

A TEI Project

Interview of Jyoti Keshavan

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (January 4, 2010)

Hampapur

What's your name?

Keshavan

My name is Jyoti Keshavan.

Hampapur

And where were you born?

Keshavan

I was born in Bangalore, India.

Hampapur

And when were you born?

Keshavan

I was born on March 15, 1957.

Hampapur

What was your birth order?

Keshavan

I was the first of four children in the family. Two of the kids survived, and two passed away. Since I'm the oldest, this is my second brother [Vasu Ramakrishna], who survived. I lost a brother right after me, and I lost a sister who was born ten years after I was born.

Hampapur

What region of India is your family originally from?

Keshavan

We all come from South India. It's from a state called Karnataka.

Hampapur

And what languages does your family speak?

Keshavan

My family, we speak English, we speak Tamil, and we speak Kannada. And since I grew up in Bombay, I picked up Marathi and Hindi, and so did my family.

Hampapur

What is your religious background?

Keshavan

We are Hindus and to be more specific, we are from the region of Karnataka and we practice--to be more specific, we are Iyengars.

Hampapur

And what were your parents' occupations?

Keshavan

My mom was a homemaker all her life. My dad [Ramakrishna] worked for Indian Airlines. He worked for Air India first and then he transferred to Indian Airlines. He was a mechanical engineer. I'm sorry, he was an instrumental engineer.

Keshavan

And where did you grow up?

Keshavan

I grew up in Bombay and Madras. The first fifteen years of my life was in Bombay, in the city of Bombay, and then till twenty-two, fifteen to twenty-two I grew up in Madras, which is now called Chennai.

Hampapur

And why did you move to Chennai?

Keshavan

My father got transferred, so that's the reason why we moved.

Hampapur

Okay. So can you tell me a little bit about the house you grew up in? Was it a house, an apartment? Just some description of what it looked like.

Keshavan

Okay. I was told as soon as I was born we lived in a city called Chembur, which is near the city of Bombay. It was a one-bedroom apartment, one-room apartment to be more specific, and we were two families living in that one-room apartment. Then afterwards we branched out. The two families, one is our family, my dad's family, and the other one is my dad's sister's family. And then after that we branched out. My father got a job in Air India, so we lived in an apartment. It was called Air India Quarters. That's how it was called in India. And then my dad's sister, they moved out and they lived in their own apartment. And then after that, my father bought his own apartment in Bandra, which is again in the city of Bombay, and that was a two-room apartment, two rooms, a hall, and a kitchen, self-contained, a self-contained apartment.

Hampapur

Okay. Who were your neighbors in Bandra?

Keshavan

It was a very nice city. It was a cosmopolitan--I would call it a cosmopolitan building, because I grew up with Christians, Maharashtrians. Then we had people from Kerala in our building, we had Punjabis, and we also had Marvadis, who are from Rajasthan.

Hampapur

Okay. And how did you travel in those times around the city?

Keshavan

Mainly by bus, public bus, and sometimes we also took taxis. I've also traveled in public trains, but these were the modes of transportation.

Hampapur

And what kind of diet did your family follow?

Keshavan

We're vegetarians. We're all vegetarians, Hindu-Brahmin vegetarians, which our food basically consisted of rice. Rice is our staple meal, rice, vegetables, curries. We used a lot of coconut in our cooking and a lot of spices.

Hampapur

Did you have any pets?

Keshavan

No. We did not have any pets.

Hampapur

Can you tell me a little bit about your friends while growing up?

Keshavan

While we used to live in the city of Bombay, I had two very good friends. One was called Ophelia. She lived in our building, and she was one of my good friends. And then I had a schoolmate, her name was Vidya, and she and I would compete in school, in academics, so that was nice. Then after I moved to Madras, I was there for--I just attended high school in Madras for one year and then I went to college, and in college I made two very good friends. One is from Punjab, and her name is Vibha, and one is from Tamil Nadu, and her is Anuradha.

Hampapur

Okay. So while you were growing up, were your friends mostly girls, or did you have friends who were boys, or solely girls?

Keshavan

No. I was brought up in a very strict environment and so I did not associate myself with any boys. So the only friends I had, I just named them, and a few others who were mainly acquaintances, so that's pretty much it.

Hampapur

What were your friends' religious backgrounds?

Keshavan

They were all Hindus except for Ophelia, who was Christian.

Hampapur

Were they from a specific region of India, or was it mixed as you mentioned with your college friends?

Keshavan

They were all mixed, like I said. We had Punjabis and Marvadis and Gujaratis, and when I moved to Madras, Chennai, it was Tamilian.

Hampapur

And did they follow the same diet as you and your family?

Keshavan

Pretty much, yes. Yes.

Hampapur

Okay. So in your childhood and your teenage years, what did you like to do for fun, for entertainment?

Keshavan

When I was growing up in Bombay as a young kid, all the kids from the building, we would come out and play on the street. We would play lagori, we would play marbles, we would play jump rope, we would play hopscotch, those are the games. Then after we moved to Madras I did not play all those games, so those are all my childhood games.

Hampapur

Did you ever watch movies?

Keshavan

Seldom. Seldom.

Hampapur

Did you listen to the radio?

Keshavan

Oh, yes, yes. I used to listen to a lot of Hindi film music, and I would listen to cricket commentaries, which was pretty common in the days when I was growing up, as a kid. So cricket commentaries, music, of course news on the radio, those were the common things.

Hampapur

And who did you listen to the radio with?

Keshavan

Myself. Sometimes I would increase the volume so the whole family could hear it.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any hobbies while growing up?

Keshavan

Oh, by the way, I didn't tell you, in India we owned a transistor. It's a smaller version of the radio. This was a portable transistor; it was battery-operated. That was kind of new when I was growing up. It was not like those box type and you had to plug it into the wall. This was a very nice, small, cute one. I could transport it wherever I wanted to.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any hobbies?

Keshavan

My hobbies--I liked sewing, doing embroidery work. I learned sewing in school, so that's pretty much it. Otherwise, other than that I enjoyed cooking. I would cook every now and then, and if my parents went out I would go into the kitchen, try to experiment with Indian cooking.

Hampapur

And did you have any rules or restrictions from your parents that you had to follow while growing up?

Keshavan

Yes, I did have rules. I had to be home before the sun went down. My parents did not like me to talk to boys on the street. That was a no-no. Yes, I had to be very strict with the way I dressed, nothing revealing or anything, and the way I did my hair. My father was pretty strict about all those things.

Hampapur

So what kind of clothes did you wear then?

Keshavan

I grew up with long skirts. I was introduced to sari at a very early age. Once I reached puberty I was introduced to the sari, which is pretty normal in India. I also wore half sari when we moved to Madras, which is a long skirt and half of a sari. It's a three-yards material which is wrapped around the skirt, which pretty much looked like a sari.

Hampapur

Can you describe to me the chores and responsibilities you had at home?

Keshavan

At home--at times we would not have servants at home, so that's when I had to wash my clothes, take care of--I helped my mom [Rukmani Ramakrishna] in the kitchen, washed the dishes. But for most of my life we did have a servant in our family who did those things.

Hampapur

Okay. So now I'm going to switch towards school.

Keshavan

Okay.

Hampapur

So in your childhood, before college, what type of school did you attend?

Keshavan

I attended a convent when I was in India. It was called Cardinal Gracious High School. We did not have nuns, but we had priests who were our teachers. I had a few male teachers who were priests, and then we also had other gentlemen who were not priests as my teachers. When I came to Madras, one year I had many female teachers there, the one year of high school that I was in, and then in college it was mainly women.

Hampapur

In Madras, the school that you attended, was that also a convent high school?

Keshavan

That was not a convent. That was just a general school, and it was a coed school.

Hampapur

Okay. And why did you parents choose to send you to a convent school when you were younger?

Keshavan

I lived in the city of Ea Bandra, and this is eastern part of Bandra, and this was one of the good schools in the area, so that's the reason why my parents chose to send me over there. And it was also very important for them that I learn English.

Hampapur

And what was your best subject?

Keshavan

English was my favorite subject. I did not enjoy math as much.

Hampapur

What was your worst subject?

Keshavan

Math. I enjoyed history, I enjoyed geography, I loved civics. Math was not my forte.

Hampapur

What languages were spoken in school?

Keshavan

English was the medium of instruction, but we had to learn two other languages besides English. So my second language was Hindi, and since I was in the state of Maharashtra, I learned Marathi as my third language. But when I came to Tamil Nadu, when we moved to Chennai, all I had to do was take one second language, and I continued with Hindi.

Hampapur

What was the gender of the other students in your convent school?

Keshavan

Are you talking about the ratio between boys and girls?

Keshavan

Yes. Was it a coed school or all girls?

Keshavan

Yes, yes, they were all coed schools, and it was kind of fifty-fifty.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any role models at your school, any teachers?

Keshavan

None that I can think of. I remember when I was in Madras, since I was not up to par in math--I was good with reading, English, Hindi, all those subjects.

Math, since I told you it was not my forte, so I had a tutor named Mrs.

Padmakshi. She was my math teacher as well, so I remember her. She was a good teacher and she kind of instilled a love of math within me, so I remember her very well.

Hampapur

Okay. And what were your feelings about school when you were growing up?

Keshavan

I enjoyed school, loved going to school, putting on my uniform, walking sometimes to school. Sometimes I would take the bus. I enjoyed school pretty much, yes. It was a heavy competition in those days, because kids wanted to go to college and so we were always competing. "Oh, I got 60 percent, I got 50 percent, I got 58 percent." As I was growing up, if you scored 60 percent that's equivalent to an A today, and so, yes, that was a major achievement if somebody got a 60 percent. Fifty percent was like a B, 40 to 50 was like a C, and below that is an F. But I hear that today things have changed in India. It's more or less like how it is over here.

Hampapur

Okay. Who encouraged you to prepare for college?

Keshavan

My father. My father wanted me to go to college. He would have loved it if I had taken science, but I had an aptitude for English. I liked English and the arts, so that's why I headed in that direction.

Hampapur

And did your teachers talk about students attending college when you were in school?

Keshavan

No. It was taken for granted that everybody would attend college, and most of us did attend college. It's only then we would ditch college if we didn't have any classes in the afternoon. Although we were expected to stay on campus, many of us would just leave campus and do extraneous things.

Hampapur

And how did your parents feel about your grades?

Keshavan

My parents were very happy. They were proud of me. They thought I was smart.

Hampapur

Did you have any patriotic activities in school?

Keshavan

Yes. We celebrated India's Independence Day, India's Republic Day. Different schools would participate in the marching ceremony, and we would go to this one particular school, and all the schools had to be represented over there. We had to march and flag salute, and we did all those things. We had to listen to lectures, speeches, so those were our patriotic things.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you ever hear any prejudices against certain groups when you were in school?

Keshavan

Not really. To be honest with you, no. But I saw that more after I moved to Chennai, because I saw racial fights and racial discrimination within the communities over there.

Hampapur

Within which communities?

Keshavan

The Brahmins, the non-Brahmins, and different political parties. As you know, India has so many different political parties, so they would fight with each other and we would have riots on the streets.

Hampapur

Then going back a little bit, the other students in your school, what were their religious backgrounds?

Keshavan

Most of the students that I associated with were all Hindus, a few of them Christians, but majority would be Hindus.

Hampapur

Okay. So I'm going to move on a little bit forward towards college. What college did you attend?

Keshavan

I attended Stella Maris College right from pre-university all the way up to my master's, so we're talking about a total of six years.

Hampapur

Okay. And had anyone else in your family gone to college?

Keshavan

No, no.

Hampapur

So you were the first?

Keshavan

My mom attended, I think, for one year, and then she got married. I don't think my dad attended formal college. He went to like, what do they call that, over here also they have, like institutes. He went to an engineering institute. Like you know you have DeVry over here? So that's where he went and got his instrumental engineering stuff all done.

Hampapur

Like a vocational institute.

Keshavan

Kind of, yes. That's right, that's right.

Hampapur

Okay. And how did you pick which college to attend?

Keshavan

Oh, Stella Maris College is very popular in Madras, in Chennai, and it was every girl's ambition to go to that college. And, of course, it was in close proximity to where we lived, so, and I was lucky to get into that college.

Hampapur

How did you pick the subject you studied?

Keshavan

Like I said, I always liked English throughout my life, and I always got compliments from people, "Oh, you're such a good writer, you have good vocabulary and you're good with writing skills," so that motivated me to go into literature.

Hampapur

And what degrees did you earn?

Keshavan

I earned a B.A. and an M.A., both in English literature. Both those degrees are in English literature.

Hampapur

And what was the purpose of attending college? Why did you choose to attend?

Keshavan

Why did I choose to attend? Oh, good question. Just to expand my knowledge. And then everybody went to college. As I was growing up, going to college was quite an achievement, and I wanted to be an achiever, so that's the reason why I went to college.

Hampapur

Okay.

Keshavan

And, yes, of course, without my parents' parental push, this would not have happened, so it was important for my parents also that I be a college graduate.

Hampapur

Did you work after graduating from college?

Keshavan

No, I did not. In fact, I got married before I finished. In the final semester of my college, of my master's degree, I got married, and then I had to go back and take the final exams, so I had no chance to work. And within three months after I got married, I came to the United States.

Hampapur

Okay. And when you were growing up, did you expect that you would be working one day, or was it kind of assumed you go through college and then you get married?

Keshavan

I assumed that I would go through college and get married. I did not see myself as a person with an occupation. I thought life ended with marriage and then bringing up children and that's it, but that's not how it turned out to be now.

Hampapur

Okay. And did you have any friends who worked?

Keshavan

No. Like I said, since I, [unclear] and I graduated and I left India--but later on I did hear from some friends that they did work. Some of them worked in the same college where we studied. They became lecturers and professors.

Hampapur

Okay. So I'm going to switch topics a bit to immigration. While you were growing up, during your childhood and adolescence, were there any expectations for your family to move out of India? Did your family ever consider that?

Keshavan

My family consider moving out of India?

Hampapur

Yes.

Keshavan

No, no. No, not really, no.

Hampapur

Did you know of any family members or neighbors or friends who had moved abroad while you were growing up?

Keshavan

My uncle. My father's brother came to Canada. Actually, he was in London first, and then they moved to Canada. That's the only person I can think of.

Hampapur

And why did he move?

Keshavan

For a job.

Hampapur

Okay. And what did you know about the U.S. while you were growing up?

Keshavan

Oh, U.S. was a big talk among all my friends. We all aspired to come to the United States, because it was a glamorous country, and I did have those ideas in my mind. I wanted to come to the United States, if not for settling, at least for a visit, just to come and see, because we had heard so many nice things about the continent. Of course, we did learn about U.S. history and exploration and all that, so it was one of my aims to come to the United States, just if not for settling, at least to come as a tourist.

Hampapur

What are some of the kinds of things you had heard about the U.S. that you and your friends used to talk about?

Keshavan

Well, we knew it was a land of plenty. We also knew that technology was advanced here, and people were nice, you can earn a lot of money, you get lots of cosmetics, jewelry and clothing, all of those kinds of things.

Hampapur

And where did you hear those things from?

Keshavan

Heard it from fellow students, because some of my fellow students, a couple of them had come to the U.S. They had come here as cultural artists, like Bharatanatyam. One of the students had come to perform here, and another student had come just for the visit, and so when they came back, they told us all stories and interesting stories and all the nice things. They showed us some of the nice things they had bought from here, so those kinds of things kind of motivated us. "Hey, we should also go someday and visit." You know what I'm talking about, right?

Hampapur

Yes.

Keshavan

Showing us jewelry, little purses and compacts, powder compacts, all those kinds of things.

Hampapur

Did many people go? Was it common for people to visit?

Keshavan

No. It was not common. Like I said, I knew two students, Lakshmi and Vedavali, two of my fellow classmates in college. So they came back and told us about all the nice things of the United States.

Hampapur

And so why did you decide to emigrate to the U.S.?

Keshavan

Why did I decide to emigrate to the U.S.? My husband [Keshavan] had come here in the 1960s for an education, late 1960s. No, I'm sorry, it was the early seventies. That's when he came. Then he came here, he got his doctorate and a Ph.D., and then he came back to get married, and then mine was an arranged marriage. My grandmother was instrumental in causing this. And after we got married, in those days it was easy to come. You could come with your spouse, and I came here on a green card, with a green card I should say.

Hampapur

And when did you come?

Keshavan

I came in August 1979.

Hampapur

Where did you get married?

Keshavan

We got married in Bangalore, India.

Hampapur

And when your marriage was being arranged, was your family considering any other potential grooms from abroad, or were the rest within India?

Keshavan

Before this alliance, I had seen a couple of other boys. One came from Detroit, Michigan, but somehow it didn't go through, and there was another one who was from India himself, and that also did not work out. So my present husband is the third alliance that was brought to our family.

Hampapur

And were grooms from abroad more favored, less favored, or it didn't make a difference?

Keshavan

It didn't make a difference.

Hampapur

What was your husband's description of the U.S. when you decided to get married?

Keshavan

He said that he lived with his brother. They have a nice home. They had just bought a home, and he told me he drove a Dodge car. And he said, "You know, we have everything, all the basic necessities, whatever we need," so that's pretty much it.

Hampapur

Okay. And did you have any friends or family who were also moving to the U.S. through marriage?

Keshavan

No, not when I moved. Not when I moved in 1979, but in the eighties a lot of my cousins, one by one they started moving to this country.

Hampapur

So what were people's reactions, your friends and family's reactions when they found out you were moving to the U.S.?

Keshavan

It was mixed feelings. Some of them were happy that I was going to the United States. My parents, of course, had the same mixed feeling. They were happy that I was going, but they were sad that I was leaving them, because I'm the only daughter in the family now, surviving daughter, so it was mixed feelings for them.

Hampapur

And how did you feel about emigrating then?

Keshavan

Likewise. It was similar, because I was leaving my parents, coming to an unknown place, and so I had kind of a fear in me too, fear of the unknown, like they say. How is it going to be? Am I going to fit into the society? Am I going to be able to understand what they speak? Will they be able to understand me? Those are some of the common feelings that were going through me at that time. My greatest fear was language. I felt they might not understand me, or I might not understand them, and it took me a while, because when I immigrated here, a couple of phone calls. I would just take their name and number. Then I would call my husband and say, "So-and-so called and left a message," because I was still getting used to the accent of the people over here, and a Texan accent is way different than California accents.

Hampapur

Did you expect it to be a permanent move? Or were you expecting it to be a temporary migration?

Keshavan

A permanent one, because my husband had his green card, and he was working towards getting his citizenship.

Hampapur

Okay. What were some of the expectations that you had of the U.S. at that point?

Keshavan

Expectations--not that I can think of. I just wanted to have a nice home, a lot of food to eat, be happy, do all the fun things, drive a car, and which I achieved.

Hampapur

Was anybody opposed to you moving?

Keshavan

No, nobody was opposed to my moving. No.

Hampapur

Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the process of planning to move? How did you decide what to bring? How did you bring your things over?

Keshavan

Okay. I brought most of the clothes that I had, saris, with me, and I brought some food items with me, all the spices that I would need for my day-to-day cooking. I came with that. I brought some few--my husband asked me to bring some Indian artifacts to decorate the home. I brought a few of those things with me and mainly saris. It was only after I came here that I started wearing Western clothes. I switched over to pants and shirts and T-shirts and fancy clothes.

Hampapur

I'm going to pause it one sec.

Hampapur

So did you come here on a visa or a green card? What kind of paperwork did you have?

Keshavan

My husband had the green card with him, so it was easy for me. The processing took only three months in those days, whereas I hear that today it takes years.

Hampapur

Did you move with your husband? Did you come over with your husband after your wedding, or did you come by yourself?

Keshavan

I did not come with my husband, but, in fact, I came with his nephew, who was also coming to--he had got married at that time, and he was coming back after his marriage, so I came with him.

Hampapur

How soon after your wedding did you move?

Keshavan

Within three months.

Hampapur

And why didn't you come earlier with your husband?

Keshavan

Because the processing of the paperwork had to take place, and so it took about three months for everything to come through.

Hampapur

And so in that time, that's when you finished up your--

Keshavan

That's when I was able to go back to Madras and finish my final exams and take care of all the things that I needed to take care of.

Hampapur

Okay. So where did you initially move to in the U.S.?

Keshavan

My husband was in Dallas, Texas, at that time. We landed in New York City and then we took a connecting plane to Dallas, and I was in Dallas for eight months, and then we moved to California after that.

Hampapur

What was your initial impression of the U.S. when you first saw it?

Keshavan

Oh, it was a clean country, very clean. I liked the way the streets were laid out. I liked the way traffic moved. I liked the cars. I liked the order and the discipline that was maintained in this country.

Hampapur

Was there anything you didn't like?

Keshavan

No, not really. Like I said, the only fear I had was talking to people, for the fear that they might not understand me or I might not understand them.

Hampapur

So when you first came here and you saw the U.S., did it match with the expectations or ideas you had?

Keshavan

Yes. Yes, very much.

Hampapur

Can you describe to me your first neighborhood?

Keshavan

My first neighborhood. We were living in a very nice neighborhood, quite new homes. The homes were all new. My husband and his brother, they were living together and they had purchased this home, and I was just enamored by the home. Everything looked new, bright, clean. The appliances were new, the bathrooms were very clean. I liked the tiles, I liked the marble. All those little, little things caught my attention. And even today I cannot forget that first home that I moved into. I always compare every home that I see with that. That was my model home.

Hampapur

Were you living in a suburb when you moved to Dallas, or was it a city?

Keshavan

Yes, it was a suburb of Dallas, yes.

Hampapur

And how did you feel about living in a suburb versus living in a city in India?

Keshavan

A suburb is very quiet, of course, coming from India. As you know, it's a populous country and there's a lot of traffic, a lot of people, a lot of noise, and now when I came to the United States and I saw the order and the discipline and the way people walked and the way traffic moved, and also the density of population over here is very, very less, so it was a much quieter town and, yes, more colorful town.

Hampapur

And how did you feel about that change?

Keshavan

Oh, I liked it. Oh, I liked it very much.

Hampapur

Were you homesick when you first moved?

Keshavan

Yes. First few months I was very, very homesick. That's because I was alone at home. I did not have a job. My only job was to maintain the kitchen, and my husband would go in the morning, come back in the evening, and I missed my family because I didn't have any friends at that time that I could call and talk to. I did not know my neighbors and so I was very homesick the first few months.

Hampapur

How did you keep in contact with friends and family from India?

Keshavan

Back then it was through letters, because a telephone call was quite expensive, so letters was the only way I could keep in touch with them.

Hampapur

So was it common for you to write letters, or did people not do that too much?

Keshavan

Yes, we did write letters. Even in India I wrote letters to my cousins and near and dear family members, so I used to write letters. Now I don't.

Hampapur

Okay, so it was a frequent practice then?

Keshavan

Yes. Back then, yes, it was. Today [unclear] a telephone, using the telephone is--you know telephone rates have also become very cheap and very accessible, so I don't write letters anymore.

Hampapur

Did you have any visitors from India?

Keshavan

No, not when I was in Dallas, Texas. It was only after I got pregnant with my first child my parents came to help me. Both my parents and my brother also came out at that time. That was their first visit, and that was in 1982.

Hampapur

Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the changes you made in your clothing, your hair, anything like that?

Keshavan

Hair, I used to oil my hair in India, and my husband didn't like that, so I stopped oiling my hair. So I do oil my hair and wash it off right away, but I don't put oil again after that. And in clothing, yes, slowly I started introducing myself to new pants, shirts, tops, skirts.

Hampapur

Was this your first time wearing Western clothing?

Keshavan

No, not my first time. I did wear them in India for a brief moment, before my puberty.

Hampapur

Okay. What are some of the skills that you learned to adapt to live in the U.S.?

Keshavan

The biggest skill, the newest skill for me at that time was driving. I did not drive in India, so I took driving lessons when I came here. I drove with my husband for extra practice and then my best practice came on the road when we moved out of Texas and we were coming to California. I drove all the way, so I had a chance to drive on the highways at that time.

Hampapur

So how soon after moving did you learn to drive and get your license?

Keshavan

That was in about three or four months.

Hampapur

And how did it go with your fear of speaking to people and being worried about understanding them and them understanding you? Did you have any issues with language, or how did that work out?

Keshavan

My husband asked me to watch TV, so he said you could pick up on the way people spoke. You can get used to phrases, common phrases that are used in the United States, and that was a big help. I used to watch a lot of TV while my husband was at work, so that's how I got to know the accent and then the way people spoke here.

Hampapur

What about in terms of cooking? Did you have to adjust some of the practices that you did in India when you came to the U.S.?

Keshavan

Yes. I learned to change my approach to cooking. My husband said that there are certain utensils we could not use, because we were trying to conserve

energy. He taught me what kinds of vessels to use, cooking pots to use, and the temperature, how to set the temperatures, and then I learned from there on.

Hampapur

Did you have any difficulty getting the ingredients that you needed for cooking?

Keshavan

No, not really, because we did have Indian stores, so it made life easy.

Hampapur

Did you have any difficulties following your vegetarian diet after moving?

Keshavan

Not really, because I used to cook Indian food. When we went out, I'm a very picky eater, so I used to cook at home most of the time.

Hampapur

And in terms of shopping, had you been to a grocery store or malls, things like that, in India before, or were those new experiences here?

Keshavan

No. Going to the mall was a new experience for me, because I did not grow up with malls. Although I hear that today there are a lot of malls in India, but when I was growing up, going to the grocery store was going just down the street to the nearest store.

Hampapur

Did you watch any Indian movies or television or anything after coming to this country?

Keshavan

Yes. Yes, I did, yes.

Hampapur

So can you tell me a little bit about what you watched and where?

Keshavan

I watched a lot of American television. Indian movies, very few. We would get the tapes and watch movies on tape, not a lot but a few movies here and there. I'm not a big movie watcher.

Hampapur

Okay. And where did you get those movies from when you did? From the Indian store or from friends. If they said they had a good movie, they would say, "Watch this movie," and they would give me the movie.

Hampapur

And what language were those in?

Keshavan

Hindi language.

Hampapur

And were there many Indian stores in your area?

Keshavan

No, not really. We had one or two in Dallas, and even when we moved to California I learned that India Food and Gifts was the one store on Pioneer Boulevard we used to shop at. But today Pioneer Boulevard is booming with a lot of Indian stores, so it's called Little India now, so things have changed over the years.

Hampapur

What kind of products did they used to carry when you first moved here, those stores?

Keshavan

They carried everything that you could find in India, so it was no problem.

Hampapur

Okay. So how did you make friends after coming here to this country?

Keshavan

I made friends by going to people's homes, meeting a lot of new people over there and slowly expanding my friendship circle.

Hampapur

And what ethnic backgrounds were the people that you were meeting?

Keshavan

Mainly South Indians, and I associated myself with people from Karnataka, very few North Indians.

Hampapur

Why did you choose to do that?

Keshavan

Why did I choose to do that? Because of commonality in food. And my husband is more at ease with people from the South than with people from the North.

Hampapur

Did you join any regional associations?

Keshavan

We just joined the Kannada Kutta, which is a Kannada cultural association. We went to a few parties in Dallas and then after coming to California we have a big Kannada Kutta family over here, and I joined the association.

Hampapur

What kind of events did you attend for the Kannada Kutta?

Keshavan

We would attend India's Independence Day function. There was a huge function for Ganesha festival. There's a religious ceremony in the morning, and then they would serve lunch and in the afternoon they had entertainment. I would attend that, and then I also attended drama festivals, and these dramas were performed by local artists from the Southland, from San Diego and Los

Angeles area, and we would have about half an hour dramas. We would have three or four dramas and then a dinner after that, so it was a nice outing. I'm more of a spectator than a participant.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you attend the temple after moving to the U.S.?

Keshavan

Yes, yes. I even remember in 1980 going to the inauguration of the Ganesha temple in Malibu, the first day when they had the, what do they call it, consecration ceremony? Yes, I went for that. I still remember that. But now the same Ganesh temple is now a huge Malibu temple with all the other Hindu deities there.

Hampapur

And how often did you attend the temple?

Keshavan

Once a year.

Hampapur

And what kinds of activities did you like to do with your friends?

Keshavan

We would like to just hang out, socialize, have the children in a get-together, play, eat, and that's pretty much it.

Hampapur

The friends that you made, the Indian friends that you made, were they also like you in that they had gotten married and moved to the U.S.?

Keshavan

Yes, most of them, majority of them, because we had commonalities and we would talk about homeland and what schools we attended, what we did in school and all the functions and the clothings, and we'd talk all about those. So most of my friends were just like me, immigrants from India.

Hampapur

Did you have plans to get citizenship?

Keshavan

Not when I moved, but after we came to California my husband got his citizenship, and then after a few years my husband wanted us to, one person have U.S. citizenship and one person to have Indian citizenship, and then we maintained that kind of a thing going for about ten years, and then afterwards I took my citizenship.

Hampapur

Okay, and why did you do that? Why was one person an American citizen and one Indian?

Keshavan

You know what? To be honest with you, I don't know. I don't know why I did it. My husband said it's okay to get U.S. citizenship, so I just applied and became a U.S. citizen.

Hampapur

Okay. So when you first moved to the U.S., like in Dallas or maybe when you initially moved to California, how did people react to Americans who had been living here for a while?

Keshavan

React to me you mean?

Hampapur

Yes. Were people friendly? Were people rude? Were people familiar with Indians?

Keshavan

I think people were familiar with Indians. I did see any aspects of racism or any of those kinds of things inflicted on me, so it was pretty good for me. Even today people when they come up to me, they look at my skin color and say, "Ooh, you're so fair." And so I did not have problems with racism.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you hear about problems with racism with any of your Indian friends or the Indian community?

Keshavan

Yes. My husband himself would talk about things at work that did not work for him, and he said, "I can only associate this to my skin color."

Hampapur

Did you hear of any women having problems, Indian women having problems?

Keshavan

Not that I do recollect now, no, because most of the women that I associated with were just like me. We were all homemakers, mothers with children, and so we would have pretty much nice things to say about schools and playgrounds and play equipment.

Hampapur

Did people ever ask you any questions about your background or about India?

Keshavan

Yes. People always asked me about my bindi, and I wore the bindi on my forehead. People were curious about it, and they wanted to know why I put it and what's the significance of it, and I would always answer their questions with pleasure.

Hampapur

Did you ever receive any sort of advice from Americans, just any general advice about adjusting to the U.S.?

Keshavan

General advice? No, no, nothing, no. People always made me feel welcome and friendly.

Hampapur

Did people have any preconceived notions of Indians, any ideas of what Indians were like?

Keshavan

I wouldn't call it preconceived notions. I would say that some of them would come up to me and say, "Hey, I've visited India. I visited New Delhi. I visited Bombay," and they would talk to me about their experiences in these places, and they'd say, "It's such a nice country, so people are so religious." Nobody, even--there were many aspects of India that were not clean, but people never mentioned that to me. They always said nice things about how people were warm in India, how people made you feel welcome, and how they liked to eat samosas and Indian food. Some would even say, "I couldn't handle the spices," so which was okay.

Hampapur

And after Dallas, where did you move to?

Keshavan

Huntington Beach, California. We were in, actually, Fountain Valley, California, and then we moved to Huntington Beach.

Hampapur

Okay. And then when did you move to the Los Angeles area?

Keshavan

Palos Verdes. When did we move, 1988? No, 1986, sorry, 1986. Two years prior to [unclear] we lived in that home together.

Hampapur

Was there anything you had to get used to when moving from Texas to California? Were there any changes?

Keshavan

No, nothing much. It's pretty much the same, everything same. It's just that my friend circle grew larger, wider. I made more friends.

Hampapur

And have you pursued further education since moving to the U.S.?

Keshavan

Yes. After I moved to California, I was working as a preschool teacher. I worked for some time, and then when my first daughter started grade school, I would help out in her classroom as a mother-helper, and then I would get a lot of compliments from people asking me, "You know, you do such a good job with teaching and helping. You should become a teacher." And that's when I went and enrolled in Cal State Long Beach in the teacher-education department, and I got my credentials through CSULB. I was very lucky. I got

interviewed on campus right after I finished my credential program. I was interviewed on campus, and they hired me right away.

Hampapur

Okay. And why were you working at the preschool? What made you decide to go to work?

Keshavan

As we were driving up on Crenshaw one day, I saw this advertisement on Rancho Palos Verdes Preschool and Kindergarten now hiring, so I said, let me go try. So I just went in there and they hired me. It was part-time, so that was a nice thing, because I had little children at home, so working from nine to twelve was very convenient for me at that time.

Hampapur

Okay. And why did you want to work?

Keshavan

Just for the fun of it. I wanted to have some dollars.

Hampapur

Had anyone expected that you would continue your education in the U.S.?

Keshavan

You mean back home?

Hampapur

Yes. Did anyone expect you to return to school?

Keshavan

No. It was a surprise for them. It was a surprise for my family, and they were happy that I got a job and that I was keeping myself busy. Most of all I should say my husband was very happy, because it was very important for him that I got some education in the United States. He said, "It's always good to have a footing here in the U.S. When you have a U.S. education, it's like boom." It's like--what's the word I'm trying to get here? It's like a nice foundation to have, and he said, "God forbid, one fine day if you have to survive on your own, you need to have a U.S. education." And since I had a master's in India, it was very easy for me to go through this teacher-education program and get my credentials.

Hampapur

Okay. So was it your husband's idea for you to return to school, or was it your decision to go get credentialed?

Keshavan

My husband's idea.

Hampapur

Okay. And then whose idea was it for you to get the teaching credential, to choose that path?

Keshavan

That was my own. That was my own. I tried to go into computer science. I attended Cal State Fullerton but did not enjoy it, so I gave up. I quit that. And then we moved from Fullerton to Huntington Beach, and then I was taking classes on and off, going to the junior college, trying to get some math courses in. And then after I moved to Rancho Palos Verdes, that's when I decided for sure that I'm going to be a teacher, and I joined Cal State Long Beach.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you receive any praise or support from anyone besides your husband for returning to school?

Keshavan

My parents. My parents were happy.

Hampapur

And did you receive any criticism from anyone for seeking further education?

Keshavan

No. Like I said, we value education a lot in India, so the more you educate yourself, the better that people think of you.

Hampapur

Had you ever pictured yourself as a teacher before this?

Keshavan

No. I never thought I would be working in the United States. I thought I was going to go through life like my mom, get married, have children and be a homemaker, so it was my husband who motivated me to do something with the education. And like I said, I lucked out. I was interviewed on campus, and I got hired right away.

Hampapur

Did you enjoy school here?

Keshavan

Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

Hampapur

Did you have to make any adjustments to your family life after you decided to go to school?

Keshavan

Yes. I had to make adjustments, because I had to take night classes, and my husband had to come home from work, and that's when I would leave the children so he could take care of them while I went to school at night, so that's how--it was tough. It was tough in the beginning, and I was afraid to drive on the road all by myself and coming home at ten o'clock at night, but it was a determination I had. I wanted to complete it, and I achieved my goal.

Hampapur

Okay. And so when did you receive your teacher's credential?

Keshavan

1995, December 1995.

Hampapur

And where were you hired to work? You said you were hired on campus.

Keshavan

I was hired by Los Angeles Unified School District, L.A. Unified School District, on campus. They were conducting interviews, so I just went on campus and they interviewed me, and on the spot they gave me a job, and they said it was a part-time job. I was filling in for a teacher who had gone on a maternity leave, but I did not take that job, because it was in the city of Compton, and my husband was not happy, me driving all the way to Compton. So I waited till the summertime and then I interviewed at this school in San Pedro, which is close to our home, and they asked me to come onboard.

Hampapur

Okay. How did your family react to you working?

Keshavan

Initially, my kids did not like me going out for so long, but now when I look back and reflect on it, I think it was good in a way that I did this, because it helped them and it helped me too.

Hampapur

And how did your family in India react to you working?

Keshavan

Oh, they were happy. They were always happy, always asking me, "How's school? How's this, how's that?" I always had positive feedback from home, no negativity at all.

Hampapur

And what was your goal in going to work?

Keshavan

Like I said, I was good at helping children. Since I was a preschool teacher, I knew how to handle little children. And then I also told you I got compliments from a lot of people who said, "Why don't you become a full-fledged teacher?" And that's when I enrolled in the teacher-education program.

Hampapur

Have you enjoyed teaching?

Keshavan

Yes. It has its pluses and its minuses, but overall when I think about it, I think I would say yes, I would like--I've always enjoyed teaching. It gives me great pleasure when I see my students do well, and I motivate my students and they try to achieve it, and that's the greatest satisfaction I can get as a teacher.

Hampapur

Okay. And how important would you say your career is to you?

Keshavan

How important--in what way are you saying?

Hampapur

Well, do you plan to teach for a long time? Do you think this is like an important aspect of your life?

Keshavan

It has been an important aspect of my life up to now, but now since I'm aging and trying to--I'm getting tired more frequently. I may work for a few more years and then retire.

Hampapur

How many different schools have you worked at, and what grades do you teach?

Keshavan

Okay. I worked at preschool. I worked as a preschool teacher. Then my first teaching experience was in first grade, and then it's been third grade ever since then. So this is my thirteenth year teaching third grade.

Hampapur

Did you have to make any adjustments to your family life because you chose to go back to work?

Keshavan

Yes. I did have to make adjustments in the sense I had to make sure that my kids had their meals made ahead of time. I had to make sure that after they returned home that they did their homework properly and make sure everything was running smoothly.

Hampapur

Did extended family play a role in this at all, in helping out while you were at work and your husband was at work?

Keshavan

Yes, extended family did help me, because if I had to run errands or if I had an important matter to take care of or anything important that needed my attention, extended family was here at home. They would watch my children and I could go take care of whatever I needed to take care of.

Hampapur

And what household responsibilities would you have when you would come home from work, or when you come home from work every day?

Keshavan

When I came home from work, my first duty was to make sure that the children had a snack to eat, then make sure that they all did their homework, got their homework done, and if they needed assistance with their projects, I had to help them with that. And then I had to take them to their after-school activities, like art class or dance class, or my son to his soccer practices. I had to make sure I

had to take care of those things and then, of course, fix dinner and then prepare things for the next day. So those are some of the things I had to do.

Hampapur

Okay. So now I'm going to switch to the last section about your family.

Keshavan

Okay.

Hampapur

So how did you teach your children about their religious background and their cultural background?

Keshavan

We said prayers at home, so my children have been taught some of the prayers. Then I also enrolled them in Indian dance lessons, which is called Bharatanatyam, and they learn a lot about Hindu culture, Hindu religion, Hindu faith, Hindu gods, and, of course, some of the Hindu ceremonies that we have in our day-to-day lives.

Hampapur

Was that the goal in putting them to Bharatanatyam, so they would learn all these things? Or was there a different initial goal in putting them--

Keshavan

Okay. A part of me was also involved when I enrolled them, because when I was growing up as a young girl I wanted to learn Bharatanatyam, but I was not given the opportunity because my parents were too afraid to send me to these classes. They didn't want me to travel on the public buses and trains in India, and so I was not given a chance to learn the art form. And so it was very important for me when I had my children that at least one of my two girls would learn the art form and perform it and do the arangetram. I had that in my mind. It was one of my goals. And fortunately, both my daughters were able to satisfy that goal for me.

Hampapur

Did you teach your children any of the Indian languages that you grew up speaking?

Keshavan

Yes. At home when they were growing up as young kids, we did talk to them in our native language, and they did pick it up, at least as far as I know. My first daughter learned the language very well and even today she's the best speaker when I compare them with my other two children.

Hampapur

Was being bilingual encouraged for children back then in the eighties?

Keshavan

You mean in American society?

Hampapur

Yes. Like when they attended school, did anyone say anything about the fact that she could speak another language? Was it a good a thing, a bad thing, nobody said anything?

Keshavan

Nobody said anything about that. The fact that they spoke English was very important, and my kids had no problems with that.

Hampapur

And what language was it that was spoken at home?

Keshavan

Tamil.

Hampapur

And what do you consider your responsibilities and duties to your children?

Keshavan

To make sure that they get a good education, they get a good job, they settle well in life. I hope they get good partners when they get married. It's very important that they have loving, affectionate, compatible partners, life partners, so those are my important things.

Hampapur

Okay. And what are your expectations for their education?

Keshavan

I want them to be educated well and have good jobs. Just like my husband said, you need to be able to stand on your two feet. God forbid if something happens, you should be prepared to take on a job and try to survive on your own.

Hampapur

And what are some Indian values that you would want them to retain?

Keshavan

I would want them to know that Hindu culture is important. I want them to be aware of things in India. I want them to know their cultural heritage. I want them to know who their grandparents are, who their forefathers are, and, yes, all Hindu traditions, beliefs and customs. It's very important.

Hampapur

Are there any American values that you hope they pick up?

Keshavan

American values, I want them to be disciplined. I want them, yes, and educated, of course. I want them to think clearly, think for themselves. I want them to be independent, independent learners, independent thinkers.

Hampapur

And are there any Indian or American values you don't want them to pick up?

Keshavan

Not really. I want them to learn the good. I want them to know the difference between the good and the bad, and I want them to be able to be good judges in whatever choices that they make and make good choices in your life.

Hampapur

Did you have any concerns about raising children in the U.S., as opposed to India where you grew up?

Keshavan

No, not really. I knew I was going to be in the United States and so far I haven't had any problems, so I can't comment much on that.

Hampapur

Do you think there are any positives about raising your kids in the U.S. as opposed to India?

Keshavan

Yes. Yes.

Hampapur

Can you tell me about some of those?

Keshavan

A positive thing is they have become good--they are good independent thinkers, and I'm happy of the fact that they did not pick up any bad habit. None of them drink, smoke, do alcohol, tobacco, drugs, so I'm very proud of them for that. I'm very happy that they're able to think matters through correctly, and I'm also happy that they're able to give their opinion without being biased about anything.

Hampapur

And how do you think they learned all those things?

Keshavan

I think it's the school education, plus our home environment I think also provided opportunities for them to think clearly.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you ever take your children to visit India and your family there?

Keshavan

Yes. I took them almost once in three years when they were growing up. Now they have traveled by themselves independently. They're all grown up now.

Hampapur

And what were the purposes of those visits to India while they were growing up?

Keshavan

The purpose was for them to meet my parents. They should know who their grandparents are. I wanted them to know Indian life, how life in India is when compared to the U.S., and, of course, get to know our culture and our traditions, our religious beliefs. I wanted them to visit Hindu temples.

Hampapur

Okay. So my last little bit is just kind of a reflection on some of the things that we've talked about. So how long have you been in the U.S., how many years has it been?

Keshavan

Thirty years, over thirty years.

Hampapur

Okay. So after thirty years here, I guess the majority of your life, how do you feel about the fact that you immigrated to the U.S.?

Keshavan

I have been very happy that I've been able to--it's like a dream come true. I wanted to come to the United States, and like I told you in the beginning of this interview that either for a visit or if I got married, fine, and it's like a dream come true. I'm happy here. I'm happy my kids have grown up and they are aware of both cultures, which is another thing that I had in my mind and of my goals. They are aware of both cultures. I only wish that we could have spoken more of the language fluently.

Hampapur

Are there any negatives you feel about immigrating? Any sense of loss about anything?

Keshavan

No. No sense of loss.

Hampapur

Okay. What about in terms of seeing your family in India?

Keshavan

I try to go every two years now, because my parents are still there and so I have that pull. I want to go see them every now and then.

Hampapur

And as time has passed, have you had more relatives visit you in the U.S.?

Keshavan

Yes. I have a lot of extended family, and I have a lot of visitors on my mom's side and my dad's side of the family. They've all come and visited me here.

Hampapur

Okay. And after your time here, do you feel like you fit in here in American society?

Keshavan

Yes. To a very large extent, yes, I do fit in, I think. Yes.

Hampapur

Is there any way you feel like you don't fit in?

Keshavan

Maybe like when I go to parties, because still I'm a vegetarian, so I feel that I may not be--see what I'm saying? Since I'm a vegetarian, so making vegetarian choices becomes a little difficult for me when I go out and party with people.

Hampapur

Okay. Well, when you moved to this country and you started to make Indian friends, was that an issue with them as well? Like in terms of diet, choosing to eat meat?

Keshavan

No, no, no, no, no. That was not a problem at all. Because I associated friends who were from my community, and so we had similarities in foods, so it never became a problem.

Hampapur

Okay. Do you ever think about moving back to India?

Keshavan

No. No.

Hampapur

And in your life up until this point, what has been your favorite place to live?

Keshavan

In the United States?

Hampapur

In the United States or India; either.

Keshavan

I'm happy where I am right now. I have a home and my kids grew up in a nice community. They went to good schools, and they're educated. I'm looking forward to them settling down, getting married and settling down.

Hampapur

Do you ever think about moving to another part of the U.S.? Or do you think you'd want to stay in Los Angeles in the future?

Keshavan

I think I'm going to stay in Los Angeles, because I can't ask for better weather than this weather, so.

Hampapur

Okay. And what are some things you like about the Los Angeles area?

Keshavan

I have lived here in this home for twenty-one years and have got used to the environment and got used to my friends around here, so I'm going to stay put here. Because if I have to move somewhere, it's going to be a whole new beginning, and I don't think I have the energy for that.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (January 5, 2010.)

Hampapur

So what is your husband's job in the United States?

Keshavan

My husband is an engineer. He works for Northrop Grumman. He's actually a manager of a lab.

Hampapur

Was it his idea for you to take the computer science classes?

Keshavan

Yes. He wanted me to be a computer scientist, but somehow after I tried one or two courses, it did not, what shall I say? I was not satisfied with it, and I was not happy with it, so that's why I had to change subjects here.

Hampapur

And how often do you receive visitors now from India?

Keshavan

Almost every year, once a year I have somebody or the other visiting me, people from my mom's [Rukmani Ramakrishna] side of the family, people from my dad's [Ramakrishna] side of the family, everybody. At least once a year, for the past five or six years that has been the trend.

Hampapur

And do your parents ever visit?

Keshavan

Yes. The last time my parents visited was in 2003. They came for my second daughter's dance recital. And ever since then I have been visiting them more often than they have come now.

Hampapur

What kind of extended family do you have in the Los Angeles area?

Keshavan

I have my in-laws. I have a ninety-six-year-old mother-in-law [Rathnamal]. She's the matriarch of the family, and then I have sisters-in-law. I have four sisters-in-law, and I have my husband's two nieces [Shanta Bindiganavile, Vijaya Prakesh]. They live around here in the proximity, about ten miles from where we live. We also have my husband's nephew [Vatsa Bindiganavile] lives in San Diego that we see frequently. We visit and they come over also and visit us, so we're in touch with each other like that.

Hampapur

Do you see your other relatives who live in the L.A. area frequently as well?

Keshavan

Yes, yes, we do. At least, I would say, on an average of once a month.

Hampapur

And since moving to the U.S., have you made any friends that aren't Indian?

Keshavan

I do have acquaintances. I wouldn't say anybody is like a close friend, because I don't associate with them on a regular basis, but I do see them every now and then. It's like a casual acquaintance. And if you would like, I can say my colleagues at school, they could be my friends too, right?

Hampapur

Yes.

Keshavan

Yes, I have a lot of friends there at school.

Hampapur

Okay. And can you describe your town here in Los Angeles?

Keshavan

Describe my town here in Los Angeles. Well, we live in the city called Rancho Palos Verdes, which is the suburb of Los Angeles. We are about fifty minutes away from downtown Los Angeles, and it's a nice town. It's on a hill, and the society here a more affluent society. Kids who go to Palos Verdes schools are pretty competitive and they do fairly well on standardized tests, and so the Palos Verdes School District has a good rating, and it was very important that our kids when they were growing up, that they got a good education, and that's the reason why we moved from Huntington Beach. We used to live in Huntington Beach, California, and my husband used to work for Northrop Grumman, which had a branch here in Palos Verdes. He would commute from Huntington Beach, and he had heard about the school district over here, and that's when we made the decision to move out to this area.

Hampapur

And what are some things you like about this area?

Keshavan

It's a very nice neighborhood, calm, quiet, clean. We have good parks and recreation centers, and a lot of our friends live around this vicinity over here. When I say friends, I mean friends from our Indian community.

Hampapur

Are there any Indians in Palos Verdes?

Keshavan

To count off, I know there are at least ten families that we see quite often. We meet quite often at parties and religious functions, so if you consider that to be a good number, then I would say it's a good number, right?

Hampapur

Yes. Have they been here as long as you've been here?

Keshavan

Yes. Yes.

Hampapur

Okay. And how did you meet them?

Keshavan

I met them at parties. Sometimes it's religious functions, sometimes it's just like birthday parties or just festival occasions we celebrate, we have potlucks. So when I went to one potluck, that's where I met a lot of people, got acquainted with them, and then I invited them over, and then things were on a reciprocal basis. We saw each other more often and the friendship just grew from there.

Hampapur

Okay. And is there anything you don't like about your town in Los Angeles?

Keshavan

No, not really. I'm happy with my house and the area that we live in.

Hampapur

What are some changes you see in the U.S. from when you immigrated and currently?

Keshavan

Comparing 1979 with 2009, thirty years have gone by. It's actually now 2010. What do I see? Prices have gone up, for sure. Prices of commodities have gone up, prices of groceries have gone up. Gasoline, the price of gasoline has skyrocketed like crazy, and the number of cars have increased on the streets, and I notice that. Property, the value of property has gone up everywhere in the Southland, and apart from that I can't think of anything.

Hampapur

Okay. Do you know of women from India who are still marrying and moving to the United States with their husbands like you did thirty years back? Does that still happen?

Keshavan

I haven't heard of that, but what has been happening right now is a lot of students are coming to the United States to further their education, and then they end up taking up jobs here, and a lot of marriages are taking place in the United States with many of these immigrant students coming from India, so that's another change you could add. When I came to the United States, there were many families who were getting married over there in India and migrating over here, whereas now I see many students who come here and they've been getting married to local people, most of them getting married to local people who have settled over here. And some of them, yes, they do go back home and get married and bring their spouses over here. But to a very large extent I have seen that the boys who come from India, they find suitable brides over here and get married to them.

Hampapur

And those students that come over and settle down here, are they in your circle of Indian friends or Indian community here in L.A., or how have you met these people?

Keshavan

I have heard about them. I haven't met any of these, but I have heard about many cases from distant relatives, and, of course, some friends too.

Hampapur

Okay. So of your Indian friends, did most of them come around the same time period when you did, in the early seventies?

Keshavan

Yes. A few of them were here before I was here too.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of recording]

1.3. Session 3 (January 5, 2010)

Hampapur

So what are some changes you've seen in the Indian stores available to you, Indian products in the United States?

Keshavan

Indian communities, yes. Going back to 1980, I remember when we used to come from Huntington Beach, there was only one Indian store in Cerritos. It was called India Food and Gifts. But today the whole area in Cerritos has become Little India. We have many Indian clothing stores. We have a lot of jewelry stores, plenty of restaurants that cater to the palates of the people, yummy foods, Indian vegetarian food, non-vegetarian food. There are a lot of Indian grocery stores and, yes, when you go to Cerritos and walk on Pioneer Boulevard, it's like walking on a street in Bombay or Madras, Chennai.

Hampapur

Do you enjoy going to Pioneer Boulevard?

Keshavan

Oh, I love going to Pioneer Boulevard. I go there because I can buy my groceries in bulk and stock them up, so I try to go there at least once in two or three months. I go there for some of my Indian vegetables also, which is not available in the local grocery store.

Hampapur

Were those available when you first came to this country?

Keshavan

No, they were not available. I was happy with grains and rice and all the dals that we use in our cooking, all the lentils. Those were the things that were available. But today you have any product that you could think of in India is

now available here, so this tells you that trade and commerce has improved quite a bit.

Hampapur

And so when you first came and all these food items weren't available, did you limit what you were cooking, or would you try to find substitutes?

Keshavan

I would try to go to the Indian store, try to find it, and if they didn't have those items then I would try to substitute. Like, for example, dal, toor dal. If that was not available, my husband had introduced me to lentils that were available in the local grocery store and on several occasions I have bought those lentils and used it as a base in my cooking.

Hampapur

Do you see more Indian restaurants as well?

Keshavan

I see a lot of Indian restaurants today. It's not just [unclear] in Cerritos, it's all over in the Southland. If you go to Los Angeles, what's the street, I'm trying to remember, where the Hare Krishna Temple is?

Hampapur

Near Venice?

Keshavan

Venice Boulevard, thank you. Yes. Venice Boulevard had a lot of Indian stores and Indian restaurants as well. In Torrance we have Indian stores, Indian restaurants, yes, and quite a few have come up now. There's a lot of competition.

Hampapur

And since moving to southern California, do you see more Indians as well?

Keshavan

Yes. The population of Indians has quadrupled I would say, when compared to 1979, 1980.

Hampapur

And do you see many people coming from your state in India, or from Karnataka?

Keshavan

I see a whole lot of people coming from all the states of India. Like if you were to walk on Pioneer Boulevard in Cerritos, you will see people of all languages and people from all different cultures of India walking down the street over there, so I wouldn't just say Karnataka, I would say all the states of India.

Hampapur

Okay. Do you think that Indians, at least living in southern California, have kind of a connection to one another? When they see each other, is there a sense of community, or do people split off in different groups?

Keshavan

I would say they split off into their different groups. Like I know there's a group of Maharashtrians and they have their Maharashtra Mandal, and then I know the Tamil groups, they have the Tamilian group. The Karnataka people have their group, and I also know there's an Andhra group, and the North Indian group is a huge group, and the Gujaratis have their own cultural group too. The Patels, as you know, they're quite common. They have their own group. Yes, when it's time for cultural events, they congregate and have fun.

Hampapur

When you first came to the U.S., when there were less Indians, did people still split into their different language and region groups?

Keshavan

The groups that I was talking to you about just now, the Karnataka group, the Tamil group, it did exist in 1980 also, but I guess the size was much smaller than what it is today, because a lot of people have migrated to this country, so as a result the cultural groups have expanded.

Hampapur

Okay, so they have been in existence as long as you--

Keshavan

Oh, yes, they've been in existence, yes, yes, for a very long time.

Hampapur

And would people associate more with people outside their groups when you first came to this country, since they were in smaller numbers?

Keshavan

It was more within the group. Like when I joined the Karnataka Cultural Association and most of the people were from Karnataka, I did not see people from Andhra or Tamil or Tamil Nadu. Anything else?

Hampapur

In terms of the Indian groceries and the restaurants that you see, do you see more North Indian stuff, South Indian, a variety?

Keshavan

I see a variety today. They cater to a lot of people, all kinds of customers, so I see vegetarian food, non-vegetarian food. Like even the cultural, like there's Gujarati food, there's Punjabi food, and there's also Marvadi food, Maharashtrian food, South Indian foods, so it's nice to have.

Hampapur

And then my last question was, you mentioned earlier that you don't plan to move back to India. Amongst your friends, is that a common sentiment, people want to stay in the U.S.? Or do a lot of them think about moving back?

Keshavan

Among my friends, there's not a single group that wants to go back. So we're all settled here. We all have kids who have grown up in this country, and those kids are now all in the marriageable age group, so I don't think any of my friends want to go back to India and settle down there.

Hampapur

Because their family is here.

Keshavan

Yes. Everybody's over. The children are here. And also, it's going to be very tough, very difficult to go back to India now at this stage in our lives and restart our lives over there. It's going to be extremely difficult. So I personally, I know for sure I don't want to have a new beginning when I go to India. My parents are getting old, so I like to go visit them, but I don't think I want to settle down there.

Hampapur

And when you visit India every few years, do you get a sense that India has changed a lot since you left?

Keshavan

India has changed dramatically over the years. Computer science is now such a leading thing in India, and if you know, Bangalore is the Silicon Valley of India. India has improved tremendously, and India is being now in the news. Every single day they talk about India and China, India and China, and for a long time they would never mention India. But now today India is one of the leading nations in technology, in commerce, in trade, in business. India is a booming country now.

Hampapur

Do you think there's still--poor people in India, do you think they hear some of the stories that you heard about America while growing up, it being a glamorous country, land of plenty, things that you said that you would talk about with your friends? Do you think people still have that idea in India?

Keshavan

You know, surprisingly it's not like that anymore, because people have heard about the United States and how you have to work hard over here, whereas people work hard in India and they're self-sufficient now, and they're happy to stay back in India. No one wants to come here and work as much as they've heard of before, so. Most of my friends who are now still in India, their children are happy with whatever they earn in India, because they have a wonderful lifestyle over there, comfortable. They have all the amenities that they need, all the luxuries, and all the other trimmings that are available here today are available in India too, which was not the case when I was growing up and when I came to the United States.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of interview]

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