Punjabhai Patel Narrator

Polly Sonifer Interviewer

March 2, 2000

PS: This is Polly Sonifer interviewing Punjabhai Patel on March 2, 2000. How are you this evening?

PP: Pretty good. How about yourself, Polly?

PS: Good, great. Thanks. Thanks for taking time out for this interview. We've got some real general questions here to start out with. First tell me your name, your current age, and your Indian language heritage.

PP: Okay. My name is Punjabhai B. Patel. 'B' stands for my father's name, Becharbhai and my age is 57. I was born on July 25, 1942.

PS: Okay. And you grew up in India?

PP: I grew up in Gujarat, India, the state of Gujarat. I came from a small town, Vatadra, which is a farming community, and for education, I went to another school somewhere out of town.

PS: Okay, you went to boarding school?

PP: Yes, I went to a private boarding school, right.

PS: Okay. All right, and you have been in the United States for many years?

PP: I came here in 1965.

PS: Tell me about your involvement in SILC [School of India for Languages and Culture.] When were you most active in SILC?

PP: I remember Godan [Nambudiripad] thought of me because they needed yoga teachers. Godan and I had worked at Hindu Mandir helping with the children's programs. I taught yoga there, so he recommended me to that year's president, which was Neena Gada, from what I remember. She asked me whether I could be, you know, help them out and be a yoga teacher and then I volunteered my services.

PS: Okay. And what year was that? Do you remember?

PP: Yes. It was the '85-'86 school year.

PS: Okay. So 1985-86. So it's been a long time.

PP: Yes, right.

PS: Okay. And what motivated you to become involved?

PP: Well, I have always liked to do some volunteer work and this I saw as a great opportunity. As I said, I did teach yoga at Hindu Mandir. I was teaching yoga and Godan was doing story telling and other education things. And after this [Hindu Mandir], Bharat school started, which eventually became SILC, and then after a couple of years, they asked me to join and I did join.

PS: Join in the sense of?

PP: Become a volunteer.

PS: So you were working at another school teaching yoga.

PP: Yes. At Mandir, there was separate room for children where there was story telling and they did some yoga, exercise, and stuff like that while their parents were attending the services.

PS: Okay. Now was Hindu Mandir fairly new at that time as well?

PP: Yes. Hindu Mandir was that time—what were they called?—it was brought about in 1979. So, '78-'79 time period. I was in Mandir from day one when they started.

PS: So you were a founding member of Hindu Mandir?

PP: Yes. I was involved. I was made a member of first executive committee in Mandir also.

PS: Okay. And so when you became involved with SILC, tell me about what you did first.

PP: Okay. When I joined there was a young girl who used to—she was a student at U of M [University of Minnesota]—she was teaching, and so I watched what she was doing to see how I could help. She wanted to take time off, she was Ph.D. student. So she didn't have much time. So I eventually got involved and she phased out.

PS: Okay. What subject was she teaching?

PP: She was teaching yoga. Yoga was my main subject. I did teach a few other things on and off, but yoga is the main thing I taught throughout fifteen odd years. Fourteen to fifteen, not quite fifteen.

PS: Okay. Are you still involved?

PP: Yes.

PS: All right. Fifteen years.

PP: Fifteen years.

PS: That's amazing. Okay. So what were the most significant things that you learned over those fifteen years in being a teacher?

PP: I think that what I have learned—all the volunteers that I have met and am still meeting as I go along—it is unreal how people help this cultural and social setting. That has impressed me a lot. And all the children from anywheres, age six and up. Now we have even younger kids come to SILC. One is four years, four and half years in my yoga class. [Laughter] His father wants to come. so he comes along with him.

PS: Okay.

PP: I think that the people, they just impress me most in the SILC organization, more than any other organization. That's it.

PS: Okay. So do you think that you'll continue to be involved?

PP: I always think that maybe I should find somebody who probably can do it a little differently than I'm doing it doing the same thing, you know, for so many years. So, I'm looking for ... Hopefully I can find somebody who can maybe do alternate days. You know, you do one Sunday, I can do a different day, or somebody else can. But I haven't found anybody yet and they haven't found anybody yet. So one of these days, I hope.

PS: So you are still willing to continue?

PP: Yes, I am willing to help out as much as I can.

PS: Okay. So what are some ways that being involved with SILC has changed the way you think about yourself as being Indian or being American?

PP: I don't see it that way—whether it changed me any one way. The way I look at it is from a more human side, the parents and children come there and I meet them and I can teach whatever I know or whatever they want to know to the children. From an Indian point of view more so than probably an American point of view or a Western point of view.

PS: So you grew up in India yourself?

PP: Yes I did.

PS: Did you learn yoga as a child?

PP: I went to a private school and we used to get up at 5:30 in the morning and we did a half hour or forty-five minutes of exercise and some yoga. It wasn't yoga in a pure sense. It wasn't like one-to-one or some teacher or guru or student kind of relationship. But I could then pick up some of these standing on head and bending back and all those postures. I continue that and it interested me and that's what I learned, I guess.

PS: Okay. So you were just a natural. You just took to it.

PP: Yes, I just took it. I loved it and somehow I have continued that. Then after coming to this country, I had more exposure, you know, I met different gurus visiting the Mandir or there was a one gentleman who taught classes before I did at the Mandir. I attended his classes for a while and as a matter of fact, maybe a year and a half. I think it was a long time.

PS: So you have been practicing yoga all through your life?

PP: Yes. I'm more conscious of it over here. Because in college, I was in ROTC training and other things. So I did physical things but here, after coming to this country, I've mostly been doing some Asana throughout my life here since '65.

PS: Okay. And were there any community events that SILC was involved with during the time that you were actively involved with them that you got involved in?

PP: Yes, there was something called Adopted Parent of Indian Origin Children. That's an organization where all the children come from India and they are adopted here. They have small groups. So I do, now and then, demonstrate yoga there also. They have a one-day workshop and my wife sometimes goes and show the cooking part of it and I show the yoga part and then also some other things. So I have done that kind of thing.

Also, the India Association and SILC, they were very close organizations from day one. So I was involved in India Association as like a Chairperson for the Festival of Nations for a couple of years, I guess. At that time, SILC participated in, like, a cultural part of it.

PS: In the Festival of Nations?

PP: Festival of Nations.

PS: Okay. Right. So you were involved in a lot of different activities.

PP: Yes I am and I love it. [Laughter]

PS: [Laughter]

PP: I don't do enough I think. That's what I feel most of time.

PS: Okay. Any special memories from any of those particular events that you were involved with?

PP: Well, one time we celebrated, when I was president, the 10th anniversary of SILC, at University of Minnesota [Northrup] auditorium. There was one occasion I remember, we invited all the students, past students and present students and couple of volunteers, and did a function. We did another one, the 20th anniversary function last year and that was a good, I was on the celebrating committee also.

PS: What was most memorable about that for you?

PP: Well, the 20th I remember more than—both I kind of—It's a, you know, all those people come back and they talk what SILC has done. You know, some of the students who went to MIT or Harvard or wherever, Stanford. But I know one Stanford student here. When he applied for his application for admission, he wrote about yoga. One of the paragraphs, he was so impressed. So the students telling about what they get out of SILC, that's what impressed me most. They come and tell you how what you taught affected their life and things like that.

PS: Do you remember all the students you've had?

PP: I remember—I think—no—I do remember most, but not by name. I'm not very good with names, but I do remember which students were good and who was more flexible and who can do better at some postures more than other ones. There were some troublesome ones who couldn't pay attention, you know, that kind of moving around, so there are those students too. But yes I do, I think from day one I have remembered a lot of students. I remember a lot of my students and I think yoga is popular class for it because it's more like active learning. The kids really enjoy it. They look forward to it.

PS: Yes. Okay. The next series of questions that I have is about how you taught your subject and what it was like for you to be a teacher, and you were also on the [SILC] board so we'll get to that set of questions a little bit later.

PP: All right.

PS: The subject that you taught was yoga. Is it a particular kind of yoga?

PP: This is called a *Raja* yoga or *Astanga* yoga. "*Asta*" means eight. "*Anga*" means eight steps yoga and these postures and breathing are one part of it. And that's what I teach. I don't teach all eight. Eight is like *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayam*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, and *Samadhi*. Those are eight steps. I'll write it down for you.

PS: Yes.

PP: And out of those, the first two are like your self-discipline, your responsibility to society, non-violence, and stuff like that. Those are the first two steps and next, the third step is where the Asana or postures comes in. The fourth one is the breathing techniques. So those third and fourth steps are what I teach most of all that, of this eight-step yoga system.

PS: Okay. So you take the eight steps and just teach two steps.

PP: Yes, only those two. Because the other ones are like meditation. These kids and people don't practice everyday. It's just a once a week kind of thing.

PS: Okay. And how did you learn to be a teacher of this?

PP: Well, as I told you in beginning, I picked it up when I was in a private school. I went from fifth grade to all the way to high school, seven years. We would get up at 5:30 a.m. and pick up some of the *Asanas* and I just liked them and I continued them.

PS: Okay. So when you were in fifth grade and they were teaching you this and you were getting up at 5:30 in the morning.

PP: It was tough. [Laughter]

PS: [Laughter] I was thinking maybe that was so.

PP: It was tough. These private schools, like any other private school or boarding house, some of the kids didn't like it. You know, at home you'd get up at eight or nine. Here you are kept in a very routine, very regimental way. You have to be regimental, I guess, because with that many students, maybe 200 or 300 students staying in the dormitory or boarding house— So, but I thoroughly enjoyed it somehow. I really liked those school systems by the way. The education, the food. Believe or not, I really enjoyed the food in dormitory. [Laughter]

PS: Wow.

PP: It was good though. It was a very well run school, a very prestigious school.

PS: So you were learning it when you were a child.

PP: Right.

PS: And then you started teaching it. Was there a time when you were a college student here in the United States that you were doing it on your own?

PP: Yes. Yes, I was doing it, some sit-ups and some standing on my head. Not really as systematic as I do now. Because as I get more involved and as I teach it, I get more and more interested. I read more books and I see different facets of yoga that I wasn't aware of before or that I didn't know about or I didn't care so much about those things.

PS: Things change, don't they?

PP: Things change, right.

PS: Yes. Okay. So how did you develop the teaching materials that you eventually ended up using?

PP: Well, I have used a kind of a five-six page handout that I give it to my students. The method I use to teach is that, first I do few minutes of warm-ups. So stretch your limbs and jump in place, that kind of thing. And then we do some standing postures, then we sit down, and do a few more postures and then lie down on our backs and do some more postures and then lie down on our stomachs and do more postures. And then last, I usually do a sun salutation which is ten steps, dynamic postures. But, well this year I haven't done a handout, but usually I give out a handout of this printed material to my students for their reference.

PS: And what age children have you been teaching over the years at SILC?

PP: Six and up. Now sometimes adults even join. The parents join in but mostly the students six through high school age.

PS: All right. And what do you find is different about teaching a six year old versus a ten year old versus a fifteen year old versus an adult?

PP: Okay. I think the younger ones, their span of attention is very short. [Laughter]

Because in yoga you want to sit down. The idea is to stay in that posture as long as you can. It's not how fast you do it, it's how slow and how steady and how well you do it. The kids do not have that much patience so I kind of move along at a little bit faster pace than I usually would. And I guess that's basically how I do it.

PS: At what age do you find that they have the attention span that they need in order to do this?

PP: I think that the sixth grade and up kids are in that range maybe about ten, eleven years are better. But the first few years when they are in first, second, third, fourth— Again, I'm generalizing.

PS: Sure.

PP: There are some younger kids even more interested than some older ones. I have one kid who was in like seventh or eighth grade, but he wasn't that attentive either, so it varies. But I think I make it little bit more on the fun side so that they can enjoy it and look forward to coming next week.

PS: Right. Have you ever taught a class of all adults?

PP: Yes I do. I do Sunday morning also. I teach in Mounds View, one of the halls in Mounds View. It's a city hall now. Ram Gada is one of my students. He comes regularly. That has been going on for nine or ten years also and that's Sunday morning from 8:30 to 9:30.

PS: So you are spending a lot of time every week teaching and doing yoga?

PP: Yes, that's why I take every chance to do it.

PS: Wow, Okay. What for you has been the most challenging part of teaching yoga at SILC?

PP: I think the most challenging part of the yoga is, in a way I try to make it fun, but it's really serious in sense it's more than fun, it's a lifestyle thing. You can't teach somebody in one hour a week and have them become good yoga student.

PS: Right.

PP: So that's kind of hard. Unless you have some drive to know about it and learn about it and apply yourself, or apply yoga to yourself is a better way of putting it, you do not know how, you don't get the maximum out of it. In order to get the maximum out of it, you have to be regular, you have to dedicate yourself, and you have to have some interest in it.

PS: So do you find that the children who come to SILC, do they get that kind of reinforcement at home?

PP: I don't think they do. They do it once a week as a more or less, as one of those elective subjects when they come to SILC.

PS: So they see it more like a Phy Ed. [Physical Education] class.

PP: Yes. Some of them do, I think they have dancing, music, art, cooking, and yoga. There are four or five choices. I think some of the kids like yoga class more than others and I think they're great. They are fun.

PS: And what's been the most rewarding part of teaching yoga for fifteen years?

PP: Okay, like again. I get out there to do yoga with people. I think otherwise probably I would sleep late to some extent. I think the rewarding part is that at least they are getting exposed, whether they apply it right now or maybe a year after, or maybe ten years after they learn. At least they have a, it's an alternate physical lifestyle they can apply in their life futures. At least they get exposed, they know about it and that I think, that's the part I like most.

PS: So you see yourself as planting seeds that grow in the future.

PP: Yes. Right, grow, right. I have kids who have said, "Oh yeah, yeah, I do this," you know after they finish college. So they say, "I do this now" or "I go away to the YMCA to do yoga." People do come and tell me that they pick up the interest.

PS: So they sometimes grow.

PP: Yes. There are some kids, when they go to India, they will show their grandparents. "Oh see I've learned this yoga." I have couple of kids who tell their grandparents and they were happy. They come back and they say, "I showed them what I have learned," and things like that.

PS: So you've been at SILC for fifteen years?

PP: Since '85, fourteen and a half, I think.

PS: Okay. And what year did SILC start?

PP: I think SILC started, let's see, 1979. No, not quite that. I don't know the exact time frame. When did we celebrate the fifteenth year? It'll be sixteen, about sixteen years ago.

PS: Okay. So you were there pretty close to the beginning but not exactly.

PP: Right the beginning. As a matter of fact, when Bharat school, which is what we used to call SILC, started, I was on the board of [Hindu] Mandir. So they did approach us and inform us that there was a school going on. So I knew when it started and who the founding group of people were who started this SILC school.

PS: So you've been involved for many years. How have you seen the school change or grow over the years as a teacher?

PP: I think the school has changed. The enrollment has gone up and down. The main reason, I would say, is that when the school started, there was a continuous growth. After a while, when the students graduated or finished whatever they learned, then there was a drop. Now, I think, it is picking up the pace a little bit. That's one change.

We also changed physical locations since we don't have permanent facility. We have changed from an elementary school in St. Anthony to some community hall in University of Minnesota student association somewhere over there, there's a community association, I forgot the name, and then now we are teaching at Como High School. So we have changed that a few times.

We have lot of new committee member that are willing to donate time.

PS: So you have seen it growing and changing and shrinking over the years.

PP: Yes.

PS: What are your hopes and dreams for SILC in the future?

PP: Well, the idea of SILC as the name means, the School of India for Languages and Culture. I think for a lot of second generation children and adults, sometimes they don't have enough time to learn about their heritage. Maybe that's a strong word, but cultural or whatever, the alternate culture they can apply or learn or know, they should know about it. SILC is the opportunity to learn about it and the format is so, it's not very regimental. It's a very easy going format and you can pick whatever you like. I think, at first if anybody is interested in knowing the cultural part of it and it could even be a social gathering. They could find some good friends or other families that want to know about it.

PS: So your hope is that SILC continues to meet that need?

PP: Yes. My hope is that it continues to meet that need and also people take more advantage of it. I mean we have about thirty thousand people of Indian origin in the Twin Cities.

PS: Thirty thousand?

PP: Yes.

PS: I thought it was more like ten thousand.

PP: No I think it is more than that. Because there are a lot that come—Indian origin means not only those that came from India but also those that come through Africa, some from Guyana. Some are not only Hindu, there are some Christians too. See, I think that you'll find that it's pretty close to thirty thousand at this time, in the year 2000.

PS: Wow, amazing.

PP: It is a well-to-do community and the priority is not put on the culture right now, but it wouldn't be a bad idea to know about it at least.

PS: What do you see as the priority right now among Indians?

PP: I think Indians, for the first generation, the priority is to come and settle in this country, first priority. Or if you are student, to go through school, study and find a job and get married and settle. So it depends on what stage of your life you happen to be at here. So that's the first priority and then after that you want—if you have baby in your family, you worry about your kids or their education. So the cultural/religious part doesn't come right away. Eventually it comes. Everybody goes through that phase where you have to know about your heritage and have to learn about your culture and about religion. But it doesn't necessarily come right away. People have different priorities really, how to settle, how to live. They might have a new house or the material things like cars that become a priority till you are well-to-do and then your kids might ask you where their grandparents are or where we come from.

PS: So you see that priorities shift and change throughout your life.

PP: Yes. Priorities will change, everybody goes through different phases. When you are a student, you have one priority. When you are married, you get different priorities.

PS: If you could go back over the fifteen years, fourteen and a half years that you've been involved in SILC, if you can change something about how it was, or how you were, or how it happened, what might you change?

PP: Well, I not really a ground-breaking kind of a guy. I usually follow the leader [Laughter] But, somehow if I could get this community involved and let the kids have bit more opportunity to learn about this SILC, I'd like to see that. But I don't know. How would I change that? We do advertise, and have a big mailing list every year before we open the school but it's still—not everybody participates. Somehow if I find some means of broadening the base, I would do that.

PS: Okay. So if you could require every Indian child to, you would make them come, right?

PP: It will be tough but it's a goal. That would be good goal, yes. [Laughter]

PS: Yes, but that's what you want. Okay. All right, because you just feel that strongly about it.

PP: Yes. Probably, I think. You see, it is always nice to learn more, you should learn everything, the Western cultures, Eastern cultures and whatever you want to call it. All cultures can contribute to your life and then you have opportunity to pick out what you like out of that. But if you don't have that exposure, you probably might miss out. That's what the way I look at it.

PS: Yes. And you don't even know what you're missing.

PP: You don't know unless you know about it. The only way you know what you are missing is if you have any exposure to it.

PS: So you were telling me you are from Gujarat.

PP: Yes.

PS: Which is an area of India, in a small town. Do you think that being from that part of India had any influence on you becoming involved with SILC?

PP: No, not necessarily. I think the chance at involvement, my father is probably the best volunteer I know of. He worked in local government without pay almost all of his life. He's 84 and still volunteering, running a couple of high schools and a girls' dormitory, and he's pretty active. So he's my hero as far as volunteering goes.

PS: Okay. [Laughter]

PP: But not just the yoga part of it. But as volunteerism where—so if somebody asked me to do some other work, I will try to do it. So that's where I pick up, not necessarily just the yoga part of it, but...

PS: Okay. So your father was your role model about being a volunteer.

PP: A volunteer, yes.

PS: Okay. And your role model for being a yoga teacher specifically was?

PP: It just started in a Mandir, there was a group of kids, they were, they wanted us to teach them by story telling and to introduce yoga and they liked it. So that's how I did for year and half with Godan [Nambudiripad] and then somebody gave my name to SILC and Neena Gada, they approached me and said, "Would you consider joining?" and that's how I got into it.

PS: Did you also, are there any other things that you want to tell me about being a teacher that I haven't asked about?

PP: Well, no, I think that you are doing excellent job asking all these questions, so no complaints there. [Laughter]

PS: [Laughter]

PP: I think I mentioned before, that with the yoga, if I could find some other exposure and some different technique, even if it happened to be back and forth, that it would be little bit better setting than this I'm teaching. I do not have any formal training as such, so if somebody else has some different ideas, they might introduce a little different way of doing it. That would be desirable.

PS: Okay. Now your children attended SILC.

PP: Yes.

PS: Now, tell me your children's names.

PP: Okay. One son's name is Vipul. Other son is Kanak.

PS: Okay.

PP: And, they didn't attend long. They did about year and a half or two years each. And they enjoyed it. As a matter of fact, I did teach a couple of years of Gujarati language as a substitute teacher on and off but my main thing was yoga.

PS: Okay. So did you ever have your sons in your own class?

PP: Yes. They both were in my class, as a matter of fact.

PS: And how did that work?

PP: I think it worked very well. I think those two years, I had a very big yoga class. I think I had almost eighteen to twenty-two students I think, and they were all about same age. So I think they really had a ball.

PS: [Laughter]

PP: Because I think that time the attendance was good and the kids were really enjoying it.

PS: Okay. So there wasn't any issue with you being their dad and teaching the class.

PP: No, I don't think so. Matter of fact, even after that even Boy Scouts—they had, one time they had me do a yoga demonstration to their Boy Scout meeting, too, so, even then the kids enjoyed it. We went to some gym and did yoga together.

PS: So the whole Boy Scout troop was doing yoga?

PP: Not whole, just a part of their little group.

PS: Okay. Wow. Cool. Okay. Now you also were on the board.

PP: Yes.

PS: Okay. And what years were you on the board of directors of SILC?

PP: I was on the board, boy, I don't know the exact date, time frame, but I was there. If I find it (shuffling papers). I think I was there '89, 1989.

PS: 1989. Okay

PP: I was president in '89, I believe and I was on the board '89, '90, '91. Here is my name in one of this board, I was there. So, yes, it was three years. Yes, '89-90 I was the President of the board and next two years after that, '90 and '91, I was on the executive committee, I was the member at large.

PS: So the first year you were on the board, you were the president of it?

PP: Yes.

PS: That's a big change. Had you been involved with the board previously?

PP: No, before that I was, since lot of people know me, I was involved—I was President of Gujarati Samaj for a couple of years and I was on the board of Mandir. So they asked me, will I join the board. I thought, no, but I was a teacher there so they knew I was on a committee, but I was a teacher. My first involvement with the board was as president. [Laughter]

PS: So you just went right for the top. [Laughter]

PP: That's right.

PS: [Laughter] And what was that like being the president at the same time you were teaching yoga?

PP: I think being the president usually is more logistical. Where are we going to find a place for next year? Where are we going to celebrate this function? Where are we going to have classes? All those logistical parts of it. So I think that it did take some time away from my yoga because usually we have a meeting once a month or so during the third period of SILC. That's the time I used to teach yoga, so I had to get a substitute, so there was some conflict there. But other than that, it wasn't that much of a big change.

PS: Okay. So how many periods would there be in a typical day?

PP: In SILC, there are three periods. One is called language although there are eight or nine different languages being taught at given time, I guess, depending upon the volunteers. And then the second period is General Knowledge. There were history and geography kind of things. And the third, called electives, was one of those four or five subjects I mentioned before. Like art, music, dance, yoga, cooking. One of those, the children have a choice.

Well, in beginning whenever the students join SILC, they have to learn couple of songs like a national anthem of India and couple of other songs and there they can select one of the electives. But now I think they can join any group they like, except cooking. You have to be a little bit older. They don't let you do that. You have to be a little bit older to stomach it. [Laughter]

PS: Good plan. Okay. So you were asked to be the president of the board.

PP: Yes.

PS: Right away, because of your background in being on the board of other organizations. What motivated you to say yes?

PP: Well. As I said, I'm not the guy who'll, you know—I like to do volunteer works but I do not like to do lead, usually I end up doing it anyway. They asked me and I said, "If you can find some other way, please find it, otherwise I'll be glad to do it." Sometimes for this organization you have to volunteer your time. I think you end up, I don't think you can find some particular 'X, Y, Z,' just whoever happens to be in the given group. You take turns or volunteer or find, you know, time to do it and things like that.

PS: So you just, because they couldn't find anybody else, you said okay.

PP: I think you can say that. [Laughter]

PS: Well, you know, if you put it out that way, they are not going to find anybody else, are they?

PP: [Laughter] That's true. They asked me, so you know.

PS: Okay. So you were on the board. How many people were on the board with you at the time?

PP: Usually there are six or seven people. There are positions for like a president, then a principal, then an associate principal, secretary, treasurer, and two members at large. So there are seven people.

PS: Okay. And there is a committee structure as well?

PP: Yes, there's a committee structure. Well, usually the structure, as it goes, principally, they do take care of the teaching part of it or running school, Sunday school, if you want to call it that.

The president can supports activities, other activities like functions, community functions, or if you want to go somewhere, things like that. And then usually we have a SILC day and parent-teacher meetings and we get together and establish an agenda. Where we are going to find more volunteers? What we are going to do next year? That kind of thing.

We sometimes have committee nominations for the given tasks like next year's curriculum or next year's function, what will we do next year or the next kind of ten years or whatever.

PS: So there's a planning committee.

PP: Planning committee.

PS: Okay. So we would meet once a month as board members.

PP: Yes, for board.

PS: Than the other, were most of the board members also teachers?

PP: Yes. They're all volunteers there. Whether their children happen to, and most of the volunteers have their children attending the program. In my case, that time my sons were not attending. I just happened to join them. But most of the committee members are parents.

PS: And how did the board make decisions?

PP: Well, there are a couple of times—I think it's interesting, like this time—What time will suit people? Should we do Saturday or Sunday? So we have survey forms and we ask all the parents to fill out survey regarding the Saturday or Sunday. Or would you want it morning or afternoon? Or should we do like 1:30 or 12:30 or whatever. We do a lot of surveys. That's one way of doing it

PS: Okay.

PP: Or you want to change the place. Whether it should be in the Como High School or St. Anthony Elementary School or anywhere. So usually again we do take surveys. It's mostly very democratic.

PS: Okay.

PP: A lot of input from parents.

PS: Okay. So when it came right down to which building are we going to go to or which time are we going to offer the classes, did you go completely on the majority rules of the surveys?

PP: Absolutely. Right.

PS: Okay. All right.

PP: I mean unless we can't get the building or something, then it's a different story. We might have a Plan A and Plan B and Plan A doesn't work out. So maybe we might have to fall back on Plan B, but we always have some sort of a survey to do.

PS: Okay. So even though you were a board, you mostly let the parents of the children who were attending decide, they make the decisions.

PP: Yes. That's absolutely right. They have a lot of input.

PS: Okay. Very, very customer driven.

PP: Yes, right.

PS: All right. What language did you use during board meetings?

PP: English. [Laughter]

PS: [Laughter]

PP: Because most of the, you know, India Association and SILC and even in Mandir for that matter, it's not one lingual group, as in India as a whole. So, there is not a like a Gujarati or

Hindi or Marathi or Bengali group because there are people from each and every region. So English is the medium for conducting business.

PS: So are you accustomed, were you accustomed to doing that in India as well, conducting business in English?

PP: Yes. I think it's a mixed bag. In India you'll find English is very prevalent. As a matter of fact, South India probably more so than North India. Now it's getting more and more everywhere. English still has a good hold on the educated class.

PS: You'd say that's from the British influence?

PP: Yes. That would be the right way of putting it. [Laughter]

PS: All right. Were there any special challenges that ever came up with the use of language or understanding each other even though you were all speaking English?

PP: I don't think so, because most of the people who come here, whether they are a graduate student or a doctor or a Ph.D., for most of the medium of instruction in college is English. So, even though you don't speak it—I didn't speak that well because it wasn't my mother tongue nor was it spoken as a common language—however, you are supposed to learn and understand the instruction. English is very well accepted in the Indian community and most of the people do understand that.

PS: Okay. When you would take breaks and things, did you find that people gravitated towards their language group and would speak their language anyway?

PP: I think yes. That's a very good point. That's very true particularly if you don't know people. Many people in given group, you have to understand the people so you can associate, and language is a very good medium to help you to associate with people because you can know the dialects or part of it, where you come from or the area you're from. So, in some of the Indian groups, it's a very common practice. It easily happens that people do break up in groups and you might find people speaking their language and socializing a little bit more so than across the language barrier.

PS: So would it happen sometimes that when they, when the SILC school would have a social event, teachers and all the Gujaratis would be in this corner and all the...

PP: Well I wouldn't go quite that far, but it has happened. Yes, it has happened. As a matter of fact, the parents who didn't attend any class, they will be sitting in a main hall or somewhere. Here, you see them, four or five people speaking a certain dialect. You can see that because probably they know each other from India or they have common groups, they get together, have a friends circle or whatever. People do find that, if you speak their own mother tongue, it's easier to socialize I think.

PS: Sure and that's a part of what you're seeking.

PP: That's what you're seeking. Absolutely, right, right.

PS: And that's why you want your children to learn that language.

PP: Right. The only thing is, I was just trying to say that sometimes you try to break that group up and mingle with others also. But it's very—it's human nature to do that I guess.

PS: Right. Was it ever difficult to find board members?

PP: I think for all these volunteer organizations I have been associated with, it is getting harder and harder to find people who are willing to give some time for this kind of organization. And there are two reasons. Most of them are two income families. They have the children. They are pretty busy, and they socialize a lot on weekends. So all this takes a lot of their time and committing for say, every Sunday for full year, it requires some commitment or dedication and not all people are willing to do that. So it's getting harder all the time. For the last five or six years, I've been the guy who does the nominations. I'm on the nomination committee for SILC so I end up nominating people, so I know how hard it is. [Laughter]

PS: Are you finding that it varies depending on people's ages or do you think it's happening to everybody or is it just the younger folk?

PP: I think it's happening at all three organizations that I can think of, Gujarati Samaj, we have a hard time trying to find next year's committee, should we say, because there's only a few members willing to join [the board.] Finding the whole slate of the committee is getting harder. It's the same in Hindu Mandir, and India Association goes through the same motions in that we find, like, we needed twenty members. I mean for the Board of Directors, we might only get eighteen or something. It's the same thing, the same way with SILC.

Another thing is happening. I'll tell you, like over twenty years, everybody has been on a board one time or another and they don't want to come again, so for many reasons, the pool is limited, should we say. There are eighty families and, all along the way, the families who took classes for eighteen years or sixteen years, they might only want to be members. So you now have to—hopefully they want to do it again, or they want to continue. So it does get—it is harder and harder to find volunteers.

PS: And you are finding that in every organization then?

PP: At least the one I'm associated with. It's getting tougher.

PS: Okay.

PP: But usually we do find them by the way. It just happens.

PS: So it does work out?

PP: It does work out.

PS: Okay. [Laughter] Okay, so you were on the board for three years. The first year you were president and you said the second two years you did other things?

PP: I was a member at large.

PS: Member at large. Okay. And how is that different? Was it easier or harder being president or member at large? What was the distinction?

PP: Being member at large is always easier because we are not as responsible. You have input in it and you might do some other work, but when you are the president, when, you know—like when we were celebrating the 10th anniversary or something like that, you have a bigger function, and then you have to do little more work than a member at large. So it's always when you are heading an organization that it's harder than when you're part of the organization.

PS: So was it kind of easier, it was easier for you then to be a member at large.

PP: Absolutely.

PS: Okay.

PP: And on most of the other committees, like Hindu Mandir, I was a member at large for a few years. But I was a treasurer for a couple of years too, but member at large is better than that. [Laughter] Then you can give your input and can be less responsible.

PS: And just kick back and let somebody else do it. Okay. Were there guidelines on how long people were asked to serve on the board? Or any traditions?

PP: I think the tradition usually is if you are a member of a committee then usually you'll become principal or president and if you are president then next year you'll be a member at large so there's continuity in the committee. And we try to find a mix of people who have experience with SILC and find some new blood or a couple of new bodies or new people who can bring some new ideas. So, to balance that. That's the main goal of concern.

PS: So do most board members—would they serve for three years?

PP: Most of them end up serving three or four years, then some on and off serve ten or fifteen years.

PS: But most people, the expectation, the tradition was three or four years. Okay. All right.

PP: Most people serve three years. You're right.

PS: And that was sometimes challenging.

PP: Yes.

PS: Okay. And you said that while you were on the board of directors you didn't—you still taught but not quite as much.

PP: Right. I would miss now and then, depending on if I had a meeting or somewhere to go, then I would. Once I commit, I usually make a point to go regularly and do my class.

PS: What was the most satisfying thing for you about being on the board? Serving on the board?

PP: As I said, just working with the great people. I mean, I find each and every person has a potential to contribute and if they do contribute to any of the committees, I think that's the best part, even though sometimes it seems hard to do. But we end up doing such a great job with all of us chipping in. And that's what I like about all the organizations I'm in. At a given point, the task looks so big or overwhelming, but one way or other we end up doing it and managing well.

PS: So it's that teamwork, coming together to do something to make it happen.

PP: Yes. I think so too. I'm not that—I don't do all these things by myself. I think that everybody contributes and that's what makes any organization great or good depending on how much people are willing to do.

PS: And you mentioned a little bit about special celebrations. Did you have some particular roles that were involved in carrying out any of the special celebrations, the Festival of India or the...

PP: The Festival of India was good. I was a chairperson of a whole festival and there were three different activities under that chairpersonship. They were the cafeteria, cultural, and exhibit. And that was a good year. I ended up going all the days, but it was fun. That was a commitment in itself. I'm sure you know about Festival of Nations, but once you go there, running a cafeteria for four days and finding all the volunteers, and doing dance programs and cultural activities and finding—it requires a lot of effort and a lot of people did help out that year doing that.

PS: Okay. Describe how you would set up the cafeteria. How would you get it staffed? How would you decide what to serve?

PP: Okay. I think—I always rely on—if I find somebody or some background information on how to do it, I will read up or meet that person about it and develop some background. So last year's chairperson, if I happen to run into him, I'll ask him for some background material or invite him for set-up. I'll ask, "How did you do it?" And then what we do, we advertise or send newsletters, we need volunteers for so and so, please give your name. And some people do sign up. As a matter of fact, for Festival of Nations, people do sign up. It's very good. That's a very successful event year after year.

PS: So just putting up an ad in the newsletter that you need volunteers to run the show.

PP: Yes. And sometime you'll call your friends, the ones that know you, your close, personal friends. Hopefully, they chip in. Then we'll make someone a Day Captain by the way. Like if there are five days, then each day they'll be Captain, or four days depending on the festival. And there will be shift leader and there will be cooking person and delivery person and somebody collecting money kind of thing. And then the same thing in cultural area. There will be Chairperson for the cultural program. He or she will approach a couple of lingual groups, like Gujarati Samaj or some other, Bhangra, Punjabi Bhangra dance or Marathi group and they will contribute, or SILC, and they will give one or two programs. And then the exhibit, there is always different theme. Like a marriage theme or education. So you make that exhibition on that theme. So usually the Indian group does well on these days.

PS: When you are setting up like the food, how would you get the food there? Where would you get the raw material? Where would you cook them?

PP: We usually cook there. First we take semi-cooked, meaning we prepare it but it's not totally cooked. Like we buy some frozen things and refry it, or we take rice and make rice there, or we make a salad. Or the mango shakes we make right on the spot or fry *papar* or *papadam* depending on how you pronounce it. And then we'll make like a chicken curry, but usually we used to give that [assignment] out to one of these Indian restaurants like Taste of India, Tandoori or Thaere Punjab or now it is the India Palace. We'll take a bid and see whoever wants to do it, I guess.

PS: So they would actually prepare the food?

PP: They prepare it, only part of it and then we'll refry it or re-warm it, kind of, in oven and finish the *papadam*, that's how they do it.

PS: Okay. So you actually have a contract with them?

PP: Yes right.

PS: Okay. All right. And would you give them credit somehow as you sold things?

PP: Yes. They will, yes, they will get paid for whatever food they supply.

PS: But when somebody was buying food from your stall at the Festival of Nations, would you say, "Oh this is actually food from Taste of India?"

PP: No. I don't think so because they didn't do everything.

PS: No.

PP: The only thing we buy is maybe one or two items from there. We have other things there. We have rice, we have mango shakes, we fry, we do salad, and make a whole plate, so it isn't completely out of the restaurant. Only thing the meat dish we save for supplier.

PS: Okay. And how did you decide which things to serve?

PP: Well, again it's like *tandoori* chicken and *samosas*, some of the items, they are very popular or people have heard about it. Or the committee, the previous year's committee, has done it. If what they have done—they will tell us that this was very popular, we should continue it or should we add something, and we'll talk it out and plan it.

PS: And are there certain foods that you'd always avoid serving or preparing?

PP: Well, I don't know whether I would avoid anything because everything we sold there, I think had a good—usually we do sell it well. The only thing is, the more you add, the more work there is for volunteers. So that's why I am usually reluctant to add lot of new things, but we at least want to make sure we have enough of a good variety so people can taste Indian style food—*chole* or *pulava*, and chicken and *samosas*, *papadam*, mango shakes etc.

PS: Okay. How did you decide the spice level?

PP: Yes. I think we keep it in moderation when we do it for the general public. They're still spicy but there are not like a lot of hot peppers. There's still touch of other spices there but not—we don't make it as hot—the level is medium to low, not medium to high. [Laughter]

PS: And would you get feedback from non-Indian people who are trying the food?

PP: Oh yes, because you can see. I've volunteered on and off many, many times. People look so, "Oh, I came here last year," they will come and line up. From the response you can tell how it's going.

PS: Then in your experience over the years of working with the food at the Festival of Nations, what was the most popular thing that you served?

PP: I think the mango shake is pretty good.

PS: Okav.

PP: *Samosas* and mango shakes are probably the tops, between those two. I think we have two dishes, vegetarian and non-vegetarian. There is a non-vegetarian dish. We will have *chole*, rice, *papad*, salad, and a non-veggie dish, we will have chicken instead of *chole*.

PS: Okay. And did you find that the people who came by, who bought the food, that they were from all over?

PP: They were from all over. All people you can think of, every walk of life, every different nationality and culture.

PS: And did you actually work in the food booth sometimes?

PP: Yes I did. Yes. I also worked when I was the co-organizer, Chairperson of Festival of Nations, but I also worked as a Day Captain.

PS: When you were Day Captain, did you have to be there all day?

PP: Yes.

PS: From what hours to what hours?

PP: From whenever it opens, ten in the morning to eight o'clock at night.

PS: So what time did you open it up?

PP: I think ten, something like that.

PS: Ten in the morning till?

PP: Eight in the evening.

PS: That's a long time.

PP: Yes, it is a long time.

PS: Wow.

PP: But usually you do get a break, get somebody [to stand in] and then walk around and see some other functions and come back. It's not that hard.

PS: Okay. All right. I would think that would be kind of fun. You get to play restaurant for a day.

PP: Yes, right. Yes, Yes, right.

PS: All right. So you also worked on a special project with a day camp for adopted children?

PP: Yes. Usually what they do, once a year, they will have a one half a day or maybe six hours of programs. And during that program, they will have different activities, like a small activity about India and there will be some cooking and there will be some talk about Indian culture and some program, like a slide presentation, and there will be some demonstrations, and there will be

some *dandia-raas* [Gujarati dance] or something. So my wife and I, we volunteered a few times. I mean, I don't know how many times, but whenever they, somebody, calls, I'll go. [Laughter]

PS: That's great.

PP: Yes. Usually, the children adopted from India, they could be from any part of India and could be anywhere from poor to, most of them are poor adopted kids, anyhow because when they come from there to here, I don't think there are too many rich kids to give away. Usually they are poor kids or orphans. And I know that the parents feel they can get exposure to the culture. That's the same reason that SILC is doing the business. The camp is only for one day, each of the programs [SILC and day camp] are basically the same format.

PS: So how is it for you when you are interacting with these school children who've been adopted. Is that different for you than when you're with the SILC kids?

PP: In a way, yes it is and in a way, it's not. In a way it is because when we do yoga, again I do try to make it more like fun. I usually join in. So I demonstrate it and they follow it and I think they like it. And then we do *dandia-raas* or musical programs and we join in that. So it's being a participant in this kind of program, I think children like that.

PS: So that's how it's the same?

PP: Yes, the same, yes.

PS: Are there any ways that it's different?

PP: One time I remember, I'll comment on something else. That one time I remember like twenty-five, thirty, and I did something called *Savasana*. *Sava* means a lying posture, relaxation posture. *Sava* means dead, like corpse, you just lie down and I kept kids for three or four minutes, all the parents were, "How can children be so quiet so long?" I mean they all lie down and think it was kind of fun and couple of parents came after that, "It's great that all these kids are relaxing." They usually run around and they'll move around and here they are, lying on a floor. So you get good feedback from the organizer. Go ahead with what you are going to ask me.

PS: So that was really satisfying for you.

PP: It was, absolutely.

PS: You get these hyper little kids to lay still and be quiet.

PP: Yes, that's always nice to see, children quiet. [Laughter]

PS: So this is called a dead posture, did you say?

PP: Yes, *Savasana*. Dead, yes. *Sava* means dead, yes.

PS: Okay.

PP: Sava means you are so still, it is like you're dead, nothing is moving. You're supposed to go through the motion of relaxing every part of your joints from your toes to the top of your head. You relax your toes and your knees and your hips and you go through everything. As you relax, your body gets, it sinks in the floor kind of and everything becomes very rhythmical and slows down and if you add not to think anything, that's great. That's the idea of yoga where you want to concentrate on not thinking. That's the best state and that Savasana helps that. It relaxes you if you do ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. As a matter of fact, if you do in the right way, it's almost like three or four hours of sleep, if you can do twenty minutes of Savasana.

PS: Wow. And could you get the kids to do that?

PP: Well, not that long, though this was a couple of minutes or three minutes. As I said, they are not regulars, yoga students as such. They are kind of weekend warriors, I call them. They come for a week and they do it for and then forget it and then they have to start from scratch. For them, it's more like a fun Saturday than being a real serious yoga student.

PS: Okay. And there was some other project that you worked on, special project or event?

PP: I think there was the 10th year celebration, we talked about it. Then Festival of Nation Chairperson and then Parents of Indian Adopted Children and I also—let's see what else did I do? I do other works but I don't know which one I mentioned, I don't remember.

PS: Okay. I can't remember either. Somebody will tell us if it's important. [Laughter] Tell me some more about your most vivid memory of being on the board of directors. Was there any particular meeting that was particularly full of energy or fire or conflict or anything?

PP: I can think of a couple of things and the main thing I think of is the 10th anniversary celebration, which was one year behind. On the 11th year, we did the 10th year anniversary. I think that was the most satisfying function for bringing people together and agreeing on things and eventually doing it. And of course, as always when the children are involved, then getting their parents and making them bring their children on time, and making sure they attend and stay until the classes finish all three periods, and how to incorporate or how to implement that ideal, I thought that was challenging. Because some of the kids, they have to go somewhere or they have to go to a basketball game or they have to—Saturday is usually a busy day.

We used to do it on Sunday instead. We have gone back and forth between Saturday and Sunday, while now it's Saturday—used to be on Sunday at one time. And I think since this is a volunteer organization, there'll always be challenging things coming up. It's not very regimental or not very fixed so it's day-to-day things.

PS: So the challenge for you is getting volunteers to keep their word?

PP: Getting them to work and volunteer. Figuring out how to get the children to stay there, and to stay in their class and make sure they participate in the activities. And we'll have guest speakers and we'll have sometime we do called group activities, like Festival of Lights or Diwali program, we'll do that. Or some other festivals that we'll celebrate in a group. We'll plan for that and we need volunteers.

PS: So if the child was supposed to be in class and wasn't, how would you deal with that?

PP: Well, usually we just try to point him in the right direction or if they usually ask their teachers to excuse them because they have to go somewhere or out of town or something, earlier, like they have to go basketball practice or whatnot. But, I think one time there used to be a little bit more formatted structure. Now we have a little bit more lax structure. We do allow them to take only one period if they want to. Or if they just want to learn a language or if they want to learn two periods, that's okay. Before they had to do all three. Very rarely we allowed two, unless it's really a high school student who wants to learn language only, we allow it. But most of the time, they have to do all three periods. But now I think people do go in and out in a little bit less structured manner.

PS: What do you think of that?

PP: I think that there are advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage part of it is that your attendance is not regular. So if some teacher wants to do a certain activity, you don't know how many students are going to show up. And another disadvantage is that you don't get the whole benefit. I mean the idea is to teach all the different things. So they do miss out on some of the things. Otherwise you have a choice I guess. If you cannot be in all three periods, I guess you can take only one or two periods and go with your parents earlier. Personally, I'd rather see them keep a little bit more structure.

PS: But it's gone the other way it sounds

PP: The other way, yes.

PS: So now, if you were in charge...

PP: Yes, right, right. Right, I mean you always have to adjust and play along when you are a volunteer organization. It's not a regular high school where you have to have 95 percent attendance otherwise you don't graduate and things like that. Here I mean you have to work with an available volunteer force.

PS: So that's one of the challenges for you.

PP: That was a challenge. I think for even now, children are a little bit—and there's always, I mean, you can always say when you have more freedom, then people, kids will probably learn

more. It depends on how you look at it. Instead of telling you what to do, maybe they do what they like. So there are pluses and minuses to any given comment I guess.

PS: When you were on the board, was it the board who made decisions about what classes would be offered, like which languages and which subjects?

PP: Yes it was and also whether we had a volunteer who can teach that subject. That also has an influence on it. There is one language, Sanskrit, it's like Latin. Sanskrit is a mother of all Indian languages. We offered that for a couple of years, as a matter of fact, but after that there was not enough interest so we discontinued it. The same thing happened with Gujarati. One time we used to have almost half of the students learning Gujarati, now we don't have any Gujarati taught.

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PS: So is that because of a lack of a teacher?

PP: Lack of attendance.

PS: Lack of attendance, oh.

PP: Lack of attendance also. Because you have to have students. Usually the parents and teachers and some of the parents become volunteers and teach hand-to-hand. But at one time, Gujarati was the biggest class. We taught three or four classes of Gujarati and now we have a couple of Gujarati students but they are not learning Gujarati. They are there to do other things.

PS: All right. So the topics and the subjects change depending on needs.

PP: Change, yes. It depends on resources and the students.

PS: And what are the ages of the students that are at SILC right now? Do they tend to be younger children?

PP: I think there are more younger ones now. Yes, they tend to be younger. At one time they were, some of them used to start at nine or ten or twelve or fourteen or fifteen years. Now they are starting at a younger age. They are starting from six or seven years—we even have some younger than six years who want to become SILC students. So we have new program where they can come and get together, meet parents, and those kids, and know environment, so next year they can join. It's like a preschool.

PS: Like a nursery school. Okay. And is that working well?

PP: Yes, it's working out. It's a once a month kind of, they will be in one room and keep those kids in and play around, pick up some points here and there.

PS: Are the kids that are coming now, these young children, are any of them the second generation of the kids that you had earlier?

PP: As a matter of fact, there's one—She's the principal of the SILC. She used to be a student at one time, Chitra Subramanian. She used to be student and now she's the principal. Because after graduation—she's a teacher in real life and she wanted to help us out and that was, I think that was a big thing. I really think that's a big thing the second generation becoming teachers and a principal. Then some of the students who graduated or came for five or six years, afterwards they become assistants to teachers. You know they help out in a class. So we have a few of those also. But I don't think we have children of second generation from what I recall.

PS: Okay. Just wait.

PP: Yes. Just wait, right. Matter of fact, Ram Gada's daughter, Lisa mentioned to her parents, Ram and Neena Gada, that they should make sure the SILC is there when her kids grow up. So, she really wants to join. Then we'll have second generation, that's what I meant. That way you know they will come.

PS: Tell me about the relationships that you have with other board members.

PP: I think I had a principal who is pretty good, Aparna Ganguli. She really helped me out a lot. I think I usually try to be a team member and work together so that usually works out. I think I really enjoy it. I think all of them, really, I knew them. Some of them I really knew well and some of them I got to know better. Yes, but they were very supportive and whatever committee they were heading or activity they were heading, they did it extremely well and it made my job much easier.

PS: Was it ever challenging that you came from all these different parts of India?

PP: I don't think so. I don't think so. The reason I'm hesitating is that more people are not joining because they think maybe we're too broad an organization. They'd rather see it be only one lingual group, but personally, you know, I don't think that's a shortcoming.

PS: Okay. Most of the people that were on the original board were people who had emigrated directly from India, right?

PP: Yes. All those on my committee, they were all from—originally, they all came from India.

PS: Okay. And my understanding is that when you're in India, there's a consciousness of the caste system.

PP: Yes.

PS: Did that ever play itself out in any way in any things that you were doing?

PP: Not here. With all organizations I am involved in, I don't think they're playing off the caste system at all. Maybe in social groups, other settings, but not at a public organization such as SILC or India Association or Mandir. I think you shouldn't play any caste system. I might add

though that most people who come here, they are well-to-do. So, they do not come from poor or backward class. Okay. Most of them are well-to-do.

PS: But the highest caste is the Bhramins.

PP: Bhramin.

PS: And then the next one is Vaishya—

PP: Kshatriya.

PS: Kshatriya. Are some of both of those involved together?

PP: All four of them I think they are. Vaishya, Sudhra, Bhramin, and then Kshatriya like you mentioned. They all are involved. I don't think, I can tell someone from the caste but I can't tell which caste they belong to. Really, it doesn't bother me one way or another. Once you have education and once you are volunteering yourself, you are already there as a good upstanding person in your society. So no, it doesn't play. Luckily, it doesn't play at least in these organizations I've been involved.

PS: Okay. Good. Yes, that's interesting. So what do you think caused people to just set that aside here because in India that's a fairly strong way to be identified, is that right?

PP: Yes, absolutely and I hate to admit that even in educated class, particularly when it comes to marriage, and making friends, and being socially involved, it's really, people do pick sides and they do belong to certain groups or certain castes. In America, I think that maybe that's what we're learning from Western culture, I think. That maybe that's helping us. That it doesn't have to be that way; it shouldn't be that way. And, I also mentioned that most of the well-to-do have a college education and have exposure to groups of people from different caste, I guess, so they have adapted well.

PS: So that's an influence?

PP: I would like to think that way, that here, you don't see that caste system. I'm sure they have some touchs of it here and there, but overall—it's very good that society as far as the caste system or job status or things like that, is not that influential here in America.

PS: So you think it was just that influence of 'we're all Americans, now we're all equal'?

PP: I'd like to think that. That would be my opinion.

PS: Okay. All right. SILC has been around a long time as a volunteer organization.

PP: Yes.

PS: And that's actually very unique.

PP: Yes.

PS: A lot of volunteer organizations, after the principal volunteers get tired out, it just fades away. To what would you attribute that long-term success of SILC? What gives it the staying power?

PP: I think the democratic approach. Some of the organization doesn't last long like you mentioned. Most of the time, if one person takes ownership and other people do not participate and doesn't have that ownership feeling, then eventually it fades away. In SILC, I think it's democratic, like we said we take a lot of votes about whether we should move or what time should we meet. We do a lot of surveys and I think that's what keeps it going. But there are some people who have been involved from long time and do their time, but it's still a democratic approach. That's what makes it more successful than 'you have to be the one', believing that I'm the only one who can do this job. It's not that. If people are willing and able to do jobs, they do show up and do that thing.

PS: Okay. If you had to do it all over again as a board member, is there anything that you might change about how the board worked, or any decisions that it made, or any choices?

PP: Well, I think the board, as I keep repeating myself, the board does a very good job. Mostly, I think the recruiting part—getting more students—is something. If somehow I could figure out some way of doing that. If there's a magic wand I can swing out, I would do that. And if some committee member or board member can think of some way, and if I can do that, to have more people participate, that would be great. That's the only thing I would change if I could change anything at all.

PS: So all the other choices you've made over the years, moves to different locations, moves back and forth between Saturday and Sunday, the courses that are on Saturday?

PP: I don't think it has that much of an influence.

PS: Okay.

PP: I think sometimes the peer pressure—if certain students are coming and other friends know about it, sometimes they come that way. But if some of them are in for four or five years and they don't come, then some of them don't come either. So it works both ways. You can bring more students that way, peer pressure or friendship, or the other way around when they finish school then some of them go with them too.

PS: Did you find that students tend to stay through their teenage years as students?

PP: Yes. I think once they are there for couple of years, I think they tend to stay a little longer because I think they appreciate it and they have that bonding between friends or their classmate

and it does influence them. Some I think even for their college career. If they have this kind of background it does, it has a positive influence on their career and education. Because as I said before, learning about different culture is always a good thing and it shows if you go through more than two or three years.

PS: And what would you say is the most important factor in helping the kids stay long-term at SILC?

PP: I think again, it's if they bond with classmates or their parents are willing to bring them every Saturday, if they are willing to do their part. And there are more options available in the school, so they can take different things, music, yoga, dance, whatever. All those things collectively will help and word of mouth and that, "Hey this is such a good organization maybe we should send our kid there or we should volunteer there." After all it will benefit anybody who wants to join or who's there.

PS: Okay. And have there been any—I know technically the Indian culture does not approve of dating.

PP: Yes.

PS: But have there been any romances that have come out of students, between students?

PP: I think they are a little bit too young for that. [Laughter]

PS: Are there any teenagers?

PP: There are teenagers but not that, like sixteen, seventeen. There are not that many. And there might be. I go only for one period, so I do not know about it. I really don't have knowledge about that I'm sorry. [Laughter] I'm not the right guy to know all this things. Somebody else might know.

PS: [Laughter] All right. I'll ask one of the women about it next time. They are a little bit more emotional about that.

PP: Yes, right.

PS: Okay. So tell me about the vision that you have for SILC in the future? You want every single Indian kid in the United States or at least in Minnesota to be a graduate?

PP: Not necessarily Indian even. Anybody who has interest in Indian culture can join. Nowadays you hear about yoga and vegetarians and lot of things are environment friendly, and all those things. Anybody wants to know about Indian culture, or alternate way of doing things or learning or broadening the horizon, should we say, can attend.

I should maybe go and learn some other religion myself. I should read about Catholicism or any other, Muslims. Same thing about any other languages. Everybody should learn at least one or two other languages whether it is Spanish or German or Hindi or Gujarati. What it does, I think—some of the languages are so rich. If nothing else, you probably don't learn that deep but at least you know about it, that there is such a thing or that there is such a culture that exists and it might contribute in your life, that you might appreciate it later.

Like myself, I wish I had learned more Sanskrit. All the religious and philosophical writings are done in Sanskrit and say if I had a little deeper knowledge, I would probably appreciated it more. I would learn more classical music, should we say. Kids don't realize that these kinds of things are long term things. It's not just one year you learn and forget about it. Eventually, it influences your life if you know about music, arts, or literature. It does help in the long term. That would be then my wish. If everybody has chance to do that, it would be great.

PS: Can you actually buy books these days that are written in Sanskrit?

PP: Oh you definitely can. You can buy them or with a translation underneath. Like you might have heard of *Bhagvad Geeta*. It's a very philosophical book. You can buy a book with Sanskrit and underneath with a translation how to pronounce and then what's the meaning.

PS: In English.

PP: In English.

PS: Or in other languages as well.

PP: In other languages as well, but mostly in English translating from Sanskrit.

PS: Okay. And how do you hope to be involved in SILC in the future?

PP: Well, I have a very minor role. As I said, whenever I can help out in the organization I will be glad to do it, but I'm not, shall we say, running part of the SILC as much as I was when I was doing it three or four years ago. I've ended up on the nominating committee now and then but other than that, I have a more passive role. I think, the way I see it, maybe the second—I'm looking forward to when the second generation of kids will get involved. That would be my hope that those who attended SILC will show up and take charge.

PS: Do you think your sons will do that?

PP: I think one of my sons more so than other one. But I think they're both—like one likes to read about Indian philosophy and literature. He reads about it, but I don't know that he'd go and teach or not. I don't know. I hope so, but time will tell.

PS: Okay. So your sons may or may not be on the staff with SILC.

PP: Yes.

PS: Okay. Do you think if they had children, that they would bring them to SILC?

PP: I think they'll go. The reason I'm saying that is because they had some exposure and eventually, their kids will—might want to know about it, so I sure hope, that's all I can tell. I'm very hopeful about it.

PS: Are there any other things that I haven't asked you about yet that you want to tell me about?

PP: I don't think so. SILC is a great organization as far as I'm concerned. There are certain people who have been involved almost sixteen or seventeen years or even before SILC started, and there are a lot of new people as well. There is a group of people that give their time and their energy so SILC moves smoothly and functions smoothly and students learn something that they can appreciate the rest of the year and rest of their lives in a different way.

PS: So for you, overall, how's it been?

PP: It's been great. I think it's marvelous as far as I can tell. I think it's great. SILC is great. I enjoyed being there. My wife sometimes complains about it. That would be a different story because it takes too much time. If you want to go, if you want to do something in the afternoon, then I have to take an hour, when I was there plus traveling time, so that takes more time.

PS: So these days, how many hours a week are you spending with SILC these days?

PP: Just a one period lasts from 2:15 to 3:00. Yes, but I leave my house about 1:30 or 1:45 and come back about 3:15. It's a couple of hours.

PS: So still pretty good commitment in terms of time. I haven't even asked you what is that you do the rest of the time in your work time?

PP: Okay. I came here in 1965 as a student, an undergraduate student, in mechanical engineering. I did my B.S. in mechanical engineering at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. That's where I graduated from. Then my first job was at Burroughs which is now Unisys corporation, working on computer peripheral equipment like card readers, optical readers and the like. I did my M.Sc. at night, part-time. I did my M.S. in mechanical engineering. And after that I worked for Burroughs, then I worked for Control Data, which is no longer around. I guess there is just a very small fraction left. Most of it has kind of disappeared. You probably know about it. Then I worked for Medtronic. I worked for the Implantable Drug Device division. And for the last fifteen years, I've been working for a company called Abelconn.

PS: And what does Abelconn do?

PP: We make interconnect devices or like PC [personal computer] board connectors. We manufacture for the defense industry for space and satellite and custom connectors. They are very high density custom connectors.

PS: So what you are doing in yoga is very, very different from that.

PP: It is definitely different. The only thing is—you see yoga, by definition, is to connect. Yoga means whatever is your goal to, how to connect or reach there, that's yoga. And yoga is not just five minute or twenty minute or one hour. It's a really lifestyle. Your style, you know, the way you think, the way you eat, the way you behave, the way you do your job.

Everything influences and if you are really good student of yoga, you will do the oddest routine without being bothered. You will do things smoothly or without stress or you eat in moderation, you sleep well, or you don't get frustrated. Those kind of things you can do by practicing yoga, regular breathing part of it and after breathing, concentration, meditation those things. If you are in that, if affects everything you do.

Yoga is not related to my work, but at that time I might find a few breathing technique or some relaxation between jobs that really help me. So to me, yoga is everywhere from getting up to sleep. It's a lifestyle, it's not just a one hour activity or a day long activity. It's a total approach. If you look at it that way, it's everywhere.

PS: Yes, that's cool. All right. Anything else that you want to tell me about?

PP: No. Maybe I've been talking too much. No, but now I don't have anything else.

PS: You're supposed to talk.

PP: Okay [Laughter]

PS: Well thank you very much for taking time tonight.

PP: I appreciate having the opportunity to talk about this yoga subject with SILC and my involvement with SILC and [the Minnesota] Historical Society, it's nice that you're giving this opportunity to Indian culture and society to have something that in future somebody can look into it or learn about it. Hopefully, it'll be put in the permanent record and will be great.

PS: Great deal. All right. Thank you.

PP: Thank you.