

A TEI Project

Interview of Kamala Bhaskar

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (August 29, 2010)

Hampapur

It is August 29, 2010. This is Veena Hampapur here with Kamala Bhaskar.
Thank you again for agreeing to do this interview. I'm looking forward to it.

Bhaskar

Oh, it's my pleasure, Veena. I've known your mom, and I've seen you from younger days, and we've seen you grow up, and it's my pleasure to be-- hopefully, I'll be of some help to you.

Hampapur

So I'd like to start off by talking about your childhood. Can you tell me where you were born?

Bhaskar

I was born in India, in Bangalore. It's almost, I would say, a cosmopolitan city, and I grew up there in Bangalore.

Hampapur

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Bhaskar

Yes. I come from a very large family, I should say. Right now we are five siblings. I have three sisters and one brother, one brother who lives in India.

Hampapur

And where is your place in that five?

Bhaskar

I'm the third one right now.

Hampapur

Okay, so the one in the middle.

Bhaskar

Yes.

Hampapur

Were all your siblings born in Bangalore as well?

Bhaskar

All my siblings, yes. My sisters and my brother were born in India, yes.

Hampapur

What about your parents? Did they grow up in Bangalore?

Bhaskar

My parents are--they spent a good part of their adult life in Bangalore. I think my mom was born about two hundred miles north of Bangalore, and my dad was born probably a hundred miles to the west of Bangalore, somewhere there. So but they spent their married life in Bangalore.

Hampapur

Okay. So did they get married and then move to Bangalore?

Bhaskar

No, that's true. My dad was already there in Bangalore. My mom is from Belari, and they got married and they started a family in Bangalore.

Hampapur

How did your father originally end up in Bangalore?

Bhaskar

He was from Chitradurga, and then I think he came looking for a job there, to Bangalore, and he started working in Bangalore.

Hampapur

What did he do for a living?

Bhaskar

He started a job at HAL, I think, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, years ago, and then changed over to physical director.

Hampapur

What kind of work did he do for them?

Bhaskar

He did coordinating in the sports arena and helping them out in the sports and athletic activities, so that sort of a thing.

Hampapur

Did your mom work, or was she at home with you?

Bhaskar

No, my mom was a homemaker. She stayed home with the kids and raised us, so that was a big job.

Hampapur

Right, with five of you. Can you describe to me the neighborhood you grew up in, in Bangalore?

Bhaskar

Bangalore, we typically grew up in a--we were living and grew up in a brahmin community. As you know, in India is the caste system, so we were among the brahmin community, and it was an independent house, so we didn't live in the community kind of living. They do have that in--even now there is there, but we had an independent home. It was quite nice.

Hampapur

Can you describe what it looked like?

Bhaskar

It was a lot of greenery and very spacious and a lot of playground in the front, a side yard, and the neighbors were not too close, far apart, so that's my clear recollection.

Hampapur

Okay, so it was pretty spacious, then.

Bhaskar

Yes, spacious.

Hampapur

Then how long were you living there?

Bhaskar

I lived till I was twenty, twenty-one.

Hampapur

So you grew up most of your--

Bhaskar

Yes, most of my life in there. Then I got married and came here.

Hampapur

So can you describe to me your neighborhood, like in Bangalore, what it looked like?

Bhaskar

Neighborhood was typically the same kind of people around us, family people with large families, and what else can I say? And they were all independent homes. There was no apartments or anything like what it is today.

Hampapur

Okay. What was that part of the city called?

Bhaskar

That's Basavanagudi, Basavanagudi.

Hampapur

Do you see any differences between Bangalore while you were growing up and how it is now?

Bhaskar

Bangalore now has changed a great deal. It's more commercialized and very densely populated now, congested, and a lot of apartment type of living, so I do find a big difference there.

Hampapur

When you were growing up, was Bangalore already like a bustling sort of city?
Or was it more suburban?

Bhaskar

When we were growing up, it was more basically suburban, suburban.

Hampapur

Okay. I've heard Bangalore being called the garden city, so were there lots of plants and trees?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes. Those days, there were trees lined on the streets and everywhere, and plants, and you could go walk in the street so that there's plenty of shade. In summertime, there was lots of shades, a lot of trees, and trees that had been there for several years, which I don't see now. It was a lot of greenery, lot of greenery.

Hampapur

But that's not there anymore?

Bhaskar

Not there anymore.

Hampapur

Were there any fruit or vegetable trees that were there at that time that you remember?

Bhaskar

I know we used to go a few tropical vegetables and fruits like guava. I know guava was pretty common, and the vegetables, I do recall tomatoes and string beans and a different local variety beans that were there. We used to grow some too in summertime, especially in summertime. It was wild. We would get a big yield of vegetables. I do recall that.

Hampapur

Did you know your neighbors when you were growing up?

Bhaskar

Neighbors, we knew them by their first names, yes, and we would play with them. Typically they were all around our age groups, so we'd end up playing-- the girls would end up playing with the girls and make friends with them. Yes, we knew our neighbors, neighborhood, yes, everyone knew each other.

Hampapur

What kinds of games did you play when you were a kid?

Bhaskar

Oh, gee. Tag, I think somewhat comparable to a game in America. We did play a lot of tag. And then what else, what other game? I think chess was there. Chess was there. I know a few of us played chess, not many, though. A lot of

running around and just having fun. There was no particular game per se; running around and having fun.

Hampapur

So it sounds like you spent a lot of time outdoors?

Bhaskar

Outdoors. We did spend a lot of time outdoors, coming back from school and even sometimes even before school. Yes, we spent a lot of time outdoors.

Hampapur

Would you play in the backyard? Or was there a park?

Bhaskar

There were parks close by, but we would play in the front of the house or sometimes even in the street too. There was not that many traffic there, so we could play in the street as well.

Hampapur

That's hard to imagine. [laughs]

Bhaskar

I know, I know.

Hampapur

Did your parents interact with the neighbors as well?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes. They all knew our neighbor. I mean, the neighbors knew each other very well, and they were, yes, friends.

Hampapur

Did they do any type of social activities?

Bhaskar

Yes. I do recall them going to the temple together or to a movie together occasionally, or to concerts, listening to the music, definitely they did do; going to the market or shopping. Yes, they did join together.

Hampapur

So you mentioned that you grew up in a brahmin community. Was it different kinds of brahmins, or like the same as what your family was?

Bhaskar

There were different sub-sects, but they were all brahmins, but they were different sub-sects, yes.

Hampapur

And were most people originally from Karnataka, or were there other people?

Bhaskar

Basically from Karnataka. Basically from Bangalore or around Bangalore; Bangalore and around Bangalore.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any servants at home?

Bhaskar

Servants? No live-in servants. We had servants who would come and clean the dishes or do the clothes, laundry and go, but we didn't have any live-in servants, no. They would just come and get the work done and leave.

Hampapur

Did you or your siblings have any chores or responsibilities while growing up?

Bhaskar

It wasn't really assigned as a responsibility, but we would do. If it called for, like, getting the vegetables or going to the market or going to the mission, like getting the flour done from the grains, all those stuff. It was required. It was not a chore. It was like it was expected of you.

Hampapur

Right.

Bhaskar

It was expected of you, so we did them.

Hampapur

So you mentioned the flour, so what did you do for that?

Bhaskar

Well, flour means--grain in India in those days, you didn't get the flour in packages. You literally had to bring the grain, clean it up, and then take it to have it ground.

Hampapur

Okay.

Bhaskar

Yes, so we had to do that ourselves. There was no packaged flour, cooking flour.

Hampapur

I see. What about milk? How did you purchase that?

Bhaskar

Milk, we had a milkman or a milk lady who would come and deliver every morning. So every morning they would come and deliver and go.

Hampapur

I see. Did you have a refrigerator at home?

Bhaskar

No, we didn't have a refrigerator. So every morning they would come, deliver, and go, and then afternoon they would come and deliver and go.

Hampapur

So grocery shopping had to be done--

Bhaskar

Grocery shopping was different. This is milk; guy would come and deliver. Grocery shopping, we had to do it on our own, so that was at the market, at the market.

Hampapur

So was that done on a daily basis?

Bhaskar

On a daily basis, basically, vegetables. Whatever you needed to cook for that particular day, in the morning we would shop for the vegetables, like chilies, cilantro, vegetables, and all that stuff. But grains and stuff like rice and wheat and wheat flour, sugar and all that, that was not on a daily basis. That was at least once a month or twice a month, or maybe on a weekly basis, but never on a daily basis.

Hampapur

Okay, because those things can stay for a while.

Bhaskar

Yes, stay.

Hampapur

I see. Did your family practice any religious activities?

Bhaskar

Religious, on a daily basis, yes, but not like hours together like some families did. But we did, yes, worshipping, definitely. It was a part of our life, yes.

Hampapur

So it was like a puja room at home?

Bhaskar

Yes. We had a small puja section and a room. We would pray, shower and clean up, and wear washed clothes, and pray. Not a very lengthy one, but a short one.

Hampapur

And who taught you, like, prayers and things like that?

Bhaskar

Prayers and stuff, there was no way of sitting and teaching. You kind of picked up when your parents say it, or you kind of picked it up when your neighbors said a prayer, growing up, or you heard it in the temple, or you heard it from your aunts or uncles, that sort of a thing. It was never a formal teaching. We just picked it up. And that's how it was for most families. You just picked it up. There was no teaching, "Sit down here, I'm teaching." Nothing like that. So you just picked it up, yes. Or you heard it over and over and it just stuck in your mind.

Hampapur

Okay. Did your family go to the temple at all?

Bhaskar

Yes. In fact, I myself used to visit--I do recall visiting temple almost literally every day, every day. On my way back from school or in the evening, I would go to the temple, yes.

Hampapur

Would you go by yourself, or with your family?

Bhaskar

Sometimes I would go by myself, most of the times with my local neighborhood friends, or with family. It was a combination of everything. Or my cousins, yes, it was a combination of everything.

Hampapur

Was that something you enjoyed?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes, yes. I am a devotee of Raghavendra Swami, so I used to visit his temple, I think if I can recall, literally every day, every single day.

Hampapur

I see. Wow.

Bhaskar

And then my friends were devotees too, so they would go with me, and, of course, my mom would go sometimes, whenever she had time, so we all would go, yes. It was a part of my life.

Hampapur

So you all followed Raghavendra Swami.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

Did your family have a specific deity or god that they were geared towards?

Bhaskar

Not a specific; general like Ganesha and Lakshmi. We worshipped Ganesha and Lakshmi and Raghavendra Swami.

Hampapur

Were there any big religious festivals or holidays in Bangalore?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes. I do recall Gowri and Ganesha Habba, Deepavali, and Ugadi. They were really big, huge. They were huge. They were huge festivals to be celebrated, yes. And we would look forward to them. When we were really young, we would look forward.

Hampapur

Right. So can you tell me how Deepavali was celebrated?

Bhaskar

Oh, Deepavali I do recall. I mean, the night before, we would decorate the bathing, kind of like a tub, and the next morning we would all shower and wear

new clothes and light up crackers, and after that I do recall coming inside and having a good meal and worship the god and would meet friends, neighborhood friends, and relatives. It was really fun.

Hampapur

It sounds nice.

Bhaskar

It was festivities. It was real festivities.

Hampapur

What about for Ugadi? What did your family do?

Bhaskar

Ugadi basically I do recall it was tradition to wear a new outfit, and then, of course, say prayers and eat a good meal, always at a relative's, so, yes, that's about for Ugadi.

Hampapur

And then for the Gowri Ganesha?

Bhaskar

For Gowri Ganesha? Gowri was more an elaborate one for [unclear] Gowri. There was all kinds of gift exchanges and stuff for Gowri, and, of course, Gowri worship, and then Ganesha, and after that, of course, eat a good meal, sweets and everything. And in the evening, we would meet our friends for [unclear] of Ganesha. It was really fun.

Hampapur

Do you remember what types of sweets that you used to eat?

Bhaskar

Oh, we definitely recall kadabu for Ganesha, and for Ugadi, definitely nice paysa, a sweet like a porridge, and Gowri, I do recall eating obattu, so there were some nice sweets. And, of course, coconut barfi was also a good tasty sweet that we had.

Hampapur

Would people make sweets at home, or could you buy it in the shop?

Bhaskar

They were all homemade. Those days, there was no buying outside. It was all homemade food and homemade sweets and homemade desserts. Everything was homemade. Yes, all homemade.

Hampapur

Oh, wow, the good stuff.

Bhaskar

Yes, the homemade one.

Hampapur

You mentioned that you exchanged gifts as well. So what kind of gifts would you exchange?

Bhaskar

Gifts were like nothing big, or like some bangles or some mirrors or some face powders and blouse pieces and some fruits and grains, like that. Those were the gift exchanged for the Gowri Habba.

Hampapur

And who did you exchange it with?

Bhaskar

With our cousins, our relatives, and, of course, some neighbors sometimes. So if anyone brought a gift, then we would give them back to--return another gift in return.

Hampapur

Did you get these religious holidays off from school?

Bhaskar

Yes. Schools were off those days. It was big celebration. They were all ready. We knew when it was going to be off, so we knew the festival date, and the schools were all off. They all had holidays.

Hampapur

Did you get days off for other religious holidays, from other religions?

Bhaskar

You know, I don't recall. I know we got--for independence day, we had a day off, and then for Gandhi Jayanti, October, we got a day off, and I do recall for New Year's Day, but I don't recall for Christmas, though. Christmas I can't recall at all. But I do recall independence day and Gandhi Jayanti Day, and then, of course, children's day. We had a day off in November, and I think New Year's, but that's about the religious holidays we got.

Hampapur

What was done for children's day?

Bhaskar

Children's day was a celebration at the school. They used to have some sports and dances and music, and it was celebrated at the school too. Children's day was a celebration at the school.

Hampapur

So the children would perform, or someone would perform?

Bhaskar

All the children would plan for a drama or a dance, and then they would practice for it and then stage it on that day. And then we would have some guests visiting us, some dignitaries, and then there would be a performance.

Hampapur

Okay. That sounds like fun.

Bhaskar

Yes, that was good. That was a good one. That was at the school, though.

Hampapur

Okay. You mentioned independence day. Was there any patriotic activities?

Bhaskar

Yes. For independence day, again, the school took a good look at it, and then they would host and arrange singing of the national anthem and dramas that were associated, patriotic dramas, or dances. Then again, the school would host that and would have all the students present there, so that was a school thing. Children's day and the independence day was done by school.

Hampapur

So you said patriotic dramas. Can you give an example of what type of thing was--

Bhaskar

Patriotic dramas, probably--I don't recall exactly who. There were some books written by some politicians or anyone else, any writers, and the teachers would follow those books, and there will be enactment of those.

Hampapur

I see.

Bhaskar

That's what it was. But I don't recall--any particular book, I don't recall.

Hampapur

Sure. What about for Republic Day? Was anything done for that?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes, Republic Day too, the same thing. There was some festivities, eating some snacks and soft drinks, and celebration at the school. At the school, definitely, Republic Day.

Hampapur

Was there anything done at a city level?

Bhaskar

You know, I don't recall at the city level. Probably so, but I don't recall having attended any of those. School ones we used to attend. At city level, I don't recall.

Hampapur

When you were going to school, were you taught about British colonization in school?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes. The part of history they taught--history, we did learn about the colonization and the independence struggle and movement, yes, it was a part of history, study of history, high school.

Hampapur

Do you think there was any British influence still remaining in Bangalore at that time, just in customs or things people did?

Bhaskar

Part of Bangalore did have that, but we kind of lived away from that part [unclear], where some Britishers still lived there. That part had more of a British influence, but we were a little bit away from that. Geographically, we were away from that.

Hampapur

Okay, so there were people from England still living there.

Bhaskar

Yes, still there, yes, and they're still there.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Bhaskar

Yes, they're still there, and that part is kind of like more Westernized. But we were not visiting that place often. It was quite a ways out.

Hampapur

Were Indians living there too, or is it just British people?

Bhaskar

No, Indians and Britishers live together. Yes, they both live together.

Hampapur

I see. I didn't know that.

Bhaskar

Yes, they still do. They still do in Bangalore. Parts of Bangalore have that.

Hampapur

Okay. Did your family own a radio?

Bhaskar

Yes, we had a radio. I don't know if it was a good one, but it was a radio. Yes, we had a radio.

Hampapur

Was it common for families to have a radio then?

Bhaskar

Most families had a radio. Yes, most families had one radio, like a main radio, yes, and we would get songs in the morning, suprabhatas and some talk shows. Yes, radio, and, of course, news. Yes, we had a radio.

Hampapur

What kind of programs did you like to listen to when you were growing up?

Bhaskar

I do recall listening to devaranamas, but like bhajans. They used to play in the mornings. I would listen to them, yes. It was not an all-day affair. They had certain times they would come on, and after that they would shut it down, and might come back in the evening again. So it was not an all-day program. In those days, they didn't have it like that.

Hampapur

So you couldn't just turn on the radio.

Bhaskar

Anytime, no. They had a specific time for bhajans, they had a specific time for any kind of a talk show or news, and again in the evening they would come back for bhajans and news, and that's about it.

Hampapur

I see. Did your family have a television?

Bhaskar

No. There was no TV. I did not know anybody who had it. There was no television at that time, no. There was none.

Hampapur

On the radio, was it things said in Kannada or English or what language?

Bhaskar

In Kannada, English, and I think some Hindi too, some Hindi too. Those days, Hindi was not a must language in Bangalore, no. You either knew Kannada or English or both.

Hampapur

Okay. So in schools it wasn't required.

Bhaskar

No. Hindi was not required. Hindi was not a required language at that time.

Hampapur

Did you go to the movies at all when you were growing up?

Bhaskar

Yes, but it was not like a way of life, no. Occasionally we saw one movie. That had to be approved and screened by elders and, "Okay, this is okay for you to see." So then we would see. But it was an expensive affair for a movie, coming from big families, so that was not at all a priority. I mean, if you got to see, yes, but otherwise, no. Months would go by and you would not have been to a movie.

Hampapur

Were the movies in Kannada or Hindi?

Bhaskar

Movies were, that I recall having seen, both, Kannada, some Hindi, and some English too. Yes, I had some in English. I had seen "My Fair Lady," "McKenna's Gold," and "Sound of Music" then in India a long time ago. So I'd seen those, some English movies too.

Hampapur

The classics?

Bhaskar

Yes, the classics we had seen.

Hampapur

Did you have any extended family in Bangalore?

Bhaskar

Extended family, yes. We had on my dad's side, he had sisters and brothers, so their children were all our age group, so we had extended families, cousins, cousins and second cousins, both sides, my mom's side and my dad's side.

Hampapur

And how often did you see them?

Bhaskar

Some cousins, I saw them like every week, some maybe once a month, and some who lived far off, probably whenever they got a chance to come down.

Hampapur

And what kinds of things did you like to do with your cousins?

Bhaskar

Oh, with our cousins I know we would occasionally go to movies, or just basically sit and chat, or run around and go for shopping and those kinds of things.

Hampapur

What type of shopping did you like to do?

Bhaskar

Oh, shopping, occasionally we would go buy a sari or buy a blouse, material for the newest blouse, or buy some bangles or hair bands, those kind of personal things. But then we would also go for shopping for the house, like vegetables or anything that we needed at home.

Hampapur

And it was all individual shops back then?

Bhaskar

Yes, individual. There was no malls there. There was individual shops, one shop for grains and one shop for snacks. There were shops for vegetables and fruits. They were all individual shops.

Hampapur

Okay. And for clothing, would you buy clothing ready made, or would you have it made?

Bhaskar

The ready made was very expensive. Ready made was almost like a rich man's deal. So you went and brought the material, and you took it to the tailor and had it stitched. Custom was cheaper. It's the reverse of the U.S.; custom is expensive, ready made is cheap. But there, ready made was very expensive, so you had to have it custom made.

Hampapur

Okay. Yes, that is the reverse of what I'm used to. What kind of clothes did you wear when you were growing up?

Bhaskar

I do recall in my younger days I had frocks like around the knee, and afterwards I did have longer legged salwars, and then after that, a few years after that--my college years I know I had sari. I wore sari, and that was typical of any fourteen-, fifteen-, sixteen-year-old definitely already had a sari on.

Hampapur

Did women wear any Western clothes at all then?

Bhaskar

Western clothes in the sense--salwar, dupatta, and chudidhar. We used to call chudidhar, and that's how close we came to Western clothes. But we had long skirts. Long skirts was common. Long skirt was the main outfit for a long time, that would come to the ankles, long skirt, long, and then a blouse on top. Then salwars, chudidhar salwar was there, and, of course, sari was the most common one.

Hampapur

So no jeans or things like that.

Bhaskar

I had not even seen a jean then. I had not even seen one. [laughter] I had not seen a jean. Actually, I had not even heard the word jeans; I'd not heard the word jeans.

Hampapur

Did your family ever go out to eat?

Bhaskar

Going out to eat was like maybe in an evening or on a weekend, to have a dosa, vada sambar, that's about it. But not like--like a snack thing. But not going out for dinners, no. No, it was not a common thing at all, no. I mean, when we went out for shopping or you went out for roaming around or coming back or getting things done and got hungry, you would stop and eat a dosa, really, but didn't plan to go out for dinners, no. It was expensive to eat out too, because that many people at home, you couldn't be eating out. You would cook and eat at home.

Hampapur

So it sounds like it was, when you did grab a snack, it was mostly South Indian.

Bhaskar

Yes, always South Indian. In those days, there was no North Indian food there. It was typically vada sambara, chutney or water chutney, or dosa, that kind of a thing. There was no North Indian food, all South Indian.

Hampapur

I see. Did your family do any traveling or vacations or holidays?

Bhaskar

I don't recall vacations as such. If there was a wedding, our cousins or somebody got married, or some occasions like that, we would go. Or if somebody passed away, I do recall having gone and visited. But no, I don't recall any vacations, no.

Hampapur

So had you been out of Bangalore at all while you were growing up?

Bhaskar

I'd gone out of Bangalore, yes, a few times, for reasons other than vacation. I had gone out of Bangalore, yes, maybe like a hundred fifty, two hundred miles away, but for visiting cousins or spending time summer there, and that's about it.

Hampapur

So what are some of the places that you would visit?

Bhaskar

I do recall having visited--Bombay those days was too far off for us, but we had visited Bombay, and I had seen Delhi, and a few other cousins who lived in the northern part of Karnataka, so we had visited them and came back.

Hampapur

Did you like any of those areas that you visited?

Bhaskar

No, I think I liked my hometown. I was ready to get back to my hometown.

Hampapur

Right. Okay. And how did you travel to those places, to Delhi and Bombay and northern?

Bhaskar

Traveling was I think by train or bus, train or bus, either one of those. I do recall train and bus both.

Hampapur

And when you took the train, was it open, or was it a private compartment? How was it?

Bhaskar

Trains--I don't recall having seen any private ones. They all had compartments, but they were all economy-class ones. There were no first-class ones. They were expensive to travel. It was expensive to travel by first class, so we did go by economy-class trains and buses.

Hampapur

Would people talk to one another on the trains? Or did people stick to themselves?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes. That was a common thing there, tradition, that you'd help out each other or share. If you had anything to eat, we would share and we would talk about where they came from or where we were going, heading, the purpose of our trip and stuff. Yes, that was a common thing to talk about.

Hampapur

So it sounds like people were pretty friendly.

Bhaskar

Yes, they were friendly in those days.

Hampapur

Would you pack food from home to take on these trips? Or was there a dining car?

Bhaskar

I do recall having taken food from home, and the trips were so short that it didn't require any sleeping over on the trains, so we would board the train and get off by afternoon or late afternoon. So we would pack some snacks or food, yes.

Hampapur

What about in Bangalore itself? How did people get around?

Bhaskar

Bangalore those days, typically we used to call--we call it as Nataraja service. Nataraja service is by walking. [laughter] There were some public buses, transportation. Public buses were available and occasionally autos, private autos like taxis, but they were expensive, so that was not the common mode. Common mode was either walk or take the bus, so it was either one of those.

Hampapur

Okay. So when you used to go shopping for groceries or clothes and things like that, were there places walking?

Bhaskar

We could walk. We had to walk. It was just a local market, close by, so we would walk to them and come back walking.

Hampapur

Okay. So switching over to school, do you have any memories of your elementary school?

Bhaskar

Elementary school, yes, a little bit. It was almost like an old home turned into school, so those days it was a hometown school, and about thirty or forty people in each class. We had female--we'd never had a male teacher. It was all female teachers, all female teachers.

Hampapur

And the students? Was it coed?

Bhaskar

I went to a female school, so a girls-only school, so we only had girls in our school, and the teachers were ladies. But there were coed schools, yes. There were coed schools, but I went to a girls' school.

Hampapur

What language was it conducted in?

Bhaskar

I recall my elementary school I studied in the local language, Kannada, and I think my middle on I went to English [unclear], then learned in English.

Hampapur

And what languages were you required to learn in school?

Bhaskar

Schools, basically you had to know your mother tongue and, of course, English. English was the common mode of communication.

Hampapur

Were most people speaking English in Bangalore then?

Bhaskar

I don't know if I could say they were speaking, but they knew the language. But then again, it was not a spoken language. Kannada, they would all speak in Kannada, but they knew English. They did know a language English, English language.

Hampapur

Okay. And then from elementary school, was there an intermediate school, or was it straight to high school?

Bhaskar

Elementary to middle school and the middle to high school, so, yes, just like here, elementary, middle, and high school.

Hampapur

Do you have any memories of middle school?

Bhaskar

Middle school, yes, same thing. It was close by home, would walk to that. It was a girls' school; mine was a girls' school. It was from ten to five, and female teachers, so, yes it was fun. Going to school was fun then.

Hampapur

Would the neighbors attend the same school?

Bhaskar

Yes. Most of the neighbors attended the same school. I did have a few people who lived on the same street who were in my class as well, so I had my classmates who were also on the same street.

Hampapur

I see. Did you guys walk to school together, or bus?

Bhaskar

Sometimes. It all depended on--it wasn't like a plan, get together walking. It would happen in such a way that I would leave home out and then they would be leaving too, and then we would catch up on the street and walk together to the school, so that's what it was. There was no phones to call each other up and say, "I'm leaving. Why don't you leave too now?" There was no phones, so we would meet on the way, sure.

Hampapur

Did you pack lunch for school?

Bhaskar

Invariably, we packed. Most of the times we would even get back for lunch time. We were not too far away from the house, so we could walk back, eat something at home, and then go back to school again. So that was the norm for most of the students. Most families did that. That was the common thing. They would come back home for lunch, eat, and then go.

Hampapur

I see. And did you have to wear a school uniform?

Bhaskar

School uniforms was not a must, I think, if I recall correctly. Later in my high school there was a uniform, but not every day. We would wear it only like on a day when we had P.E., physical education. That's about it.

Hampapur

What did you have to do for P.E.?

Bhaskar

Just stretching and they would used to call drill. We would stretch hands and legs and that's about it, not a whole lot, not a whole lot. There was no gym there. It was just kind of stretching.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any extracurricular activities?

Bhaskar

I did belong to the Girl Scouts like here, what do you call it, Girl Scouts, but there it was Bluebells. We used to call it Bluebells. I was part of that. And what else? Played some games, that's about it.

Bhaskar

What types of activities did you do for Bluebells?

Bhaskar

Bluebells, it was like a Girl Scouts. We do recall cooking with some fire wood sticks, and then learning how to sew, and learning how to tie some knots, and reading some poems, and writing some songs, or singing together in a group, those sort of things.

Hampapur

Okay. And where was that located?

Bhaskar

That was very close to home in one of the schools. It would be vacant on weekends, so we would go there on Saturdays or Sunday mornings. I think Saturdays and Sundays, both days.

Hampapur

Did any of your siblings go with you?

Bhaskar

Yes, they did, they did. They had their own age group. They would get into groups of their own age groups and then, yes, they were there too.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you learn music or dance or anything while growing up?

Bhaskar

Not a formal learning; an informal learning. Yes, I did pick up some bhajans and songs on my own. You just hear and you would pick up.

Hampapur

So you mentioned for children's day and independence day and things, you'd have programs in school.

Bhaskar

Schools, yes.

Hampapur

So how did you participate in those?

Bhaskar

It was a group participation, so we would all sing the national anthem together or some patriotic songs. It was a group participation.

Hampapur

And you mentioned that you would also have dramas on those days too?

Bhaskar

Yes. Yes, it was also a group participation. I don't recall myself participating in dramas, but I do recall in group singing, yes, yes, I did.

Hampapur

Were there dramas performed outside of school, like in the city? Did people attend things like that?

Bhaskar

I'm very sure there were, but I don't think we were too close to that in proximity-wise, location-wise. So there may have been, but I don't recall having attended or being there anyplace like a public fair or something, no.

Hampapur

I see. How important was your education to your parents? Were they strict about school, or pretty relaxed?

Bhaskar

They were strict. It was a required thing. It was not an option. Going to school was a required thing, so you had to learn and be educated. That was expected out of you.

Hampapur

And while you were growing up, what level were you expected to go in school?

Bhaskar

To do my best. To do the best. There was always pressure to excel, always the pressure to do well, so the pressure was always there.

Hampapur

What about in school, how were the teachers? Were they encouraging?

Bhaskar

Teachers were encouraging enough, but they would not take individual attention, to come and let you know where you are or what can we do. It was like, just go ahead and do this, and get your homework done, and go take the test and make sure you do well, that sort of a thing. It was more for directive. There was no help or support.

Hampapur

Okay, I see. How were grades done?

Bhaskar

The grades were done based on the tests that they would give scores. Scores were just like here. It would be scores, percentage.

Hampapur

Did they do ranking back then as well?

Bhaskar

Yes. Class ranking was there. Yes, class ranking was there, definitely.

Hampapur

Then moving on to high school, do you have any memories from those days?

Bhaskar

High school, I do recall schools were Monday through Friday, a full day, and Saturday was a half a day. We went to school from eight to twelve, and it was close by. Again, it was girls' school and we had female teachers. I had neighborhood friends who were also with me in the same class too. We used to walk together and come back, and ate lunch at the school sometimes, in the afternoon for the lunchtime, or came home, both. Both happened. I guess that's all I have in my memory.

Hampapur

Okay. Was there a push to continue to college then, when you were in high school?

Bhaskar

A push and it was required. I mean, if you kind of didn't make it to college, that means you're like worthless. And if you didn't make it to college, then you

couldn't find a job, or the prospective guy who would marry you would look for a college-degreed girl, so there was pressure from all sides to get to college and get a degree, and to get a job or get married, you had to. It was almost a required thing, to be educated.

Hampapur

So when you were growing up, you always knew you'd be attending college someday.

Bhaskar

Yes, always knew. Oh, yes, definitely.

Hampapur

Had your parents attended college?

Bhaskar

My mom attended college, and I don't think she completed, but in those days she spoke English, so she was an educated lady. My dad went to college too, yes.

Hampapur

And then in high school, did you have to pick a certain track? Or was that only after you went to college?

Bhaskar

In high school it was all general. Everyone studied the same subjects at the same level. There was no A.P. level or anything.

Hampapur

So you were saying that it was all general subjects.

Bhaskar

Yes, general subjects. There was no choice to pick any that you wanted to further in, yes. That's how it was. All the schools were that way, so everyone studied everything.

Hampapur

I see. What college did you attend?

Bhaskar

I went to a female ladies' college. It was all women, and all the lecturers at this college level, they were all females. So it was close by. I went to a women's college.

Hampapur

So you were able to live at home and go to--

Bhaskar

Yes. I had not heard of anyone who was living in a dorm and attending college. Most people lived at home. They commuted to the college, and if they lived a bit far off, they would take buses to go there. But in my case, I didn't have to take a bus. I had to walk a few miles, and I had to walk every day, back and forth.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. Sounds far.

Bhaskar

Yes. But those days it was common. You would meet your friend on the way walking there, so I would find a friend, yes, so it was a common thing.

Hampapur

Okay. People must have been in good shape.

Bhaskar

Yes. [laughter] I know. Every day walking.

Hampapur

Wow. So was it much of a transition to go from high school to college?

Bhaskar

From high school to college was different, yes, because then the classes, or the periods as we would call it, they were scheduled differently. It was not like you had to be there at eight o'clock in the morning, no. Depending on what subjects you were, so you started at different timings. Each day was different in college.

Hampapur

I see. And what did you choose to study?

Bhaskar

I studied economics, sociology, and psychology.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Bhaskar

There were three majors. That's what I did, three majors.

Hampapur

And how did you come to choose those?

Bhaskar

Come to think of it, I wanted to pick up accounting and something else was there, accounting and calculus or algebra or something, but that was only offered in a coed college, and since I couldn't go to a coed college, I had to come to the college that was a female college, and they only had very little choice. But I actually wanted to go into accounting, but that was done only in a coed, so I had to pick these subjects.

Hampapur

Okay. So your parents wanted you to continue--

Bhaskar

In the female, yes, girls' college, girls' college.

Hampapur

I see. So when you were in college, were you attending with the idea that you would be working afterwards, or get married, or did you have any idea what--

Bhaskar

At college I did know that, actually, I was hoping to find a job after degree, so that was in the back of my mind, yes. And, of course, in the back of your mind there's also going to be the prospect of getting married as well. But job and marriage both were there. That's a typical thing for every girl there. It's nothing different to me. It's everything. Most girls wanted to work, and, of course, if they got married too, then they would still continue working.

Hampapur

Okay, so working was the normal option for women at that time.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, at least in our area, yes.

Hampapur

And how did you enjoy college?

Bhaskar

College was fun. I enjoyed my classes. I looked forward to go to college every day, so there was no single day I didn't want to go. I would have friends, and I had met friends, and I had made some friends, so it was a fun place for me.

Hampapur

What did you like to do for fun with your friends?

Bhaskar

Oh, basically, at my college, I don't recall having come back home for lunch. There was a cafeteria there, so we would have lunch there and occasionally we would go to movies, not often, very rarely. Or we would visit each other, friend's home. We would spend some time there, sit and chat, that's about it.

Hampapur

And in the cafeteria at school, was that still all mostly South Indian food?

Bhaskar

Yes. Cafeteria at the school was all South Indian vegetarian, South Indian vegetarian, and I liked their food better than home food, so I liked to eat there. [laughter] It was away from home I liked, and that's probably what it was, so I liked it.

Hampapur

Right. It's exciting.

Bhaskar

Yes, exciting to eat there.

Hampapur

Okay. So after you finished your degree, what happened next?

Bhaskar

After I finished my degree, then I did go to a tech school--in India we call it as polytechnic--tech school, and then again, that was a female college, and I did a master's in library science. I was finishing up after that, and then I got married.

In the middle of it I got married. I didn't finish; I didn't complete it, but I got married.

Hampapur

Okay. Was your husband also from Bangalore too?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, my husband is from Bangalore. But we didn't know each other. He was from Bangalore.

Hampapur

So did you know you'd be getting married at that time? Or was it a sudden thing?

Bhaskar

No, it was a sudden thing. They were looking for a prospective bride, and one of the marriage lady, the middle lady, she happened to bring them to our home. It was all sudden. It was all sudden.

Hampapur

And were your siblings married around that same age too, as you?

Bhaskar

Yes. My sisters got married around the same age, or probably even younger than me when they got married.

Hampapur

Where did you get married?

Bhaskar

We got married in Bangalore in a chowdri. Chowdri is a wedding hall, at the wedding hall.

Hampapur

And how long was the wedding?

Bhaskar

The wedding was about a day, that's all. It was a hurriedly arranged marriage, because he was coming back here, and he had already bought the tickets, so it was a hurried marriage, and it was difficult to even find a marriage hall in that short span. [unclear] and it was a day's wedding.

Hampapur

Okay, so Ankul was already living in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

No, he was coming here for the first time, but he had already bought the tickets.

Hampapur

I see. Okay. And what was he coming here for?

Bhaskar

He was coming here to find employment, so that's what it was.

Hampapur

So when you got married, did you know you'd be moving to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Yes. That time I knew. That time I knew.

Bhaskar

And how did you feel about that?

Bhaskar

It was okay with me. I wanted to come to America, so it was not that I didn't go looking for it; it just happened for me. So to me it was a good thing, I felt.

Hampapur

Did you know anybody else moving to the U.S., or who had moved to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

At that time I didn't have anyone that I knew who was coming. I had not heard of any of my friends or family members moving.

Hampapur

Did you know anything about America, though, growing up?

Bhaskar

Not much, not much, other than just passing knowledge from a paper, a newspaper, a little teeny bit here; not much at all. Not much at all.

Hampapur

Did people have a positive perception of the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes, yes. People were crazy about America, and they would come, definitely, definitely.

Hampapur

And how did your family feel about you moving to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Oh, they were thrilled. They were thrilled. They were all for it.

Hampapur

Okay. Were your sisters still living in India at that time?

Bhaskar

Yes, my sisters, at that time they were living in India, yes.

Hampapur

Okay. So you were the first to come.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes. One of my sisters was in London, but America, nobody had come to America.

Hampapur

And that was your first time abroad, going abroad?

Bhaskar

Yes, that was my first time abroad.

Hampapur

Okay. So what kind of paperwork did you have to do to come to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

You know, I do recall a marriage certificate, because we had gotten--it was kind of like a religious marriage. It was not a civil marriage, so we had to do the civil marriage, I do recall that. And I never had a need for a passport, so I never had a passport. I do recall him getting my passport done and applying for the visa. I do recall that. So those were the papers. That's about it, marriage, civil marriage, and then a passport, and then applying for the visas.

Hampapur

And how long did you have to wait for the paperwork?

Bhaskar

After he came, I think I waited about a year and a half before I joined him.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. So you had to wait a while, then. Was that common in those days?

Bhaskar

Those days, yes, it was pretty common. Coming after a year, a year and a half, yes, yes.

Hampapur

What did you do in that year?

Bhaskar

In that year or year and a half, what did I do? I did take some classes for typing and shorthand, and I did go for music lessons, and then what else did I do? I did a few other things that kept me busy. I was busy.

Hampapur

Why did you choose to do the typing and the shorthand classes?

Bhaskar

Just to make sure I had some skills when I came to America, to find jobs. So I had picked up typing, shorthand, and some other business courses I had done, like clerical business courses. What else did I do? I had picked up some driving lessons, so many of those things had kept me busy.

Hampapur

So you were planning to work, then, when you came to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes.

Hampapur

And were the driving lessons because you knew you would have to drive?

Bhaskar

Yes. Yes, driving lessons because I knew I had to drive here, so I thought I would get a head start there in India and did take lessons, yes.

Hampapur

So who taught you to drive?

Bhaskar

Oh, there it wasn't hard to find anybody, and if you paid some money, they would kind of like give you some hands on, how to drive, so I did do that.

Hampapur

Did many people have cars in Bangalore at that time?

Bhaskar

A car was a luxury. At least on my family's side, I didn't know anyone who had car, I mean owned a car. I mean, when we needed a car, we could rent a taxi. You could rent a taxi and you would travel. If you needed to travel by taxi, you would go. But owning it, I don't recall. And some of them, even the relatives who could afford to have one didn't have one, because it was considered as a luxury and didn't want to waste money on it. So people didn't fancy it. You could take public transportation, get by, or if you wanted to get an auto, you could, so there was really no need to spend that kind of--invent that kind of money in a car, so they didn't.

Hampapur

Sure. And when you said you could hire a taxi, would you just go outside and get one? Or did you have to call?

Bhaskar

There were taxi lots where the taxis would be all lined up and waiting for people, and all you had to do is to walk a few yards and go to the taxi stand and talk to him about how much he's going to charge you to take you to different places, and that's it.

Hampapur

I see.

Bhaskar

And you didn't need a cab every day, so you would rent a cab for a day and that's it.

Hampapur

I see. And what kind of music classes were you taking?

Bhaskar

I was taking some religious music classes, and I picked up a little bit songs, religious songs, but didn't practice after that. After that I never practiced it.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like you've enjoyed music for a long time, then.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

So did you ever think while you were growing up in Bangalore that you would one day leave the city or leave the country?

Bhaskar

Never. It just didn't even cross my mind. I never thought that I would, because that was not my plan. I was going to find a job, earn money, or get married, but I didn't think of leaving the country, no.[End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (August 31, 2010)

Hampapur

This is Veena Hampapur here again with Kamala Bhaskar. Thanks again for joining me. I'm really enjoying your interview thus far.

Bhaskar

Same here, Veena. I am getting to know you also as well, and it's been a good recollection of my faint memory.

Hampapur

So last time we left off talking about your upcoming move to the United States, and one thing I wanted to ask you is, at that time did you know it would be a permanent move?

Bhaskar

At that time, it's funny to say, coming from India we just never really thought that in great detail about the future. I thought maybe a few years I might stay here and then make a little bit of money to go back and buy a place on our own and settle down there. At that moment, permanency was not in the picture, yes.

Hampapur

Okay. What kinds of preparations did you make for your move?

Bhaskar

Not a whole lot. It was a simple life there. That's probably what it was; not a lot of preparation. Just waited for him to send me an air ticket, and in the meantime I was just updating my skills to make sure that I would find a job when I got here. And beyond that, I didn't even prepare myself for the clothes for this weather or for this culture. So I had my Indian stuff and that's all I came with.

Hampapur

So you mostly packed saris?

Bhaskar

Yes, packed saris and some salwar maybe, and carried a few items for setting up the home, like pots and pans and some spices. That's all I had.

Hampapur

Were you able to keep in touch with Ankul in that year, year and a half?

Bhaskar

Oh, in that year, year and a half, yes, definitely through writing. Telephones were very expensive then, and international phone calls. Each time he would

make a phone call for a few minutes, it would be like seventy, eighty, a hundred dollars.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Bhaskar

And starting, coming here and starting a life and setting aside about eighty, a hundred dollars for a phone call was beyond the budget. So basically, it was through letters, aerograms. There used to be aerograms then.

Hampapur

Okay. Did he tell you anything about America or life in America?

Bhaskar

You know, I don't recall, it's been so long. But I do recall a few things about the weather, the severe weather on the East Coast. We came to East Coast, so East Coast was very cold. That's about it.

Hampapur

So he warned you of that.

Bhaskar

Oh, he did warn me of the weather and that, what else, I had to brush up on my skills and pick up a little bit of driving, so that would save money towards driving lessons here and would hasten my learning driving and stuff like that. But other than that, not much.

Hampapur

So pretty practical.

Bhaskar

Yes.

Hampapur

In that year and a half you were staying in Bangalore, did you remain with your parents?

Bhaskar

Yes, I did remain with my parents. Yes, stayed there and focused on some typing, shorthand, those kind of things, and visited a few of our relatives on his side and everywhere.

Hampapur

Do you remember what airline you took over?

Bhaskar

I do remember taking Indian Airlines. It was a one-way ticket, Indian Airlines.

Hampapur

Was that your first time on an airplane?

Bhaskar

Yes, that was my first flight. That was my first time on the plane. Yes, it was my first trip on the plane.

Bhaskar

And you were traveling alone?

Bhaskar

Yes. I did travel alone.

Hampapur

Okay. And did you have any stopovers on the way?

Bhaskar

On the way, it did stop at--I think I came via London or Tokyo, I don't know. I think London, came via London, and it stopped over there for a few hours and then came to New York.

Hampapur

So were you excited, or nervous? Do you remember how it felt to be on a plane?

Bhaskar

I think both. I was nervous and excited both. It was a new life and away from home, comfort zone, so it was exciting as well as made me nervous, anxious, anxious rather.

Hampapur

And what year was it then?

Bhaskar

That was 1980.

Hampapur

And what season was it, or what month?

Bhaskar

I arrived towards the tail end of summer, I think tail end of summer.

Bhaskar

So where did you land?

Hampapur

I landed in New York, Kennedy Airport.

Bhaskar

Okay. Was Ankul living in New York?

Bhaskar

Yes. He came from New Jersey to New York to pick me up.

Hampapur

And had he found a job in that time?

Bhaskar

In that timeframe, he did have some. He had changed a couple and then he had a job, yes.

Hampapur

And what city was he living in?

Bhaskar

At that time we lived in Wayne, New Jersey, part of--I don't know if it's north or south. I think it's north. Wayne is north, north New Jersey.

Hampapur

Okay. But it was close to New York.

Bhaskar

Closer to New York, yes. Had an apartment, a one-bedroom apartment.

Hampapur

So do you remember when you first arrived, who picked you up?

Bhaskar

Bhaskar, my husband.

Hampapur

And how did you travel back to New Jersey?

Bhaskar

New Jersey, by car, by car.

Hampapur

Do you remember your first impressions of the U.S.?

Hampapur

Gee, I do recall seeing nice greenery, trees, and cleaner streets, and all regulated traffic was new to me then.

Hampapur

Yes, that's a big difference.

Bhaskar

Yes, that was a big difference, cars driving in strict straight lines. It was a big difference.

Hampapur

Did the U.S. look like what you thought it would be?

Bhaskar

Yes, U.S. looked very much what I thought it would be.

Hampapur

Can you describe your neighborhood in New Jersey?

Bhaskar

New Jersey, it was a middle-class neighborhood, not an expensive one, not a run-down area. It was a multi-story apartment building. I think we lived on the second floor or third floor; I don't recall. It was a good place.

Hampapur

And that was a one-bedroom?

Bhaskar

That was a one-bedroom apartment.

Hampapur

Okay, so it was just you and your husband then?

Bhaskar

Yes. Yes.

Hampapur

What was the ethnic population in New Jersey at that time?

Bhaskar

At that time there were whites, there were blacks in the building in which we lived. It was metropolitan-like. I do recall having seen some Spanish and a few other immigrants that were there. It was a combination of everyone.

Hampapur

Okay. Were there any other Indians there?

Bhaskar

There was one Indian couple. There was one Indian couple there, but she lived on the far end of the building. There was another Indian couple.

Hampapur

And what about day-to-day, in town? Would you see other Indians?

Bhaskar

Day-to-day other Indians? There was one Indian after I found a job close by. There was another Indian in the office that I worked in, yes.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like not too many.

Bhaskar

Not too many. Not too many in that area.

Hampapur

Were people familiar with Indians or with India?

Bhaskar

If my recollection is correct, not a whole lot. People didn't know much about India or Indians. But there were other immigrants, from Fiji, Bahamas, and other countries too, but they didn't know a whole lot about Indians at that time.

Hampapur

Would people ask any questions?

Bhaskar

Yes, they would ask me, "Where are you from?" or, "What country are you from?" and all that stuff, yes.

Hampapur

Did you have to make any changes in your daily life, like what you dressed, what you ate, things?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes. Dressing was totally a different one. I had to wear Western clothing and definitely adjust to the cold weather. I started wearing Western pants and tops and blouses, and, of course, shoes for the winter and sweaters and jackets and all that stuff, yes. Pretty soon I had to get used to those.

Hampapur

What was it like being in such cold weather?

Bhaskar

The first few months were very hard. My hands would freeze and my legs would freeze, but fortunately, in the apartment we could turn the heater really high. We were not paying for it, so we could keep the apartment really warm. So we didn't need any jackets inside the apartment. We kept it really high. It was a warm place to come to.

Hampapur

Did you know your neighbors in your apartment?

Bhaskar

I did know--there was a French lady who lived upstairs to me, and she was an immigrant. And then I knew a couple of other ladies on my other side, right side and the left side. There was one black lady who was single by herself, and there was another Hispanic lady. Her husband had died, so she was there. So I kind of knew a couple of people in there, yes.

Hampapur

Were people pretty friendly?

Bhaskar

They were pretty friendly, yes. I mean, not friendly. We would go out and each other say hi and morning and stuff like that, yes, so they were pretty friendly, I should say.

Hampapur

Okay, but not as close knit as it was in India?

Bhaskar

No, no, not as close knit at all.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have to make any adjustments to your diet?

Bhaskar

Diet, not a whole lot, because I was getting all the vegetarian food there anyway. The Indian vegetarian grocery store was available.

Hampapur

Oh, okay.

Bhaskar

Yes, so it was not a big change.

Hampapur

And where was that Indian store located?

Bhaskar

Indian stores were in New York and further south of New Jersey, so all we had to do was to travel and go on a weekend to purchase and bring it, and then vegetables were available in the regular supermarkets, so it was not a big change. Food-wise was not tough.

Hampapur

So were you able to get all the spices and things you needed?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, I was able to get.

Hampapur

So there was no grocery in the town that you were in?

Bhaskar

No Indian grocery in the town we lived, no. We had to drive either to New York or to the south of New Jersey.

Hampapur

And did you see more Indians in those areas?

Bhaskar

Yes, a lot of Indians in those areas, even those days too, yes. And restaurants, Indian restaurants.

Hampapur

So okay, those are then too. Was it mostly North Indian restaurants, or was there a mix?

Bhaskar

In those days, it was just North Indian restaurants. There was no--South Indian restaurants were hard to come by. But there was more of [unclear] and curry, [unclear] and stuff like that. That was there. South Indian restaurants were hardly there; not even a single one in those days.

Hampapur

Wow. The opposite of how you grew up.

Bhaskar

Yes, opposite of how I grew up, yes.

Hampapur

Did you and your husband ever eat out?

Bhaskar

It was expensive eating out those days. We were just starting out, so we ate out occasionally, but pizza was--I had taken to pizza. Initially I disliked pizza, but I had taken to pizza after a while, so pizza was available everywhere, so we had taken to pizza. Pizza was a normal thing after Friday evening dinner, was a special thing for us, pizza.

Hampapur

Had you ever had pizza before moving to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

No, I had not heard of pizza.

Hampapur

Were there any other things that were new to you after coming here?

Bhaskar

What else was new? Shopping and all the milk and dairy products was new to me, and it was really nice. That was really--I was in awe. I used to be in awe in grocery stores, looking at all the items and baked goods and nuts and ice creams and all that stuff was absolutely a pleasant thing to see.

Hampapur

Were there any new skills you had to learn?

Bhaskar

New skills--then I did have to take driving lessons. I took driving lessons. I had to pick up driving, so that was a new skill to me. And I had to start talking slowly, because I used to speak very fast, and I started talking slowly so people could understand me. So a few things, and then, of course, changes in the dressing habits, because of weather as well as the culture, so that was it.

Hampapur

Were you homesick at all when you first moved here?

Bhaskar

Yes. It was hard. It was hard for me to leave the hometown fun and meeting people and all that. It was hard in the beginning, but I had to get adjusted, so slowly I started working on that. So that was difficult. And also I got busy also. Monday through Friday I started working, and then weekends were left to get ready and prepare and get the chores done for the rest of the week, so in a way it was a blessing that I got busy, so I thought of home much less.

Hampapur

How long do you think that it took you to adjust to living in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

At least a couple of years it took me. It took me a couple of years to kind of truly get adjusted.

Hampapur

And were you able to keep in touch with your family?

Bhaskar

Yes, I did. In those days, again, telephones were expensive. I used to write often, and I would get some response definitely back, so kept in touch. And phone calls occasionally, not often, not often.

Hampapur

Were there any new technologies that you had access to in the U.S. that you didn't have in India?

Bhaskar

Computers were not that common those days, but there were some other machines that were comparable to computers that were there. And what else was there accessible? I guess that's all that I had. An electrical typewriter, we had not heard of that, so we had electrical typewriters, you know, plug it in and it would be a lot easier to print and stuff. And home phones is accessible.

Having a phone inside the house was a big deal, so we had phone. And hot water was a blessing to me, and coming through the faucet was a big deal. Even cold water we didn't have to store anymore. It was there twenty-four hours. And the heating in the cold weather, that was good, so some of these things were a big-time luxury for me.

Hampapur

Did you have a phone at home in India?

Bhaskar

No, we did not have one. We didn't have a phone, so a phone here was a big deal to me.

Hampapur

Did you have a television?

Bhaskar

In the U.S.? Yes, we had one. We had one, an old version that we had bought on sale or something like it, like a used one. That was functioning enough to give us a good idea about the shows, and we used to sit and watch in the evening, after office, would come back, sit and watch, and have dinner.

Hampapur

So that was your first time having a television at home?

Bhaskar

Yes, television at home we had first, yes. We never had--we didn't even know anyone who had a television then.

Hampapur

Was it common for people to have a television here?

Bhaskar

Those days, yes. Everyone had television. It was a black and white, but, yes, there were no color televisions then. I don't know if they had, but we had not seen one.

Hampapur

Do you remember what types of programs you used to watch?

Bhaskar

Oh, gee, I think Robin Williams I remember, and what else was there? News, I used to watch news so I would pick up the American accent; I would understand. So I used to watch a lot of news so I would pick up how to hear and understand and follow. And some other shows, "Brady Bunch" and a few other shows we were hooked on too.

Hampapur

So you mentioned that you had to learn to speak a little bit more slowly?

Bhaskar

Slowly, yes.

Hampapur

So did you have trouble understanding other people when they spoke, because of their accent?

Bhaskar

Yes. I mean, I could understand. Sometimes I had a harder problem to understand every word that they spoke, so it took a while, it took a while. I really had to focus to hear what they were saying.

Hampapur

So when you first moved here and were living there, what types of things did you do for fun?

Bhaskar

For fun, what did we do. Visit friends and have parties. We had met a few people, so we did that. And then we did travel to see some landmarks in New York, like the World Trade Center, and what else was there, the lighting house-not lighthouse, something else was there; Sears Tower, yes, Sears Tower and World Trade Center and a few other places we would visit on occasions, not on every weekend, but on some holiday long weekends we did.

Hampapur

So like the bigger tourist sites?

Bhaskar

Bigger, yes, tourist sites, we did that.

Hampapur

How often would you go to New York?

Bhaskar

Probably maybe once a month, or we went to the temple once a month, or maybe once in six weeks.

Hampapur

There was no temple in New Jersey at that time?

Bhaskar

At that time, I don't think there was any temple in New Jersey. The main temple was in New York.

Hampapur

Do you remember where in New York it was?

Bhaskar

Queens, Queens, the big Ganesh temple there, and I think it is still there. It is still there in Queens. It's really a famous one, yes.

Hampapur

So you said that you also spent time with friends. How did you meet people?

Bhaskar

We met them at the temple and at the Kannada Koota organization that they had, for all the Kannada Kootas. We would meet people there and through

work, or through the few people in the same apartment building. There was one couple that was an Indian couple. We had met others through them.

Hampapur

So you had Indian friends from the beginning, from when you first lived here?

Bhaskar

Yes, I did have. We did have Indian friends, yes.

Hampapur

And then so if there was a Kannada Koota, I'm guessing there was a sizable Kannada population?

Bhaskar

Oh, yes, yes, a big population. Just in the New York area, a big Indian population.

Hampapur

Okay. And what types of activities would they do?

Bhaskar

Oh, they basically had cultural programs, like singing, music, dancing, and maybe some lectures. Basically, it was singing, singing programs.

Hampapur

Did people from New York and New Jersey both used to come attend those?

Bhaskar

Yes. They both attended and then occasionally they had people from India too, who were artists, they were visiting. They would host a show there, have their performances given.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like you were able to maintain some of your customs from India, because of the temple and because of Kannada Koota.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, and the friends, yes.

Hampapur

What types of other things did you do with your friends, aside from the Kannada Koota?

Bhaskar

We did go a few sightseeing places and go together, make it like a picnic, so we had that with a couple of our friends there, yes.

Hampapur

How did you enjoy New Jersey and New York?

Bhaskar

It was nice, but I think the weather got us. It was too cold for us. We couldn't take it, coming from the tropical weather there. It was too cold for us, and Bhaskar decided to move to California.

Hampapur

Okay. So you mentioned that you started working when you were still living in New Jersey. So how long were you living here before you got a job?

Bhaskar

I think probably a couple of months, two or three months.

Hampapur

Oh, that's pretty fast.

Bhaskar

Yes, about two or three months maybe I stayed home, and then I did do some temporary jobs from the agencies, I did. And after that, one of the temporary jobs turned out to be a permanent one for me.

Hampapur

Okay. So what were you doing there?

Bhaskar

There, some basic-level clerical accounting job. I started with that.

Hampapur

So it sounds like those skills that you learned before leaving India came in handy.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Hampapur

And did you make friends at your workplace?

Bhaskar

At workplace I made friends, yes. I had one Hispanic friend and then another Indian friend, and I did have some white friends there, but it was all just at the work. I mean, I didn't have them home or invite them for dinner or lunches or anything like it, no.

Hampapur

Would your friends at work ask you anything about India or your background?

Bhaskar

Not a whole lot, though occasionally they would want to know when did you come or how old are you, this and that, but not other than that, and there was not a deep interest in them, for them to make further inquiries, no.

Hampapur

Were there a lot of immigrants living there at that time? Not just Indians, but any immigrants?

Bhaskar

Any immigrants--not that many, not that many. I could count on my right-hand fingers, so that many.

Hampapur

Oh, wow, okay. So most of the population were people from--

Bhaskar

They were all, yes, yes, they were all born here.

Hampapur

And how long were you living in New Jersey?

Bhaskar

We stayed there for like a year and a half, year and a half and then we moved to California.

Hampapur

Sunny California.

Bhaskar

Yes.

Hampapur

So how did you end up--is that when you moved to Los Angeles, or were you living somewhere else?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes. We lived in L.A. We lived in Inglewood, city of Inglewood. I mean, we lived in Culver City, and then from Culver City we moved to Redondo Beach.

Hampapur

Okay. Were you in Inglewood at all?

Bhaskar

No, I'm sorry, on Inglewood Boulevard, but it's in Culver City, Culver City.

Hampapur

Okay. So what were your impressions of southern California when you got here?

Bhaskar

Oh, when I got here, for one thing it was sunny, nice. I did have to lug myself with all those layers of clothing. And people were more relaxed compared to the East Coast, and more friendlier, I felt, so that was the main thing.

Hampapur

Were people familiar with Indians here?

Bhaskar

Probably a little bit more, a little bit more. Not a whole lot, but a little bit more. They kind of knew who Indians were.

Hampapur

And would you see any other Indians around?

Bhaskar

Here, again, I met a lot of people through Kannada Koota, a lot of Indians through Kannada Koota, yes.

Hampapur

Okay. So that was already well established here too.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes. They were already staying here and well established, yes.

Hampapur

How did you first hear about Kannada Koota, like either in New Jersey or here?
Had you known that existed?

Bhaskar

Oh, through friends, relatives and friends, yes, Kannada Koota, through relatives and friends.

Hampapur

What types of activities did you do with the Kannada Koota and friends here?

Bhaskar

Nothing other than just get together and eat. You know, talk, eat, and chat, where to get what, or where to shop the cheaper, where clothes are cheaper, where groceries are cheaper, and those kind of talks. It was basically, gave us a head start, which was good.

Hampapur

So you had an Indian community here when you first lived here?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

And what about the temple? Did you still attend the temple?

Bhaskar

Yes, temples, then we came to another temple. We used to visit temple much more frequently than I do now. We used to visit temple frequently and attend the functions in the Kannada Koota more frequently.

Hampapur

Was it the Malibu temple?

Bhaskar

The Malibu temple, yes. That was the only temple at that time.

Hampapur

Okay. I guess you were closer to it too. Okay. Did people ask you any questions about India or your background, things like that?

Bhaskar

Occasionally, but not on a regular basis. Occasionally someone would get interested or something, but not often.

Hampapur

Okay. And were there Indian groceries and restaurants and things?

Bhaskar

Here Indian groceries were much more accessible than at the East Coast. This was a lot closer, and we lived like a couple streets across from the Indian grocery store, so it was a lot easier, a lot easier to get even vegetables too, Indian vegetables.

Hampapur

And did you get a job once you moved to Los Angeles?

Bhaskar

Yes. As soon as I moved, just a few months after that I found a job in a fast-food restaurant, the head office, the corporate office, so I was there in the bookkeeping. Yes, I found a job soon after I moved here.

Hampapur

And what was Ankul doing?

Bhaskar

He was with the same company, in the sales, in the custom clothing.

Hampapur

Okay, so he was able to get a transfer here?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes.

Hampapur

And how did you like living in California, as opposed to New Jersey?

Bhaskar

Oh, definitely a lot better. It was better with the weather-wise, and then I had a better job than there, and I had made some friends at Kannada Koota, so I was getting well adjusted here. In the beginning itself, I was getting adjusted.

Hampapur

Did you do any traveling or sightseeing after moving to California?

Bhaskar

California after we moved? Yes. Every time we had days off, the holidays and vacations, we would travel. We went to Grand Canyon, we went to Vegas, we went to northern California, we went to Hawaii, we went to a lot of places, yes. All our holidays and vacations, we traveled.

Hampapur

And is this when you said you started to adjust to living in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes.

Hampapur

How long were you in Culver City?

Bhaskar

Culver City, we were there for about a couple of years, and then we moved to Redondo.

Hampapur

Okay, and you've been here since then.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

When you first moved to L.A., were there any parts of L.A. that were really popular to go visit, or people liked to go to?

Bhaskar

In L.A., Cerritos was really something that I enjoyed going to visit, to eat the Indian--South Indian foods was available there for the first time, and the food was there, all restaurants were there, grocery stores were all there, so it was a fun place to go to.

Hampapur

Was Pioneer Boulevard as big as it is today?

Bhaskar

No. Pioneer Boulevard was starting but not as big as it is today, but it was there. It was just beginning to grow. It was beginning to grow and it was a good place to go there. It made you feel at home. You felt you were in India.

Hampapur

Is that because of all the shops?

Bhaskar

The shops, the food, and then all the things that's available to buy, so you kind of felt at home.

Hampapur

Did you do any other Indian type activities, like Kannada movies or Hindi movies or things like that?

Bhaskar

Yes, we used to rent some and we would watch some. We used to rent some movies, yes. That was available too. We watched quite a few Indian movies, yes.

Hampapur

In Hindi or in Kannada?

Bhaskar

Hindi and very little in Kannada. It was not available, but Hindi, yes. Hindi was available.

Hampapur

Okay. Were there any other cultural activities, like programs or like music concerts or dance, anything at that time?

Bhaskar

I'm sure they were there, but I don't think we were not a part of that, so we didn't enjoy going there or anything. But other than just a few Halloween parties we went, from the work.

Hampapur

Okay. Was that your first time celebrating?

Bhaskar

Celebrating Halloween, yes. A few years we used to dress up and buy the costume, and we used to go to the Halloween parties.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Bhaskar

And that was fun.

Hampapur

Had you ever heard of Halloween before?

Bhaskar

No, we had never heard of Halloween. We had never heard of Halloween.

Hampapur

Was that something you enjoyed?

Bhaskar

Yes, we enjoyed. We had our colleagues as friends and their family would all go together. It was kind of like a group thing, so it was nice.

Hampapur

Were there any other American customs or traditions you picked up?

Bhaskar

Other than that? I think Thanksgiving time we used to get together with friends and have a meal together and all go out of town to see some places, so that's what we did.

Hampapur

And was this before Ramya was born?

Bhaskar

Yes, before Ramya was born.

Hampapur

How did you end up moving to Redondo Beach?

Bhaskar

We bought a place in Redondo Beach and moved here.

Hampapur

And did you stay at the same job? Or did you change?

Bhaskar

No, I changed. That job I changed, and I changed my job to a downtown job, to a corporate office, but Bhaskar kept the same. He's still in the same job.

Hampapur

What were your responsibilities at the job in downtown?

Bhaskar

It's the same kind of accounting-level job, and I know that, so I moved there.

Hampapur

And how do you like downtown?

Bhaskar

It was actually mid-Wilshire at that time. I should say mid-Wilshire. It was a little bit of traveling, but it was a better job for me, so I had good benefits and stuff, so I moved there.

Hampapur

Did they have like the Little Ethiopia and all those museums and things there at that time?

Bhaskar

You know, I'm sure they did, but all I did was go to work, come back home and cook dinner, and go to bed, and get ready for work next day, and weekends were certainly spent on doing the house chores and getting ready for the week, or go out and have some social outings, and that's all I did.

Hampapur

Okay. Pretty busy then.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

How long were you living here before Ramya was born?

Bhaskar

We lived here for five years before Ramya was born.

Hampapur

Okay. And at this point in time, did you know that you were planning to stay in the U.S.? Or did you still have an idea--

Bhaskar

At that time we were still not sure. We thought maybe we might still go back to India, buy a place and stay there. But then it didn't happen.

Hampapur

Did you visit India at all?

Bhaskar

We visited India a couple of times but didn't plan on a permanent stay back.

Hampapur

And would you get any visitors from there?

Bhaskar

Yes. We had visitors from there, cousins, and my mom came, my brothers and my sisters visited, but we never planned on a permanent going back.

Hampapur

How did your family like the U.S.?

Bhaskar

They liked it. My mom liked it, and my sisters still do live in the other parts of the U.S. They like it. They're accustomed to life here.

Hampapur

When did your sisters move to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

My sisters moved sometime in the eighties; eighties they moved.

Hampapur

Okay, so not too long after you.

Bhaskar

Not too long after, yes.

Hampapur

And were you able to keep in touch with them?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

And would you visit their parts of the U.S. as well?

Bhaskar

Yes, we have visited. We have visited Indiana, we visited Ohio, we have visited Carolina, yes.

Hampapur

Okay, all over.

Bhaskar

Yes, all over. And we have visited New Jersey. That's where his sisters and brothers are, so we visited them.

Hampapur

And what did you like to do on your trips back to India?

Bhaskar

On trips back to India, basically we would visit his side relatives and my side relatives, and friends, and travel to the holy cities, places to go, and just basically meet with the families and then go out for dinner and do a lot of purchasing. That's basically what we did.

Hampapur

Okay. You kept in touch with your friends from growing up?

Bhaskar

A couple of them, not a whole lot, and got back and I didn't know where a few others were, so things had changed by then.

Hampapur

At what point in time was it easier to make long-distance calls to India? And the letter writing decreased.

Bhaskar

Oh, the letter-writing thing. We used to make calls, but not too frequently. We were making phone calls, but not on a very frequent basis. I think in the last ten years, or seven, eight years or so, the cost has come down on the phones, but otherwise the phone calls were expensive. So basically, you used the phone call

for like occasional talking, or keeping in touch or something like it, but not to chat, no, not to chat.

Hampapur

Okay. So did you maintain the letter writing until that point?

Bhaskar

Yes, I did. Yes.

Hampapur

How did you feel about raising a child in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

It's different. It was different. I felt it was harder to raise kids here than in India.

Hampapur

Why is that?

Bhaskar

Basically, because of a transportation issue for the child. Back home you could just let the kid walk to school or come back or play outside. Here no one does it, so you're kind of constantly watching your child. You have to. You have to be behind them, drop them, pick them up, make sure they're safe and protected, so that part was the critical thing.

Hampapur

Did you see any advantages to raising your child in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

I knew it would be good for Ramya, for my daughter, because she would have the greater opportunity to do what she wanted, and if she put her efforts in, she would be able to do whatever she wanted to do. So there were bigger opportunities here than, definitely, than India.

Hampapur

Did you have any concerns besides the safety, or was that mostly it?

Bhaskar

Concerns about safety, that was about it. And also culturally, there was not much of exposure to her, so that was a drawback. I had to create or go to a place where there was any culture, but it was not a norm, it was not an everyday norm.

Hampapur

You mean exposure to Indian culture?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, Indian culture.

Hampapur

Okay. So how did you manage that, then?

Bhaskar

That aspect, again, I made friends at the Kannada Koota, and then she joined the Bal Vihar, and then we would help them learn some bhajans and meet up

with kids of her age group, do some activities together. We did that for several years, so that was a part of--she enjoyed that level. Now she doesn't come. [laughter] But she enjoyed, when she was young she enjoyed.

Hampapur

What types of things would they do at Bal Vihar?

Bhaskar

Bal Vihar, we would kind of tell stories, the epic stories, [unclear] and then we would chant bhajans, and then we would make Indian food and have lunch together with the rest of the group. So we would meet I think every Sunday or every other Sunday, something like it. So she used to look forward for that Sunday, which was good.

Hampapur

Were there Indians in Ramya's schools when she was growing up?

Bhaskar

In her school, elementary school, there was none. There was none. But middle school I think she had few. At the high school she had a few, just a few, but none in the elementary school.

Hampapur

Okay. And what was the ethnic diversity like when you first moved to L.A.?

Bhaskar

L.A.--you mean Redondo Beach?

Hampapur

In Culver City.

Bhaskar

Oh, in Culver City it was more integrated. There was Hispanics, there were some blacks and whites, so it was a combination of all, though, of course, there were a majority of whites; Culver City.

Hampapur

And what about in Redondo Beach?

Bhaskar

In Redondo, I would say it's more white, white population, and I hardly--these days I'm finding few Indians, but when we moved, there was hardly any Indian.

Hampapur

And how did you feel about that when you first moved here?

Bhaskar

There was not that many Hispanics either, and now I do see more Hispanics and more blacks and more Indians now. It's changed. Each year the number is increasing, which is good. There's a bigger balance now.

Hampapur

Right. Was that an adjustment when you first moved here, since you'd lived in more of a diverse area?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes, I kind of felt, yes, I would look like I was different, yes, definitely.

Hampapur

Were there any other cultural type activities you put Ramya in, or tried to teach her?

Bhaskar

Ramya went to, of course, Indian dancing, cultural dance.

Hampapur

[unclear]?

Bhaskar

Yes, bharatanatyam. And then she was in the Brownies, the Girl Scouts. She was there. And what else did she do? And I would have playdates for her. A lot of friends visited, and she would visit. And [unclear] a lot of birthdays. You know, at that age they do have you get invited and stuff, so, what else? I guess that's what she did.

Hampapur

And were there any new American customs or traditions that you learned through Ramya growing up here?

Bhaskar

Through Ramya? Oh, yes, yes. Ramya loved Halloween, so that was a big deal, every costume, and she would end up making the costume herself. I have such vivid memory of her costumes. She had to make her own costumes, and she would prepare the night before. [laughs] That was a crazy experience. And she loved making Mother's Day cards and Father's Day cards from school and everywhere, and she loved firecrackers, the Independence Day one, and Christmas tree was a ritual for us at Christmastime. Every Christmastime we put out a tree and gifts underneath the tree, and she would specify that she would need at least--"You have to have eight gifts for me." And we used to make sure to have enough number of gifts under the tree. She would [unclear] getting up in the morning and open the gifts, and she would enjoy them so. Yes, that was a cultural adaptation, Halloween, Christmastime, and Independence Day.

Hampapur

So Christmas you didn't celebrate until after she was born?

Bhaskar

That's correct. We didn't celebrate until she was born. So once she was born, then I had the tree and then celebration, and then she would have her friends over, and she would have gifts for them, and she used to exchange, yes. She enjoyed that.

Hampapur

And Mother's Day or Father's Day, is that celebrated in India when you were growing up?

Bhaskar

In India, there's no Mother's Day or Father's Day. Every day is a mother's day; every day is father's day, so we never had a special day for them. But here, that was a new thing to me. That was a new thing to him. In the beginning, it was a religious thing for her to get a card and a gift, so I enjoyed that.

Hampapur

What about Thanksgiving? Did you continue to celebrate?

Bhaskar

Oh, Thanksgiving, we're vegetarian, so I would still--either we would have friends, the family over, or we would visit them, or if not anything, we would make a dish at home and we would just eat by ourselves, so it was a special day for us, yes.

Hampapur

In the time that you've lived here, do you see changes with what L.A. or South Bay is like now, as opposed to when you first moved here?

Bhaskar

Yes. South Bay is more integrated now, and it has grown, so there's a lot of cultural activities here now for Ramya than before. Absolutely, it's grown.

Hampapur

Does India seem different when you go back and visit?

Bhaskar

Last time we were there about, what, two years ago, yes, it did seem absolutely different, absolutely different.

Hampapur

How has it changed?

Bhaskar

More influx of population there, crowded, and more apartment buildings. It has become commercialized, and cost of living has gone through the roof there, and crime has increased there, and it's difficult to travel from one place to another place, takes too long, so a lot of those things, yes. It's become like a bad city.

Hampapur

Have you seen any changes in the Indian population in southern California while you've been here?

Bhaskar

I think they're getting more Westernized, and they have less time now. They're more self-centered, and they're less dependable. I think I'm giving all the negative things now. [laughter] But that's my perception, and I hope--I don't like to throw this on others, but this is my perception. Over the years they have grown self-centered, selfish, and also the reason for that is natural, because the

people have been getting older, they're getting more responsibilities. Their children are growing up. They have more stress now, because they have to pay for the children's education and make sure they're settled in, and the parents themselves are getting older, and they're worried about their retirement, and their health is changing, so their [unclear] is different, so all these things have contributed towards that. And stress at job for them, so things have changed, absolutely, from when I came and to now; it's totally different. It used to be like where you could pick up the people or count on them. There are a lot of backbiting people; they have become more backbiters, and they don't have time to even hear others around, what's going on with them. It's like they've become commercialized and more desensitized and it's like, "What's in it for me?" There's nothing in it for me? They don't want anything to deal with it. Even [unclear]-wise, people have changed. Used to be like, okay, they couldn't make it or they can't do this, they would call up and say, "I apologize. I'm so sorry I can't." Now it's like they don't even care to respond. If it doesn't suit them or if it doesn't work out, they're not there. And that's probably the saddest part is that, to me. At a time when people should be together, be part of the solution and see that the problems that we are facing are universal, it's like be it joblessness or expensive education or expensive health care costs, I mean, I think you should at least hear and see what we can do, but people have lost patience, or people don't have time anymore. That has become rampant among Indian community, which was not there years ago.

Hampapur

Do you think that has to do with living in the U.S. and becoming Westernized, or why do you think that change has occurred?

Bhaskar

I think not just the economy; I think the individuals have changed. Because the problems are all the same for all of us. It's no different from me to another person to another person. We all have the same problem, but I think the individuals have changed. They're more in for themselves. And it's becoming more Americanized to say. It's like, "I pay my bill and I take care of myself, and if I see you there, fine, if I don't, fine," that kind of an attitude. But when we came, it was not that way.

Hampapur

So that sounds pretty different from how you grew up too.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, yes. It's kind of contradict to my own personal values and beliefs that I carried, so that's a sad part to me.

Hampapur

So it sounds more individualistic.

Bhaskar

Individualistic. It's like you can't count on anybody anymore, you know? It's like it used to be a friendship or girl-friendship group, but now I have given a new name to the friendship group. I call it a party group, because the party group signifies it's a party. It's not a friendship group. I used to call it friendships or girl-friendship group, but now I call it party group. So it's a party group.

Hampapur

I see. Things have changed.

Bhaskar

Yes, it's a party group.

Hampapur

Has the population gotten a lot bigger since you've lived in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Are you referring to the Indian population or American population?

Bhaskar

The Indian population.

Bhaskar

Indian population? I'm surprised it's gotten smaller, because the children--I would tend to think living in the tropical climate area, in California, the kids and the relatives will stay here, but funnily, some of the kids who have grown up have moved back to East Coast, like colder climates, or farther off, away from California. Some of them have even moved out of country, and some of them have moved to further east, so to me it was a kind of unexpected thing. I thought the kids who grow up here and go to school here would end up in California somewhere. I'm not saying Los Angeles per se, but they have chosen to be away, so that's a little bit hard for me to understand. So in other words, I'm trying to answer to you, families have become smaller, because the kids have grown up and gone elsewhere.

Hampapur

Right, so families are split apart.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

I see.

Bhaskar

It's become more nuclear than I thought it would be. So it's smaller families.

Hampapur

Okay, I see. Do the different communities from India, like different states, religion, all that, do you think people mix with one another or mostly stay within their own communities?

Bhaskar

My personal experience has been the North Indians get along better. They are more community-oriented, and they're more sharing, or at least during the times of festivals or events or any major unexpected eventualities, they kind of get together. But I think among the South Indians, it has taken a downward trend. They're less connected than the North Indians. They can be counted on less than the North Indians, so that's my opinion. Generally, South Indians are not as well integrated as North Indians are.

Hampapur

Was it the same way when you first moved to the U.S., or do you think that goes with what you were saying earlier about how the--

Bhaskar

I think North Indians have always been more integrated, community-wise and family-wise, but I feel the South Indians have taken a downward trend. That's my perception.

Hampapur

Okay. And do you think North Indians and South Indians in California interact that much with each other?

Bhaskar

I think at work level it's fine. I think they do interact pretty professionally okay; they can get by. They do, they do. Generally, they get by. I mean, every here and there you may have an exception there, but generally at work level they are fine. But I think socially, it's still a little bit more segregated. They kind of try to find their own comfort look and they go there. But at work level, it's much better. It's much better.

Hampapur

Okay. And then with the Kannada Koota, have you seen any changes in the type of activities they have now, as opposed to when you first moved to the U.S.?

Bhaskar

I think now--I have not been to Kannada Koota in the last several years. I have discontinued my membership there. But from what I see here and there, occasionally when I do meet people here and there, I think it has changed, because the older community, I mean older generation, some of them are still hung up on--are hungry on power roles, so they want to keep themselves in the forefront, they want to be making decisions, and they want to be controlling the community policy and everything, and I think it should be passed on to the next generation. That's my feeling, which I think I see there's a struggle there. So I think they should try to pass it on to the younger generation, and they can run the show. But some are there and some who have really made it have gotten big egos, and egos and socializing doesn't gibe together, and then if there is too

much ego, you can't socialize. So that's one of the main factors that I have been out of the Kannada Koota.

Hampapur

I see. When did you get involved with Art of Living?

Bhaskar

Oh, Art of Living, for the last year and a half. My husband has been involved for the last several years. I think, what, four years or so, four or five years, so he got me involved in that. There's some good techniques, some breathing meditation that helps, so I got involved like a year and a half. I'm not a regular there like him, but I go occasionally. I do see the benefits, but I go occasionally. But I'm not a regular, so maybe when I do find some time in the future, I will be a regular there too.

Hampapur

Okay. Do you see any differences between the first generation, your generation, and the second generation that's grown up here?

Bhaskar

Yes, there's a difference. I think the first American-born generation are much more confident. They're more focused on what they want to do, versus waiting to hear what the parents want them to do, and stuff like that. They're hard working too. They're hard working, and they're out there trying to make it happen. In their own way, they're all trying to make it happen, and the majority of them I'm proud of. And everyone here and there, you see some who've not given their best shot, but the majority of the children have done well. I'm very proud of them.

Hampapur

Do you think in present times, compared to when you first moved to the U.S. or to southern California, people are more familiar with Indians and Indian culture?

Hampapur

Absolutely, yes, definitely. They know a lot more about Indian culture, religion, meditation, even food habits, and there's a lot more people who are visiting there. They love the clothing, they love the food habits, they love the Indian dishes, so definitely there's a bigger interest and bigger group that enjoys that, which is very nice to hear and see now. Yes, absolutely.

Hampapur

So what are some examples of how you've noticed--

Bhaskar

Oh, like say even in Kannada Koota, or even in the Art of Living, or even at work level, or even at any friendship level, I have noticed a lot of locals finding interest in Indian clothing, and they wear them. They become vegetarians. They love Indian spices and they want to know where to get them or how to cook

them, and they join those classes, meditation, so they are trying to be a part of it. So that just tells you that they're adaptive. I mean, they're learning and they like it. They want to embrace it, and they're embracing it, which I had not seen in several years before.

Hampapur

Okay, so that's a change.

Bhaskar

Yes, other change.

Hampapur

Do you think Indians living in the U.S. face any particular challenges?

Bhaskar

Probably the first generation, I mean the immigrants will. It's kind of hard to accept the transition of independence to their children versus to how we grew up there, so that's the hardest part, letting it go. So that's the part, probably the hardest part. And trying to accept children making their own decision and what they choose to do, that's a little bit hard, accepting. What else? We have this tendency to hold onto, and to let go is something to be worked on. That's what's happening to me. So that's what it is.

Hampapur

Have you gotten your citizenship while living in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Yes. I've been a citizen for a long time. I've been almost, what, twenty-five years I think I've been a citizen.

Hampapur

Okay, so just a few years after you came, you got it?

Bhaskar

Yes, I became a citizen.

Hampapur

And why did you decide to become a citizen?

Bhaskar

I love America, and it's given me a lot of opportunities too. Also it's a lot easier traveling with an American passport, so those were the main concerns.

Hampapur

So what kind of process did you have to do to get that?

Bhaskar

Oh, though years ago it was a lot difficult. There was no Internet, and you had to literally go down to the country courthouse to get the papers for sign them and wait for the line to even get a photocopy of that, and then turn it back in and wait for several months, and have it notarized. It was an ordeal process in those days, but it was all worth it. It was all worth it.

Hampapur

Did you get your citizenship before you decided to stay permanently in the U.S.?

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, we got the citizenship before we decided, permanently, yes.

Hampapur

At what point did you decide that--if you have decided that this is where you're going to stay?

Bhaskar

I'm convinced now. With Ramya around, I know my daughter will be here, so definitely I want to make this so this is my place, because that's my connection. So definitely, this is my place. I've lived for too long here, and I'm more acclimatized to this life than Indian.

Hampapur

Right. Like you said earlier, you've spent more of your life in the U.S.

Bhaskar

Yes, yes, and literally grown up here, so it's been a long time, yes.

Hampapur

When Ramya was growing up, did you take her to India to visit?

Bhaskar

We took her a couple of times. One, two--I think she's been there two times, two or three times. Two or three times we've taken here, have been there.

Hampapur

Do you foresee yourself staying in Los Angeles in the future?

Bhaskar

Absolutely. Absolutely. I would like to, because she went to school here and she's got her connections here, and we have lived in L.A. all of life, all our adult life here, so it will be nice for us to stay in this area. Yes.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of interview]