I don't have too many memories of those months. They were just very hard months. I just remember the snow and how cold it was and tolerating everything. Indian kids, and especially in our family, we were not used to complaining to our parents, or telling them what's bothering us, and they never really thought to ask us.

They were not American parents. They were Indian parents. They sent us to school, you go to school. There's no questions asked, they don't ask you how things went today, and did anybody tease you. They basically asked you, how's homework, are you learning something. Concentrate on the academics.

The one sort of consolation or one friend that I always had was books. In fact, I recall that first week of school, they took me to the library, the school library. They were giving me an orientation of the whole school. Somebody was, I'm not sure who. But then they took me to the library and I saw all these books, these marvelous books. They said, "Every day you can have two, but only two books a day." That was just perfectly all right.

So every day I used to take two books, and then the first thing I did on each of the books was write my name on them because that was an Indian thing. When you get a book you write your name, so you immediately know it's not anybody else's. Then what happened is, I got a call shortly after. The teacher got a call and I'm sent to the principal's office. They said, "Why have you defaced all the books? Look at your name on these six or eight books."

I had it in four places. I had it on the side. I put my name, "Nayana." And in the inside and the back, and just about everywhere. So in four places in about six to eight books. When they asked me, "Why did you put name on there?" I wouldn't answer. I thought I'd done something bad, but I didn't know what it was. I didn't answer.

Then I think somebody, one of the administrators or the principal, figured out and said, "Do you know what a library is?" I didn't know what a library was. I didn't know what you do there. "Do you know that you're supposed to borrow the books? You don't get to keep them. You borrow them and then you return them." So I got that concept down. After that I used to take out plenty of books, but I didn't put my name on them.

PS: Simple misunderstandings.

NR: That's how you learn your concepts.

PS: The school, after that, understood that it was just a mistake?

NR: They understood. They did not do anything further.

PS: Who were the people that helped your family adjust?

NR: As I said, my father's office, a lot of helpful people. One of the professors, her name was Annamarie Carpenter, she took a special interest in us. She used to tell my father all the things, how to get a mortgage, how you should buy a house, what are all the things you should do.

And another professor who had just joined, his name was Dr. [Morris] Smithberg. They were all colleagues of my father and especially the head of the department, Dr. Arnold Lazarow, and his wife Jane. They were very helpful.

I remember going there. This was the first time we had been to any American family's home. They met us at the door and she was very gracious and, "Oh, these are the children. How sweet." She made a big deal about us and whatnot. Manners in India and Western manners are different. In India, you don't necessarily say "Enchanté" or "Good evening" or put your hand out. Especially children are not taught those manners.

And there's no such thing as table manners because in India when we were growing up, we sat on the floor. There was a wooden platform, there was a plate. Kids were always asked to eat first. They had special treatment. The parents or whoever the ladies of the house were, they would just put food on the table and you would eat with your hands. The biggest part of the manners in India is you only get your fingers dirty, you don't get the palm dirty, and you always reach for something with your left hand and not your right.

But we had never used silverware in our lives. I think the only time we knew about any kind of silverware was we knew a spoon, for ice cream or something. But everything else was eaten with the hands. It was funny, when we first sat down at the table. It was a beautifully laid out, elegant table, with a chandelier and centerpiece, and in some ways I think we were all intimidated.

But they were not all judgmental about our manners or anything else. We watched what other people were doing, especially my mother. But she was watching all the time to see which knife you use or when you use the knife, when you use the fork and spoon, etc. It was fun. She made it fun. She had some ice cream that was shaped like a Santa or some object, which was really nice. We enjoyed that. It was sure a nice evening.

PS: So you actually used the silverware that night?

NR: Yes, we did. After coming to this country, we had forks and spoons and everything. Just with Indian food it was always the hands, but little by little we did get accustomed to it. I don't know when the transition happened.

PS: What kind of food did you have in your own house?

NR: My mother always made Indian food. I don't think she knew how to cook any other food.

Later what happened is, somebody introduced us to pizza, so I know a few years down the road we used to have pizza. When we went into high school she always packed our lunches with a sandwich, and somebody had taught her how to make a sandwich. Somebody meaning, I think my father would take two pieces of bread, put a slice of meat in it, and that's it, so that was her concept of a sandwich. She really didn't know that you could put so many other things into it to make it. Every day we would get that sandwich, a piece of baloney or something like that.

We were not vegetarians, we were not strict vegetarians. My father had introduced us to meat in India, although that was very rare because it was not something that you had very often. I just remember having mutton curry once in a while in Pune. In this country, whatever was put in front of us, we ate. My mother, very reluctantly, and she did have meat for a very short time, because my father said, "Here, that's what you have to eat when you go out," but she soon realized you don't have to and she dropped it.

For the last twenty-five years, thirty years, she's been a vegetarian. She always made rice and *chipotes*, which is a traditional Indian food, and curry and something wet, like a lentil. You probably are familiar with the food.

PS: I am.

NR: Every night when my father would come home, we'd have dinner. We'd wait for him to come and we'd have an early dinner. The food habits were still very Indian.

PS: But you ate it with forks and knives and spoons?

NR: Indian food? Not *chipotes*. I think at home we still ate with our hands. Oh, occasionally we would have the—now, I think we all eat Indian food with cutlery but once in a while it's still nice to wash your hands and eat it with your hands.

PS: How did you stay connected to your family in India during those early years when you were here, and I'm assuming most of your extended family was still back there.

NR: Absolutely. Every single family member was still back in India. Letters. I don't think we wrote very many. We were not asked to write letters at that time. I wish my mother had said, "Write to your cousin," or something. It's a blur to me how we really kept connected. My parents kept connected with letters.

I remember every time a letter came. My mother, in fact, every day would go to the mailbox and look for a letter from home. When she got one it was a joyful occasion. She would read it to all of us, usually from my grandmother or aunt or somebody, telling us news about what was going on there.

PS: Did you go back to India to visit?

NR: You know, at the time we didn't. My first visit back to India was—let's see, we came in 1961 and I went in 1972, so my first visit was when I was eighteen, almost nineteen. So that was rather late. My mother had gone in 1968. That was her first visit back. So even she went only after six years, six or seven years after being in this country, and she took my younger sister with her, who was five at the time. But we stayed home. We stayed in Minnesota. My sister was engaged at that time. She was engaged at eighteen.

PS: Your older sister?

NR: Yes. I remember, she was going to look after my father and me for that summer when my mother went. But I went only when I was eighteen, so 1972.

PS: How did you feel about getting left home when your mother and younger sister were going?

NR: I didn't like it but we never complained. We were really good children. I look at my own children and say, "What a difference in attitude." We did not question anything that my parents did or we did not ask or say, "Oh, we need better clothes because people are making fun of us," or "We don't look like everyone else." Those were not important. We didn't think that we should ask our parents that, even. We just were very unquestioning. We just did everything that we were supposed to. I don't know. Some of it was personality and some of it was culture.

PS: If we could transplant that culture into our kids' lives. What language did your family speak at home?

NR: Marathi.

PS: What was that like for you, having one language that you spoke at school and another that you spoke at home?

NR: I don't recall that it presented too much of a problem. At home we would speak Marathi and at school we would speak English. But then maybe we always knew that we'd be going to English medium schools. Even in India, the different schools that we went to, they were always convents. We had a command of English so we would have done that anyway in India, too.

PS: The convent schools are Catholic schools?

NR: They're Catholic schools, right. Not that I remember much about the religion. The only thing I remember is when you saw a nun you were supposed to do this.

PS: The cross sign.

NR: And we didn't even really know why. We just knew it was the sign of the cross. It was just

like someone, when they see their officer, they salute, so we did that, without having any knowledge of why.

PS: So it had no meaning for you, you just went through the motions. Your family religion was what?

NR: Hindu.

PS: Did your family practice its religion?

NR: Yes. We were practicing Hindus but that also—our family, I think, was not very orthodox. My grandfather worked as the director general of archaeology in India at the time of the British rule, and he worked—in fact, his main work was the Indus Valley civilization. He did the excavations for that and that was major. It was not the usual job that people at that time had. He had a huge home in Delhi, he was very successful, he was well known. By Indian standards at the time, he had a very big salary. Things like that.

So a little more exposed than most families, a little more progressive. In terms of Hinduism, we did. We had our deities and we did—but we were very conscious of the different rites and different rituals and things like that.

PS: How about the holidays?

NR: Oh, yes. We celebrated those very much. I remember in India, in Pune, my grandmother's house—she had a house in India, in Pune, so everyone, all my cousins, my father's other brother's, their children would be coming for Diwali, you know, Deepaawali or Diwali season. It was about two weeks and we'd all spend time together.

I remember my mother and grandmother working hard to make the different food delicacies and keeping things on hand because guests were going to come. And we always had those firecrackers that we lit and it was just fun times. We told ghost stories way into the night and things like that. I have nice memories of that.

PS: Did your parents continue to celebrate those holidays when you came to Minnesota?

NR: You know, they did, but it was just never, ever the same because what makes Christmas Christmas is the lights and the shopping and the people who celebrate it. Now, if you were just by yourself, I don't think you would really do that. But it's the whole atmosphere that makes the holiday what it is. And since there was no atmosphere here we—I think my mother made sweets on that day and that's about it.

So we had a very subdued holiday for many years, until there were more Indians in Minnesota. Then there were a few families that trickled in, in the early sixties and mid-sixties, and towards

the late sixties we had quite a good gathering. And at that time we used to gather with—it didn't matter to us which linguistic group they were. As long as they were Indians, there was a bond. Now, I think, because of the number of Indians, they try to seek their own kind, which is their own linguistic group or something. Something has been lost over the years, I think.

I think the Gadas came in the late sixties, so we got to know them but we had known so many other families. I don't know if you've interviewed Niru Misra, her family. So we were good friends with them. She and I were very good friends, although there's a four-year age difference. She was the only other Indian friend we had.

And then there were a couple of others who were here for a short time but didn't stay very long, so she and I really were good friends here. I know our parents used to get together quite often and it was always nice to have another friend. Then there was Aparna and Mukul Ganguli. I don't know if you've interviewed them. They were here. Although their daughter was not in our age group. I just remember her as a little girl, so I didn't really play with her, but they were there. Then there was another Patel family and a few others.

It's sort of hard to remember when they came because it's all been different. I just know that over time there were so many more and then the first Maharashtran family that moved into the Twin Cities or couples we used to have a little more contact with. In the seventies, there were a few students that came and then they brought their wives. They went back to India and brought their wives and that started new branches. I just remember everybody here coming as a bride at some time or other. I don't remember. I'm sure that whatever you were asking me I'm not answering.

PS: Oh, you're doing fine. You're doing fine. Let's talk a little bit more about school for you. In your family there was just three girls, right?

NR: Right.

PS: How did your family value that formal education?

NR: Oh, very much. Since my father was a Ph.D., he had done his Ph.D. in India, in Bombay, in biochemistry. His father before him, he built his whole career on education because he came from an extremely, excruciatingly poor family, that the only asset they had, he and his brothers and sisters and mother, widowed mother, was his brain. That was the only asset.

And he was such a good student that he came number one in all of Maharashtra or all India or was a gold medalist, and that was supposed to be a big deal. He didn't have enough money for school but because of scholarships, he went all the way through, etc., so education was just absolutely, in our family, important and every one of my father's brothers were all very well educated

One was a doctor, one was a Master's in something, and my father and one of his other—in my mother's family it was not quite the same—my grandfather from my mother's side was in the construction business but he was also an engineer, so still, education was important. It was not a trade or something that was their occupation.

But Maharashtra in those days was very poor. People really did not have a lot of resources. It was not a wealthy community. Everyone was sort of the same that way. It was a struggle. My mother, when she was—when my father found my mother or they found my mother for my father, my father's family's social standing was so high, sort of comparatively. People said, "Oh, you're marrying into the Dixit family," because they were quite a bit well known. So that was a source of pride for them that they're sending their daughter into this—and my mother's family is very poor, also.

But my father's family—by that time, my grandfather had just died and that's when they got married. I think there was a custom that when the head of the family dies, within the year, you marry off your child, or you wait for another year or two, something like that. And so it was not rushed, but they had to observe that custom. It's a custom, definitely not a religious thing.

So yes, education was very much stressed, and even for us. We were all good students. My sister and I were good students, although we didn't do much with it. We got married rather early and sort of derailed, I think. I remember doing everything in this country, going through school, taking the SAT, taking the ACT, [college placement tests] and the PSAT, [preparatory test] and whatever, and performing pretty well. And then going to the University of Minnesota. I'm jumping now into the next decade.

PS: That's where I want to go to, anyway. Let's just spend a little bit of time talking about what it was like being a teenager. I would imagine that it was a little odd being in this Indian family when your peers were dating and doing all those things.

NR: Right. Although in those days, dating was not as big a deal. When you walked through the halls, you knew who dated and who didn't, and I was always with the nerdy, sort of the ones who were not the popular crowd. So we had a little more leeway. In some ways I think that gives you more freedom to be anything because once you don't fit in, it doesn't matter how you don't fit in.

I remember one of my good friends was an extremely shy girl who never spoke. I mean, I was shy, but this was way beyond that. And another girl who was a little fat or something and she was not very popular, and another one who was very smart. I shouldn't label everyone as that's why they didn't fit in because who knows what makes you not fit in. Maybe it's even a choice, and for me, it might have been even a choice that I'd rather not fit in. Because then you have to go through certain things. You have to dress really well. The ones who were popular were the ones who were very well dressed and that's something we just could not aspire to at all.

PS: Because your family lacked the means for that?

NR: No, because the sensibility of that. It was just not important. I just remember once telling my mother, before we went to a special occasion, we were going to see *Gone With the Wind*—this was in eighth grade or ninth grade, or something like that. My sister was out of high school. She was going to her first year of college at the U.

I remember that night I cried and I cried to my mother, saying, "I don't have any clothes to wear. I wear the same things." And she said, "I think you have nice clothes." I said, "What nice things? They're horrible clothes." This was the first I had asked her or, you know, felt that this is so terrible and she didn't realize that until now because we were not very forthcoming about these things. So it wasn't her fault.

I said, "No, I have the worst clothes in the whole school." We couldn't do anything about it because this is nine or ten at night and we're going on a field trip the next day to *Gone With the Wind*, and our teacher told us, "Now, dress well, because we're going out." So that night I just threw a tantrum. My older sister said, "I'll bring you something," and she did the next day, in class.

So I had a black and white skirt, which I always wore, and then a green top, and what happened is, she came to one of my earlier classes. She dropped off a scarf, just to make it a little dressier, whatever it was. When I think about it now, it was such a sweet thing to do, that she took time from her school, she bought it wherever, maybe Grey's Drug in Dinkytown and she brought it over.

I was in Marshall High School, which was Marshall at that time, in the southeast area. She came to my French class. I remember there was a knock at the door and my French teacher opened it. She said, "It's for you." I was called "Nina." I was known as Nina throughout my elementary and high school years. For some reason they just could not say "Nayana," or I didn't insist on it. And after a while when they asked me my name I said, "Nina." So she brought that over to me and I remember being very snotty to her. "Thanks," and just taking it. To my older sister. I've apologized to her. But I remember wearing that and going to—but we just did not have nice clothes.

Another thing I remember, just completely off the subject—but when I went to Marshall I started seventh grade. I don't recall how old I was, but one year younger than all my classmates. My mother always made our frocks or dresses and she always made them bouffant, or I don't know what you would call it. I can't describe it on the tape but like that.

PS: Poofy skirts.

NR: Poofy skirts and dresses. These boys would look under it. I remember that. It was so humiliating to have that happen. They used to do it to anybody, but ours, I think, were especially

good for that, maybe, because they were so much material and everyone else was wearing straight A-line skirts and whatever. I do remember that, and I don't think I told my mother. How horrible that we didn't tell her something like that. I think we just wore tights underneath and things like that.

There were a lot of social and cultural things that were very different here. But in India, I suppose, you have girls' hair pulled or something like that. I mean, boys are no worse here than they are there. They'll do something to tease a girl or whatever. Putting a braid in an inkpot or whatever. That's universal.

PS: We don't have inkpots anymore. That's why God gave us ballpoint pens, to save our hair. Were you never interested in the dating?

NR: I might have been interested. I certainly remember I liked certain boys. I won't name them, but they were usually very popular boys. They were never sports athletes. They were always the intellectuals that I liked, the ones who always had 'A's in class or had very high scores. But I would never act as if I was interested in anybody and they never acted as if they were interested in me, either. I didn't even recall having any boy friends.

My daughter has friends that are boys all the time, and both my daughters have and they still do. To me, I just couldn't believe that you could do that, or whatever. Not that I wouldn't speak to boys at all, but only when I was asked a question or only if I was in a project with them or something.

But no, we didn't date at all. I wouldn't even know how to approach my parents and say, "Well, I'd like to date." You would never even think of asking them, "Can I date? Can I go with someone?" or "Can I go to a movie with someone?" I never went to the prom, I never went to any of the dances. I remember going to sleepovers with my friends, with my girlfriends, and parties and birthdays and things like that.

Let's see, what else did we do for fun? Not as much as what my kids seem to do, which, every weekend it was—my mother didn't drive for all the years that I was—so it was very hard to ask my father to drive us somewhere. So because of that, I remember, at a very early age, knowing how to take the bus from where we were, going all the way downtown, and sometimes having to transfer and take another bus to get to my friend's house. So I was pretty familiar with the bus routes. They were less complicated than they are now, anyway. So I used to do that. I used to get money enough for that.

We used to get an allowance. That was another major thing that I had never heard of, allowance. When we came to this country, my father, after a couple of years, I used to get twenty-five cents a week and my sister would get a dollar. She'd have to get a lunch with it, with that money.

PS: And that wasn't a part of the tradition in India?

NR: No. Maybe they do that now. I'm sure kids get spending money now.

PS: But not then. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities in high school?

NR: Yes. I was part of the Girl Scouts. At an early age, my parents put me into Girl Scouts. At first I was a Brownie. I remember starting in third grade, the year that I came. I didn't know what that was. I think it really helped me to get to know some of the girls, but I was still an odd person because I just really didn't warm to anybody or they didn't warm to me.

I did have friends. In some ways I think I might have even been a trophy for some of the girls because everybody used to say, "Oh, she's my best friend." That was me. I didn't know you had the concept of a best friend but there were kids who would sort of take me over and say, oh, here's somebody special, somebody different, who was not—so I remember a couple of girls asked me, "Are you her best friend or are you my best friend?" And I'd say, "I don't know. I'm your best friend." And then somebody would say, "Oh, I thought you were my best friend." I'm her best friend. So, in a sense, I was sort of pulled in many different directions but I think I felt good to be wanted.

PS: So in spite of being shy, these people sought you out?

NR: Yes, they did.

PS: As least the nerdy kids, as you said earlier

NR: No, these were popular kids.

PS: Oh, really?

NR: Yes. That was in my early years, and I was invited to birthday parties and things. You know, maybe Minnesota is different than where I'd gone to, I don't know where else. But I think they were accepting. It's not that they shut me out, they just didn't know what to do with me sometimes, and I was not one of those outgoing children. I was very withdrawn so it was partly my own fault.

PS: Minnesota was a lot different then.

NR: Maybe Mississippi or something.

PS: I've heard stories about that, too.

What did you do after high school?

NR: When I graduated from high school, there was no question of where I was going to go to college. That's such a big question these days for all graduating seniors. I just knew I would go to the University of Minnesota. That's where my father worked; we lived a mile away from campus.

We bought a home very close to—you know, Stinson Avenue and 18th Avenue, so around there. My father, every day at seven-thirty in the morning, would take his car out of the garage, and if we were ready then we would get a ride to, whether it was high school or college. So we were so close, it was understood that we would go to the University of Minnesota. Both my sister and I went there. She got married when she was barely nineteen, and then she moved to Michigan.

PS: Who did she marry?

NR: She married a professor. He wasn't a professor at the time. He was a graduate student. He was doing his Ph.D. in mathematics. There's about an eight- to nine-year age difference between them. My sister was a very—she was the outgoing person in our family.

Our house, we were actually the first homeowners, Indian homeowners in the Twin Cities, so after we bought our house, then people started to think, "Well, maybe we should buy a house, too." But it was not done in those days. My parents bought their house in 1963 or something. My little sister was just a baby at the time. And after that, we lived in that house throughout. It was just sold very recently.

PS: Do your parents—

NR: My parents, no. My father died in 1998. Before that, he and my mother had moved from that house to live with us, in my house. We had a special downstairs built just for them, so it was like a mother-in-law apartment, with two bedrooms and a very nice area. My parents had given my sister, my youngest sister, that house. She was a single woman and she could use the house. But anyway, we had our house since then, so we were just a block away from the U. I don't know what I was trying to tell you.

PS: After high school, you went to the university.

NR: The University of Minnesota, right.

PS: What did you study there?

NR: I studied psychology, although the first two years was just distribution requirements. By that time, I just wanted to take a lot of different classes. I took Sanskrit my first year because I'd not taken a Sanskrit class. I remember working very hard in that class, working two hours a day in that class, as opposed to all the other classes. I took that, I took French, college-level French.

I took a lot of history classes on India, Indian history and Indian art, and so whenever I found a class that offered something about Indian history or art or anything, I used to take it. I don't know why, maybe I just felt a need to do that, because I didn't have to. I could have taken anything else. I could have taken European history or any other, but it was distribution requirements and you could take it in this and you could take it in that, so I preferred to take it in the class that I wanted to. I took some biology classes and this and that. I was definitely looking around for a career, and maybe not taking things too seriously at that time. Being in college was just a new feeling of great freedom.

PS: So how did you settle on psychology?

NR: I really don't know, because I think I did better in some of the other classes. But psychology was just something that, at that time, so many people were interested in. If you went into psychology you could be a psychologist. It sounded very glamorous to me. I think I just wanted to do that. Although, even though I did get my degree in psychology and actually, I took a lot of credits in child psychology, after I graduated from college and everything, I went into programming.

PS: Computer programming?

NR: Right. I went to Control Data Institute and did a six-month course in programming. It made me very employable, because after a degree in psychology, I still did not have a career because you really do have to have a master's or a Ph.D. By that time I was married and my focus had changed. The good student turned into somebody who was a little too flighty and wanted to discover the world in different ways and not really study too hard anymore and things like that.

PS: So how did you get married? Tell me the story about how you managed that.

NR: When I was a student at the university, there was an organization here called the Indo-American Club and by that time—I graduated from high school in 1970—at that time there were a lot of Indian students here at that U. They were mostly in business or engineering. Chemical engineering had a lot of people.

So we had parties. I remember going to parties that had these students and my husband happened to be one of those students. I just remember about ten or twelve or maybe fifteen students, totally. There was organization called Indo-American Club that brought people together, Indians and American. I remember being a board member of that, as a student, just as an extracurricular activity or whatever.

My husband at that time—I mean, a student at that time—was vice president. This is a very complicated story. At that time, the India-Pakistan war over Bangladesh had flared up and my mother's basement, because we had the one house that everyone knew about, close to campus. There were so many clothes donated and it was all collected in our basement, so my husband,

Ram, would come to see what to do and to package it, and at that time when he came, of course, I would flirt with him or whatever, at the time. He asked me out.

This was my first date with the first person, except for parties, which I'd gone to. But the first person who ever really asked me that I accepted because I had had offers before but I didn't think of them as real dating opportunities. I was friendly to anyone that was an Indian, but I thought of them more as my parents' friends. Any Indian was my parents' friend. And if they said, "Would you like to go to a movie or something?" I'd say no, because I would think of them as somebody who should be my parents' friend, not mine.

But this was the first person that I agreed to go out with. He asked me to go to the Ice Capades. I don't know if you'd like this story because I do remember it. I said, "Sorry, I don't date." I remember saying that. But I told my parents that he'd called and they liked him because he had come and he was very respectful and whatever.

So they said, "No, no. Tell him to come here and he can have coffee or something." So I asked him, "Would you like to come for coffee instead?" And he said, "Yes, fine." So he came over and my parents said, "He'll be uncomfortable here. Why don't you go with him for coffee?" So the first time we went to Vescio's [Italian Restaurant] or something like that for coffee and we talked about some subject. Very romantic. [Laughter] And then he used to ask me to go to this party or that, or whatever, the Indo-American Club.

We went out for dinner and my parents, I didn't ever have to say that I'm going dating. They encouraged me to do it so it just sort of happened. We got engaged in about six months, very soon afterwards and that's—and I'm married and that's history, I guess. We've been married twenty-eight years.

PS: Congratulations. That's great. His name is Ram?

NR: His name is S. Ramakrishnan.

PS: What does he do for work?

NR: He was an engineer. He worked in a company that was in distribution so the first job he had after his MBA was as a distribution analyst and then he worked in different companies, in Red Owl [Food Stores] and Target [Corporation, formerly Dayton-Hudson], as a logistics engineer and things like that. Many years after that, probably fifteen years after his career started, he started his own company, meaning he just started to write software for particular applications.

He and I worked together. I had worked as a programmer but after he became somewhat successful and he needed help, I joined him and we worked for about fifteen years together, about ten, twelve years together, and then he sold his company in 1998 to a bigger organization. I'm still working for that organization; so is he.

PS: That's Descartes Systems?

NR: Right. Soon, we don't know what we're going to be doing. In a sense, he had a three-year contract and it's expiring some time this year, so he really would like to just be free of everything and think about doing something else entirely.

PS: He's a little too young to retire yet, right?

NR: Right. He's seven years older than I am.

PS: He's got a few years left yet. So he was raised in India the whole time?

NR: Yes, completely.

PS: Were there any adjustment issues that came up, you having been raised in the United States and he having been raised in India?

NR: I think the number one thing is, yes, culturally, we were a little bit further apart but when students come from India, although they bring all these things with them, my husband had spent about eight years in a boarding environment, away from his parents. He was in IIT [Indian Institute of Technology] Madras for about six years, which would be five years for engineering and two years for a master's. So he lived in a dorm and he had other friends and they watched movies from *Ben Hur* to everything else. *Dr. Zhivago* was the big thing, a hit over there at the time.

So they came with certain ideas. They were not just traditional Indian boys right from school, although they were, of course. They were brought up in India. So he was not a conservative person. He was broad-minded or whatever and obviously, was looking for—he was twenty-four at the time that he—I was nineteen so he must have been twenty-five or twenty-six, so obviously, he was looking for marriage and I was just, I don't know what, having fun. Didn't think about marriage as such. It just so happened that we did marry.

But the fact that I was very Indian and traditional in that way, and I had not dated anybody. I was certainly not very liberated myself, so in a sense, we did find common ground. Although I was raised here for the most part, I wasn't raised as if I was an American. I don't think I could have married an American.

Although I had friends who did and there's a lot of good things about one as a life mate, I think I still was more attracted to Indians, at that time. Whereas I can't say that about my children. They seem to be just as comfortable with a John as anyone else.

PS: So tell me about your children.

NR: What would you like me to tell you?

PS: What their lives are like, what kind of values you're seeking to teach them.

NR: I'd like to teach them—I don't know what it means to have Indian values or Hindu values because I don't know if religion is the one that dictates all the values, but actually I have brought them up as if they were American kids, and going to live in America. They should know something about our culture but I haven't really—that this is Indian and this is American.

They're very comfortable with their American friends and they have some Indian friends. There are some Indian kids that are a little more Indian. They like to dress in Indian clothes and they speak the language. My children don't speak anything but English. My older one can understand my mother tongue and because I spoke to her but I think I dropped the ball with the second one. Maybe it was just too much effort and she didn't seem inclined to it and it was just too easy because my husband and I both speak English to each other, although he's from a different part of India entirely.

PS: So you don't have the same mother tongue.

NR: Right. So we speak English. Naturally, right now, the mother tongue for them is English. It changes that perspective. Although I have made sure that they've taken Indian classical dance so they're exposed to that and they have Indian music in the house. I make Indian food more than I make American food, although I make lasagna and a few other things, too.

Let's see, what else? Oh, they did go to SILC [School of India for Languages and Culture] school. You're probably familiar with SILC. So my older daughter went for about four years and my younger one for about three years, so they've had contact with other kids. They go to Hindu camp. They have gone in the past. Not every single year, but at least three or four times.

We go to all the Indian gatherings. In fact, because of the fact that my husband is Tamilian and I'm from Maharashtra, we go to the Marathi ones, we go to the Tamil ones, any occasion, and we have so many friends that are from different parts of India that we go to that, too. We go to the Hindu Mandir activities and music society, Indian music society, if you are familiar with that.

So we're really quite, in some ways, I think right now, quite well known in the community, and not just in our linguistic group. My husband right now is very involved in the Gujarat earthquake relief fund, along with all the other people who are very involved in it. So I think we don't identify ourselves with just one group.

And I think longevity. He's been here for thirty years, I've been here for forty years, and we've just seen so much. We were involved in India Association when it was first formed, the India

Club, back in sixties or seventies or whatever. So in some ways, we've grown along with all these organizations. My kids are familiar with all these things. Their environment has been Indian, but not exclusively.

PS: When they were going to SILC school, were they enthusiastic students or was it, "Ah, gee, Ma, do we have to go?"

NR: Well, I think it changed. Initially, it was more enthusiastic, and then I think towards the end when they had maybe grown a little older, it was like, "Oh, again." I said, "Well, it's just like school. You can't just drop it. You have to continue." But then after a while, even I decided that it was too much effort. They weren't getting as much out of it or whatever. So, yes, reluctantly, they were going at the end.

But both my daughters were involved in the dance portion. Every year they had a dance for the international Festival of Nations, so they liked to go there and they liked to practice. Even when they were not SILC students anymore, they used to go and be part of the group because they were known and they needed a lot of people, so they'd call and then I'd make sure that that last hour in SILC that they would go to that. So they enjoyed that.

In fact, this is the only year—even last year, my younger daughter was part of the group. This is the first year that she's not part of anything and I think she misses it because we went to a Holi program—you know, Holi, the spring festival—last week and there were a lot of dancers. She said, "I want to get back into dance." This was the first genuine thing she said, where I haven't asked her. Anyway, it was spontaneous.

So I'm going to ask around if there's any openings for dancers. She's no longer interested in doing like Bharata Natyam or something. That's what she was doing earlier and that's just too much, I think, for her. She's not inclined to do that anymore.

PS: So they're both teenagers now, at fourteen and eighteen?

NR: Yes. My older one, Meera, is in college. She went this year, this academic year. She's at Winona State University. She talks about being a nurse. She wants to go into nursing. That might have something to do with—my father was ill for several years before he died and I think she's seen that and maybe because of that, that's inspired her to be a nurse. I don't know. I certainly cannot say that that's the reason or whatever.

But she's very sure. She never waivers from that nursing. We told her she could go anywhere she wanted to and she wanted to go to Winona State, which has a good nursing department. So hopefully she will go ahead and complete that, although it's just her first year.

PS: And your daughter Priya is fourteen now?

NR: Yes.

PS: What is she into?

NR: She's in eighth grade. You know, she doesn't have a lot of different activities. I do send her to Huntington school, just to reinforce some of her basic skills because I think that's important. She was taking piano at one time but she dropped that, and then she's taking different classes over time but she hasn't really been committed to following through with it.

Maybe I've just not insisted on something or perhaps I haven't been a better mother in saying, "No, you have to do this, and you can't just drop something," and whatever. But I think with the second child you get a little more lazy or, what is that attitude, of live and let live or don't bother with it. So I think I've done that.

Sports. She's not really into too many sports. Initially, she had tried soccer. We tried that. She tried one summer of this and one summer of that and whatever.

PS: It just wasn't her thing.

NR: Right. Although she's just generally athletic but not terribly so. She still prefers to sit and watch TV or talk to her friends. It seems to be the teenage sport.

PS: Oh, yes. The phone bill. Have you taken your own children to India?

NR: Yes. About three or four times.

PS: What was that like for you?

NR: Oh, that was very nice. That time my parents had a house in Pune. In the early seventies, my father, when he made one of his trips to India, he said, "Well, I better start thinking about retirement," so he had bought an apartment in Pune because he thought that's what they were going to do. For many years after my father retired from the University, they used to go back for three months out of the year—January, February, or March—and stay there, and they used to have a great time because the family members were there and the weather was good and they used to travel and they used to have whatever servant help that they needed. They just had a good time.

I remember when my younger one, Priya, was just less than two and the older one was four years older, I had taken my older one out of school for those three months and we went there and that was my best vacation. Three months of staying there and it was great. They had lots of people.

In India, people come and they just pick up your child and say, "Oh, I'll take her to the park or I'll do this," and family members are always helping out there. There's a lot of togetherness

there. And they enjoyed it.

Then later on they went, about four years later. We didn't spend as much time in Pune. We spent a little more time in my husband's and it was only my father-in-law there at the time, and there weren't a lot of kids so they didn't enjoy that as much. But what we did was we took them around to show them all the temples in South India, so we arranged a car. They were enthusiastic about going, they liked it, but they have the same American problem with the hygiene. There weren't toilets and they're not kids who can make do with all these things.

So we had to be a little more careful about if we stopped in a town, we used to try to find the best hotel in that town so we could have some drinks or whatever and use their facilities and things like that. So that was the downer, but I think maybe they've matured now and the next time I take them—we're planning on going this year, the end of this year. They should enjoy it a little more. But I have to say that they haven't gone as much as probably I would have liked.

PS: What's been the barrier?

NR: Well, we've gone to so many other places also.

PS: Like where?

NR: My husband was very busy in the last ten years, twelve years, building his business, so we couldn't really take off for too long. You asked me a question?

PS: Where else did you go?

NR: Oh, we have been to Mexico for a week. We've been to Florida several times. Let's see, California. Acapulco, Hawaii, so those kinds of vacations. And we want to do Europe sometime, but India is next on our list.

PS: So with regard to your daughters, what do you envision will happen for them when it's time for them to marry?

NR: It's very hard to say. Their experiences won't be like mine because their attitudes are different. My older daughter has dated. She has a current boyfriend, but I don't think it's serious so it's very different from mine. I think, from what she tells me, she's going to do her school and she's going to go to a bigger school for her graduate degree and then she says, "Then I'll probably get married and have kids."

So I don't envision anything too different. It's just that I cannot guarantee that she will marry an Indian. She could marry anyone and we're perfectly prepared for it. It's not that we're just tolerating it. I feel anyone that they feel they can love is fine, whatever culture they come from.

PS: So if they chose to marry a Japanese person or a West African person, any of those would be fine?

NR: Well, I think so but I'm not sure about that. When I think about it, I certainly will tell my daughter, the more you go away from your culture, the more—there are people who do it and they do it very successfully. It takes that extra bit of struggle, or extra bit of understanding or extra bit of—and I'm not sure that I—it's not a question of whether I can accept it or not. Whatever my daughter's going to do, she's going to do, and hopefully we've given her the right values that she'll choose the right person and for the right reasons.

But I can't tell from where it would be. From her pattern, she seems to—like, she has her American friends, she has some Korean friends, and as I say, some Japanese. So it could really be—because this country really is a melting pot, so she could find anyone to, but I consider them all Americans in that category. I consider her an American, too, in a sense, even though she is an Indian also.

So yes, I don't really envision, I haven't looked that much into the future. From what I've seen of other families in our similar circumstance, most of them are married to Americans, American spouses, and it's just perfectly all right. My older sister has two sons. Between them, one is married to an Indian girl, from India. He went back to India, although he was born here, he went there and got married and came back.

The second one is married to a girl from here and they're both doing just fine and everyone is interacting. We're a family of English speakers so we don't have that—even my mother, because she's lived here forty years, has lost that very Indianness. She's seen a lot and she can tolerate a lot and whatever, so nobody would be hurting anybody by marrying outside of the culture. And as for religion, we're not so orthodox and so much into religion that we cannot tolerate other religions.

PS: That's one of the tenets of Hinduism anyway, right?

NR: That's right.

PS: All the different spokes on the wheel and however you get to God in the center is okay.

NR: That's right. In fact, I really wish that other people would leave us alone sometimes, to practice our religion. This is just an observation or maybe it has nothing to do with anything, but over the years, it seems to me that, even in Minnesota, things have become more conservative and people are so much more into their own thing.

I felt that things were a little more open in the sixties and seventies or even eighties, but towards the nineties, I see a real conservatism and people talking about religion so much more and Christianity, and I just feel that the conservative movement is just, it's just not to my liking at all.

The world, which is getting bigger or smaller or whatever, more globalization, and people should know each other a little better, they're getting a little bit more insular.

PS: And your parents were okay with you having a love marriage?

NR: Yes. Because my older sister had a love marriage also. She broke the ice.

PS: Was that hard for your parents when she did that?

NR: Yes. It was much harder for them to accept the first one. Although my brother-in-law is not exactly from our community, but he's from a very similar community and he speaks the same language. I don't want to give you the wrong impression. We are Brahmans. We were Brahmans. And he is considered a Gosadassa.

Now, there's such a small distinction between the two, although they are Brahmans, too, but they are just a little bit different. I don't think my parents really thought about it because they were educated people. Now, maybe it was more age because my sister was only fifteen, but at that time my mother thought, "Oh, he's not Maharashtran Brahman the way we would pick a son-in-law. He's a little bit different."

But now, after, with the second one, with me, even a Tamilian, although he's a Brahman, didn't seem all that different at all to her. So she had grown in the next four years. I think it's the first time that you have some challenge that you think about it and then you come to terms with it.

PS: Is your younger sister married?

NR: Yes.

PS: Who did she marry?

NR: She married someone who is Maharashtran-speaking, although she married him just about two, three years ago. She was single for a long time. I think she got married at thirty-six years of age.

PS: That's unusual.

NR: That's unusual. At that time, she was adamantly not interested in any arranged marriage, and she was very Americanized, compared to my sister and I. But she got married to him with some help, or with my aunt saying, "I know of a boy who is recently..." He was recently divorced and she was recently divorced, too. She was married for a very short time, too. "Would you like to meet him?" and she said, "Yes, I'm open to it."

So she met two people and she communicated with them on email, and then she met this person

and it clicked with him as well as her, and they got married right away and now they have two beautiful children. So everything went very quickly. But he's very Americanized, the boy. He came to this country when he was about ten or eleven and he's been here ever since then, although he speaks our language, it's mostly in English. So they're fine, too.

PS: It's a cause for concern with Indian parents if their daughter is not getting married, right?

NR: It is. It was. But my parents are a little bit different. They didn't put pressure on—my sister was also not the type to listen to pressure and to do things just because her parents said so. Yes, it was a concern but they weren't worried night and day about it. But it is hard when you go back to India. The relatives ask, "Why isn't she married?" or "Why isn't she married already?" or "I have some boys I can give you names of?" How can you tell them, "Well, no she won't even looking into that"? Because everyone wants to be helpful, thinking it's just a matter of not finding that person and the more people you get in the pool, the likelier she'll find someone.

But no, she had to come to her own decision about whether to do an arranged marriage. I wouldn't consider this an arranged marriage. It's like the old-fashioned, you introduce someone and then they decide whether it's right for them and then they go ahead. They both did that because culturally they know about it. It's not such a foreign concept, so it worked out very well for her. So it's really odd that my younger sister, who's the most Americanized, is the one who got married in the arranged—and the two of us, who are really quite Indian, got married as a love marriage. A little different.

PS: I'm having this humorous thought that at a certain age, your parents probably would have been happy if she'd married an Untouchable just so she was married, right?

NR: They never did give her that much pressure.

PS: Going back to the idea about cultural values, are there certain things that you think that you got from your being raised Indian within American culture that you think your kids or other kids are missing out?

NR: I think the one thing that my children are missing in their childhood that I got was a sense of well being that comes from lots of people being around you and knowing that it's not just the parents, there are others. Grandmother was very much involved. She was disciplinarian plus she used to—I mean, she was like a second mother. My aunts and my cousins were like siblings. So we all had that sense of well being that comes from interacting with many members of the family.

And my children, I had to seek out those relationships and they were, you could say, even a little bit contrived. You'd want to get together with people and make sure that your kids associate with other kids that are like-minded or whose parents are like you, just so you give them the same thing that you had, a sense of family.

We were lucky enough to have several members of our family here. I have an aunt in Texas and I have another cousin, grown-up cousin, in New York, and a few other members. So as much as possible we do get together and anytime that there's even a small reason to get together, like a naming ceremony of a child. My sister's son's naming ceremony, everyone came from everywhere. You wouldn't think it was such a big deal. It's not a wedding but they make it a point to get together, so there's the value of that.

And my children make it a point for them to attend everything, just so they get that sense of family and that they're close and it's not just parents that are important, that grandmother, too. My parents lived with us so that helped, too. But I think I see on the whole that kids that grow up here, they tend to think only of themselves, meaning they think, "Okay, there's Mom and Dad and us"

And some of them, I think Indian families, they do try. Many of them do a much better job than we have of taking their kids to India and making sure that they are part of that group, also, so they don't miss out, but it is much harder to do, living here. And you don't have it on a daily basis. In India you'd have it on a daily basis.

So sometimes even I, my older sister and I, in our adulthood, we make it a point to go back to India or we talk about it or we try to keep up with all of our cousins and what their children are doing and everyone else. It's harder to do it because it doesn't come easily so we make sure that we know what ages they are, or when we go, make sure we visit them or make sure we invite them so we see them. So we want to keep that thread going.

PS: Have your family from India come to see you sometimes?

NR: Yes. Some of them have. The ones that are a little wealthier have made it here, but they've come for a short time and gone back. But the fact that we have so many members here has helped. Several of my cousins from my mother's side. In fact, more on my mother's side. See, when we were growing up in India we were closer to my father's side but in this country now, in later years, I'm closer to my mother's side because there's my aunt and my two cousins, so we get together more often. My children know them because they have like—you know, the ages are pretty much the same.

That's the one thing, I think. Family getting together or get-togethers. That's the one thing that my children are missing more than we did.

PS: You said earlier that, you know, I have this college degree but I didn't do much with it. Elaborate on that a little bit.

NR: As I was growing up, the one thing I was known as—maybe it's a family thing or it's an Indian thing, but every member of the family is sort of labeled at an early age. My older sister

was outgoing and artistic, supposedly artistic, and I was the scholarly, because I was more withdrawn and I was a bookworm and I used to get good grades.

All the time, my father, he just loved to say, "Oh, this daughter is going to be a doctor," and of course, I picked up on that, so if anybody asked me, "So what are you going to be when you" grow up?" which all kids are asked all the time, "I want to be a doctor." And then when I had the chance, I sort of just veered off the path totally.

That's a real disappointment to me even now, because I think if I had used some of those skills and been a little bit more disciplined at that time, I probably could have been—or I could have gone to medical school, I could have done all of those things. But could have is not anything at all. I mean, we could have done anything. We could have been President of the United States. the the second s

PS: Well, you can't if you're not born in the United States.

NR: That's right.

PS: Except for George Washington. He wasn't.

NR: Oh, he wasn't? Oh, okay.

PS: I don't know for sure. Anyway, that was one of the rules.

NR: But I think what happened is maybe I was repressed growing up and maybe when I met my husband or when I went to parties and when I went to college, it just opened up a whole world and I didn't stick to doing anything too academic after that. I just wanted to quickly get into a job, so the most expedient thing to do was go to Control Data Institute, pay your \$3,000, and learn programming. In six months you're employed. So that's what I did. But I think now, in looking back, I could have done more if I'd been guided in the right direction.

PS: Who do you think dropped the ball in guiding you?

NR: I think my father. I should say this, but my parents, they came to this country and they gave us certain freedoms that I think maybe they could have just, maybe they could have just—it's easy to blame parents for all these things, but just not given me as much freedom, or reined me in a little bit. I want to see your grades, I want to see what your—because I had very good grades until a certain point and then I—

PS: In college?

NR: Yes, and then in college, if I liked the class, I always did very well in the classes that I liked, but the ones I didn't, I just, you know, just didn't pay any attention to. My parents never asked me at that point, after high school. Because all through the years, I always showed my

report card to my parents when I got it, probably because they were good grades.

But in college they never asked me for my report card. I think I became too flighty. I wish they had said, "No, this is not the time for you to—" I hadn't dated so far, so now why at eighteen are they giving me all this freedom? I think I just really didn't handle it well, and it's a lucky thing that I did get married to the right person.

After that it was a closed chapter anyway, dating or any of that. That happened a little too early for me. Everything I had done, if I'd done a little bit later, I should have concentrated on my career path at an earlier age, but I didn't have the maturity for that.

PS: Do you think that had anything to do with being one year younger than everybody in your class so your social and emotional maturity just never caught up?

NR: No. In some ways I was very mature. It's just that I think—I don't know what it was. It's so hard to pinpoint but when you look back on your life, there are certain times that you feel are critical and you could have gone down a different road. When I look back I feel if I had just paused a little bit and taken the right road it would have been better.

No regrets, because my life has turned out very well. I have two wonderful children, a wonderful husband, economic security, everything that you'd want, but I think to myself, I was capable of a lot more if I was—and I was heading in that direction. Why did I suddenly veer off that road? To get married, to go on a date. I mean, something that could have been done later, but then maybe I wouldn't have married my present husband.

PS: Well, you said about your career already. Some of these questions are not relevant. Did you ever experience what you would think of as discrimination, based on being Indian or Hindu or any other quality about you?

NR: Yes. There were small acts of discrimination. You know there are small acts and then there's a whole, I don't know what you call it, a whole atmosphere of discrimination, which is probably much, much worse. It wasn't really discrimination but I remember once, I must have been about ten or eleven, some of the key people you asked who influenced our lives.

There was one lady named Margaret Granger. She was a missionary's daughter. She grew up for the most part in India, until she was seventeen years of age. She was in India and she was like an Indian girl growing up. And then her parents came back to this country. She went to nursing school but she always retained the language and a real love of India, so any Indians at that time—she was at the University of Minnesota in the nursing school.

She was an assistant professor and she met my father some place and she spoke to him in Hindi. "Namaste ghee," she said, which is "Hello, sir," in Hindi, and he turned around and he saw this older American lady and they became friends and he said, "Oh, my wife and children are coming

in just a matter of weeks or something," and they exchanged phone numbers and whatever.

So when we came here she was one of our first friends and she was a friend for life. Really, she became the grandmother for us that we had left behind. She used to do things like take us to Dayton's [Department Store] and buy dresses for us. This is a little bit later in our teenage years. But something so impossible that, our parents never did that. So she did those grandmotherly things that we had missed out on.

So she was a big influence. She taught my mother how to diaper my little sister and taught her so many things. And my mother taught her things like cooking and she used to be there for her. We used to pick her up, we used to take her on family trips and anytime there was a dinner at our house she used to come. She was just like a regular person in the house. She enjoyed that.

She had other Indian friends, too, so we weren't the only ones. She just gravitated towards Indians. In fact, Ram Gada and Neena Gada, they were good friends with her, and many of the people that were the early Indians here had her as a friend. She went to all the community events and whatever. But the question you were asking? I've forgotten.

PS: Discrimination.

NR: I was with her once. We had gone to Dayton's. I was ten or eleven. And there was a lady who saw us together, and she said, "What are you doing with that nigger child?" and she just kept on talking. What Margaret Granger did was she just moved me over and just got out of her range, but she was following us saying all kinds of things about me being black and what are you doing with a child that's, etc. So that I remember. Other occasions, you know, I really don't.

PS: How did you make sense of that? Did you know what a nigger was at that point?

NR: No, I don't think so.

PS: How did you process that in your ten-year-old head?

NR: This was the time when the Civil Rights Movement was going on. This was in, I think it was probably '65, and I saw images on TV. But you know, our TV screens were that small. They were all black and white. It was hard to see much but I just saw the hosing of those people, blacks, and this was a whole thing that I couldn't understand.

And just two years before that was the assassination of John F. Kennedy. I was not very aware of what was going on. I used to read the newspaper and I used to—but I didn't know how to put it together. I didn't feel discriminated against in Minnesota. Maybe if I was, I just didn't even realize it. But that was one vivid incident of something that was very overt discrimination.

PS: Did Margaret do anything about it?

NR: No, she just moved me over.

PS: Never spoke to you about it afterwards, or just never talked about it?

NR: Right, right. I was one of those children that was very shy all the time, so I don't even remember if I told my mother. Probably not. All these things, I wish I could have done differently when looking back. I don't know what I would have done but I would have told my parents probably that this happened. If anybody hurt my feelings I don't think I ever told my parents. I used to just internalize it or handle it.

No, there was not really much discrimination. There was a teacher, I don't remember which grade it was, maybe fourth grade or something. My English was not bad. I knew English quite well, but there were certain things I just couldn't understand. When she was talking about, okay, these are the prepositions or whatever, and she said, "Now, what is over, what is under?" Words like beyond or something that was underneath. I didn't know those words because maybe that was not covered. Or beside. She said, "beside," and I couldn't figure out what "beside" was.

So I remember she was very frustrated about that and she just didn't realize that these are not words that I was exposed to and I feel that that was a form of discrimination, that a teacher couldn't look beyond that. That I knew up and down and under and over, but not beside and beyond and things like that. I think she could have done a better job of—so it wasn't discrimination but it was beyond her view of the world or something.

PS: By fourth grade, every child would know this stuff. How could you be so dense, might be her assumption?

NR: Right.

PS: And not realizing that English was not your first language.

NR: Right. And these words require a little more thought, or a concept that was just a little bit different than something very concrete, like up and down and right and left.

PS: You mentioned briefly about your husband retiring. When you retire, where do you think you'll settle, once you retire? Will you stay in Minnesota or go to India or go someplace warm? What is your vision of retirement?

NR: Oh, so many possibilities. Sometimes we think we're going to do one thing, other times we think of another. But we do have a daughter who's just entering high school and she doesn't want to leave the Twin Cities. Once in a while she says, "Unless we go to California, then it'll be okay." My husband sometimes would like to.

One of his pipe dreams or dreams is that since he never actually worked in India, except for six months as an intern, he has this feeling that he wants to work in India and he could. With so much globalization, you could do that, and he could start another company and try to do some business in India. And then he dreams and he says, "Oh, then we'll have a house there. We can afford so much. We can afford servants. You'll have a driver, you'll have a cook." Sort of enticing me to say, "Oh, yes, let's move."

But I think we're comfortable just about anywhere. You know, the United States or India, now. India, I haven't lived there as an adult. I left there at such an early age so I'm not sure how well I'll do. But I've gone there so many times that I think, with help, I could set something up and be happy there, as long as we could keep coming back here.

In terms of here, in this country, California, Florida, a warmer climate sounds good. Just about everything in America is the same. You can't feel alienated anywhere, really, because it's pretty much the same. You can communicate with people wherever you are. You're not really isolated. By now we've lived in this country so long that this is really our home, so we could go anywhere.

PS: I've got about five minutes left on the tape. Is there anything else that you would like to share or talk about that I haven't asked you about yet that you think would be important?

NR: I just feel on the whole that my experience has been unique. I've seen many people come here for work or to be students or because they've married someone from here, and their experiences are different, but I feel that I have sort of more of a comprehensive experience in this country, as a child, so I've been through my teenage years and so many other different phases of my life in this country, and evolved into this person that I am, which I don't, I think I would be—many times my older sister and I talk about it and say, "We would have been completely different people if we had lived in India."

What we would have been is—well, we were from an upper middle-class family, good prospects. We would have gotten a very good education. I definitely would have gone to medical school in India because it was my father's wish to have one of his daughters be a doctor and there you don't have an opportunity to really go off on your own. You do the right thing.

We certainly were, not programmed, but we were certainly in that—but in coming to this country at such an early age and in that particular time period, I think we've gained a lot. I'm very glad that my parents did make the decision to come. I think I would have had a happy life there, also but the exposure and what we have seen, we never, never would have been able to without coming to this country.

You know, there are great opportunities here. Everything is not all great and good but it just gives you the freedom to do so much here. So I'm very glad my parents made the right decision in coming. It's been good for all of us.

PS: When people ask you who you are, when you get past your name and they say, "Well, who are you?" how do you identify yourself?

NR: I feel that I'm an Indian woman. I think of myself as an Asian Indian woman but you could say an American Asian Indian woman. Most of my best friends still tend to be Indian. I have a few high school friends that I've kept up with. They're American. But on the whole I still feel more Indian than American, although I feel I understand this culture and like it and feel completely at ease with it and I don't feel at all the way I did when I was growing up, where I felt disconnected and not able to fit in.

Now I feel I can fit in everywhere or anywhere. Whatever experience or situation I'm put in, I feel I can handle it because I've grown up here and I read books and I know what's going on in the world and whatever, as well as when I go back to India, I feel very comfortable there also, among my cousins and everyone else. Because even in India the awareness level has increased so much that people ask you questions and you feel you can answer them. They're interested and you can advise them on certain things. They can tell you certain things that are going on.

And I just feel that the two hemispheres have really come together or maybe they're in the same hemisphere, I'm not sure, but the two continents have come together. India has just exploded. For instance, just as an example of what I'm saying, my nephew, who went to India to get married to a girl from Pune, she came here, and from day one, she knew what was going on in this country because she was connected, and she was well-read, so it wasn't as if there was a big gulf between us. And it's just amazing that that is happening. Someone who has grown up completely in one culture can come to another and just take off from there.

PS: Well, thank you so much for spending your time with me tonight. I really appreciate it.

NR: Thank you for interviewing me. It's nice to put my thoughts down on tape. Thank you.