

A TEI Project

Interview of Asha Devaraj

Contents

1. Transcript
 - 1.1. Session 1 (July 15, 2010)
 - 1.2. Session 2 (July 16, 2010)

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (July 15, 2010)

Hampapur

It is July 15, 2010. This is Veena Hampapur, and I'm here today with Asha Devaraj.

Devaraj

Right, very good.

Hampapur

Thank you for joining me today.

Devaraj

Oh, you're welcome, Veena. It's my pleasure to talk to you.

Hampapur

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

Devaraj

I was born in Delhi. I'm not going to tell you the year. [laughter] Yes, I was born in Delhi, and then I grew up, I went, did my elementary, higher school and then college, everything in Delhi, so pretty much I spent all my time, all my life in Delhi. Then for a period of three years we moved to Bombay, because my dad got transferred there. So I lived in Bombay for three years, which I really loved it. Then during my stay in Bombay, I joined the Reserve Bank of India, and I worked there for two years.

Hampapur

Okay. I'm going to take you back a minute, back towards Delhi. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Devaraj

Yes. I had three brothers and one sister, and then three of us, my sister and my brother and myself, all three of us were born in Delhi, and two of my brothers were born in Mysore.

Hampapur

And where were you in that placement?

Devaraj

I'm the second one from the top, second. I have an older brother and two younger brothers and a younger sister.

Hampapur

Okay, so a big family.

Devaraj

Yes, it is.

Hampapur

What did your father do for a living?

Devaraj

My dad was chief engineer of All India Radio. All his life, after his college, he came to Delhi and he joined All India Radio, so he retired in All India Radio as a chief engineer.

Hampapur

And what did that work consist of? What did he do there?

Devaraj

He was the head of the whole of India for broadcasting and television. Actually, he was one of the first persons to get TV to Bombay.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. And where was he from originally?

Devaraj

From Mysore. He was born in Mysore and so was my mom.

Hampapur

When did they move to Delhi?

Devaraj

They moved to Delhi in the mid-forties, after they got married. So they came, and my mom could hardly speak any Hindi and so was my dad, and my mom somehow managed with her broken English and Kannada, and slowly she had to learn Hindi. It was a foreign land for her.

Hampapur

Right, yes, other side of the country.

Devaraj

Right. Exactly. So Delhi was like a foreign country for her, because she grew up in Mysore all her life. So somehow she managed, and then all her life she spent in Delhi till my dad retired.

Hampapur

Where were you living in Delhi?

Devaraj

Delhi, we lived in Chanakyapuri. It's a pretty place where all the embassies are situated, and it's a nice, beautiful house, all government houses for all the government employees. We were giving houses there, housing.

Hampapur

So were you surrounded by all other government employees as well?

Devaraj

Yes. Most of them are all government employees. And then we were very close to all the embassies, and also we used to go jogging and all, so it was a pretty place.

Hampapur

So can you describe to me what your house looked like?

Devaraj

It was a very modern-looking house. We had like four bedrooms, and in India they don't call it a living room, they say drawing room. It's a huge living room with dining, and then a servant quarters, and we had three bathrooms and a beautiful backyard and a front yard, so it's a pretty big house.

Hampapur

Yes. Well, there are a lot of you.

Devaraj

A lot of us. But the thing is, yes, a lot of us, but by that time, like some of us-- my older brother had moved to Madras, where he did his college, so he went there. Then we were all--yes, it was a big family. It was just enough for all of us.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any other relatives staying with you besides your--

Devaraj

No, just us. So, no.

Hampapur

Did you have any other family in Delhi?

Devaraj

Not that I know of. My dad was the first one to move to Delhi. Then later on, I think, like his distant cousins, they moved to Delhi, but we didn't have too much of interaction with them. So as far as I know, I don't know any relatives we were close with in Delhi.

Hampapur

Did you ever visit your other family down south?

Devaraj

Yes, we did. See, the thing is like every summer we would get like two months of summer vacation, so the only thing we did was just my dad would pack us

all up and send to Mysore, so we would go and spend every summer, two months in Mysore, go and visit Bangalore, Mysore, visit, spend time with all our relatives.

Hampapur

Did you enjoy those trips?

Devaraj

Oh, definitely. We had a good time, and Mysore and Bangalore was a lot nicer those days, less number of people, lots of trees, so it was very nice.

Hampapur

Was it very developed back then?

Devaraj

It was developed, oh, yes. It was, and it was pretty much well developed. But the thing is, we didn't see too many highrise buildings in India, I mean in Mysore or Bangalore. Nowadays if you go, every corner you see a highrise building, but at those days, there were lots of houses with big bungalows and lots of trees on the street, so it was pretty.

Hampapur

Were they city-like back then, or was it like more suburban?

Devaraj

No, it was very--oh, you mean--see, my grandparents lived in the suburbs, so then if we had to go to the city, the city would be like downtown, what you call here, like market place, so those places, yes, they were pretty much developed. We loved it, even though it wasn't as developed as Delhi or Bombay, but it was pretty good.

Hampapur

How was it different from Delhi?

Devaraj

See, Delhi was very crowded, very crowded, lots of traffic, everything, and the weather in Delhi was extremes. It won't snow, but it was very cold or very hot. But Mysore and Bangalore--those days, Bangalore was called air-conditioned city, because it was lots of trees. Even in Mysore also there were a lot of trees and big houses, and we would love it. We used to enjoy it.

Hampapur

What did you do there in the summertime?

Devaraj

I mean, most of the time Grandma would prepare all kinds of different food, enjoy all the food, and then go with the cousins, just go shopping. Even though we didn't buy anything, we would just go down to market area and go to--we used to call it hotel in those days. We now say restaurant. We'd go there, have something to eat or see movie. Most of the time we just spent out with cousins. We didn't have any friends, but we had lots of cousins, so it was nice.

Hampapur

Were there any South Indian restaurants and things like that in Delhi as well?

Devaraj

Delhi, yes, they did have, not too many. They had a couple of them which my dad would take us all on every Sunday. It was called the Madras Hotel, so we could get dosas and idlis, all the South Indian delicacies. So every Sunday morning it was a ritual, because the offices would close only on Sundays. So we would all go there, have all these idlis, dosa, [unclear] eat, and then we would have ice cream, and that was our outing for every Sunday morning, and just come home.

Hampapur

Sounds like a nice trip.

Devaraj

Yes. [laughter] That's what my parents, that was their ritual every Sunday. That's the only South Indian hotel I knew in Delhi, Madras Hotel, yes.

Hampapur

So when you came for summers down south, you must have had a lot of--

Devaraj

Oh, a lot of--that's why we enjoyed more, and all the vegetables and fruits also. They were a lot different from what you were used to in Delhi.

Hampapur

Oh, how so?

Devaraj

Yes, see, they were like eggplants and all. See, eggplant in Delhi would be purple and big ones. You'd get the long ones, like the one you have, Chinese or Japanese eggplant. But in Mysore or Bangalore, there were green ones, and they were a lot more tastier than the one which we're used to in Delhi. Even the fruits, mangos, I mean, we loved mangos, and [unclear] my grandma had a big tree in the house, so you'd eat Grandma's mangos from the tree. And then she had lots of coconut trees, and then we would drink the tender coconuts, and the jackfruit, which we had never seen in Delhi, we would get them from the house. We used to have lots of jackfruit in the house. The servants would come. They would peel everything and give us, so we were very pampered. Any, all kinds of nice food would be cooked in the house, all these nice fruits we would eat, so we loved going to Mysore every summer.

Hampapur

Did you have cousins there as well?

Devaraj

Yes, lots of cousins. My dad had two sisters, and he was the only son in the family. Each one of them had kids, like three or--the older one had four; the younger one had three kids. And my mom's side, her older brother had six kids.

So some of them were older than us, but still, we enjoyed. We never had any age problem. Once we'd go to Mysore, you would all be like one, go like a big group. And then her sister had another four kids, so whenever we went to Mysore every summer, all her brothers and my dad's sister, they would all come to Mysore to spend time with us. So it was nice.

Hampapur

Yes. It sounds like you had a lot of company.

Devaraj

Oh, a lot of company, yes, it was. But as we grew older, everybody went their different ways.

Hampapur

Right. And how did you travel from Delhi to Mysore?

Devaraj

Oh, train. That's the only thing. We used to take--do you want the name of the train also?

Hampapur

Yes, I would love to know.

Devaraj

Yes. It used to be Grand Trunk Express from Delhi to Madras, and then Madras we had some family friends in Basang Nagar, and then we would stay overnight there, have a nice dinner, spend time with them, and next morning we would leave for Bangalore, and then we would reach Mysore. So from Madras to Bangalore by train, it was like six hours, I think, six hours or so. And then once we reached Bangalore, we would take the train, night train, and the train would go so slow. The distance was only eighty miles from Bangalore to Mysore, but it would take a whole night. Next morning at five o'clock we would reach Mysore. Then in those days, they had very few taxis, okay? So we would all love to go in that jet car, like tonga, pulled by a horse, so we would all sit. It was a big excitement for us. [laughs] Sit in the tonga, and my grandma's house was, I would say, about three miles, three miles from the station, from the railway station. It was a big thing for us. We used to enjoy that, those rides in the tonga.

Hampapur

Right. Sounds like it was a long trip if you went all to Madras and then back up to--

Devaraj

Delhi to Madras, it would take us three days in the train, okay, and then from Madras to Bangalore were six hours. If we left Madras in the morning, we would reach Bangalore in the evening. Then we would take the night train, and we would reach Mysore next day morning, so it was like four days in the train. And luckily, my dad was--he would get the first-class compartment, so just for

the whole family. It was like the whole family spending in the train, so it was very nice, and we used to look forward to those train--riding in the train, four days in the train. We used to love it.

Hampapur

Would people on the train socialize with one another?

Devaraj

No, because, see, the first-class compartments, those days it was just by yourself. I think it used to be like eight by--I would say eight by, or six by ten or like that. And then you had your own bathroom, and you locked the door, at least like you have upper berths and lower berths, and we would fight for that among brothers and sister. "I want the upper berth," "I want the window seat." We had plenty of room, so just for us, that's it. That's how it was those days.

Hampapur

I see.

Devaraj

So we used to look forward to that. And you locked the door and that's it, it's yours. And then you ordered food in the train. They had their own cafeteria in the train, and you would order. They would come and take your orders, and they would bring it to your seat, breakfast, lunch, dinner, so it was pretty good.

Hampapur

That sounds really nice.

Devaraj

Very nice. I miss those days. [laughs] Yes, it was nice.

Hampapur

So going back to Delhi, do you have any memories of your neighbors while growing up?

Devaraj

Yes. We used to be very close. Like here you just come out and say hi. You sit in the car and you're done. But there in each house used to be only one car, so all of us, the children, we all had to take the bus. Then we used to interact with our neighbors a lot. If we had to go someplace, we would go out, go out for walks in the evening, play together, so, yes, we had a lot of interaction. We had a lot of friends, socialized with.

Hampapur

There were a lot of children your age?

Devaraj

Oh, yes, we had in our neighborhood, yes.

Hampapur

Were people from the South as well, or from different parts of India?

Devaraj

Most of them from the North. They were all Punjabi-speaking people or Hindi-speaking people. There were some South Indians also, but our age group, most of them were from the North.

Hampapur

Okay. Were people familiar with people from the South or from Karnataka?

Devaraj

No. See, when we were growing up in Delhi, anybody other than Hindi-speaking people, if you say you are from the South, they would say, "Oh, yeah, they're Madrasis." All they knew was Madras. They didn't know Karnataka or Trivandrum, none of those states, so they would say if you tell them, oh, you're from the South, they'd say, "Oh, you're from Madras." So all South Indians for them was Madrasis, so that's how they would--

Hampapur

And how did people feel about that?

Devaraj

We didn't feel good about it. We had to tell them, "Hey, no. We are not from Madras. We are from Karnataka." In those days it was Mysore State. We used to say, "No, we are from Mysore, Bangalore. We are not from Madras." But in spite of that, they would just characterize us as, "You're from Madrasi; that's it."

Hampapur

Why do you think there was so little knowledge about--

Devaraj

I don't know. It was really sad, because we used to tell them, explain. Later on people, I think when more South Indians started coming to Delhi, they knew then. But those days, in the late sixties, early seventies, even the early sixties also, they would all call us Madrasis. We used to go and play with the other children. Oh, they would say, "Oh, you're from Madras. You're a Madrasi," and all that. But nothing, no derogatory remarks or anything. They would just think we are from Madras, that's all.

Hampapur

Okay. Were there any perceptions that people from the South had of North Indians?

Devaraj

Not really. Most of the South Indians were very timid. We would never fight or argue when we were growing up; very friendly. And we had gotten used to that, them calling us Madrasi and all. Even though we used to get upset, we never bothered, because we lived in Delhi. The majority were North Indians, so we didn't care about all that. And they were pretty good. They were nice. Our neighbors were very nice, so we had no complaints.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any chores or responsibilities at home while growing up?

Devaraj

Oh, yes. Even though we had servants in the house, we had to do certain things ourselves, like doing our beds in the morning. We didn't have like big cots like this, big beds. We used to call like char-pie, like the smaller cots, each one of us. We had to do our bed, clean up everything, and then if you had to go to the store, my mom would send us to the store, and she would say, "Can you go and pick this up?" So we would walk to the store. We had only one car and my dad would drive. None of us knew driving, and we were all very young also. We had to walk most of the places. We would walk to the store, whatever she wanted, we'd buy the things, come home, and a lot of things we used to help them in the house.

Hampapur

Okay. Your brothers and your sister?

Devaraj

Yes, all of us, all of us. But we didn't have like a, this is the chore I'm supposed to do. This is it; no. We all used to share, whatever. Whoever was in the house, we had to do, and we had to help her in the kitchen also sometimes. Cook was there, but they didn't like us just all sitting in the living room and ordering everything, no. My parents didn't like that. They wanted us to interact with them also, help them also with their kitchen, cooking stuff and all that.

Hampapur

Okay. So you mentioned you had a cook. What other servants did you have?

Devaraj

Oh, in India the servants were very cheap, okay. We had a servant who--the guy, he lived with his family in the servant quarters. His job was to wash the car every morning, go and get the milk, and we had a maid servant. She would come in the morning. She would do the dishes, and then we all had granite flooring in the house, no carpeting. Only living room had the carpet. So she had to come and sweep the floor and then mop it, and then do the dishes and wash the clothes. We didn't have washer or dryer. They had to wash the clothes by hand and then hang it up outside. And then we had a gardener. He would come. He would take care of mowing the lawn and then planting the flowers and vegetable garden in the back. He would take care of all that. But the mowing the lawn was not done by our gardener, because these were all government houses. They had from the neighborhood, they had their own person who would come and mow the lawn every other week. So they had that manual mower. He would come--there was lawn only in the front yard. There was no lawn in the backyard. Backyard was all kitchen garden and a vegetable garden and all that, so that was taken care by our gardener, whom we used to pay. But the mowing the lawn was done entirely by a different person, and we didn't have to pay for

mowing the lawn, because they had to keep up everybody's lawn nice, manicured.

Hampapur

Sounds very meticulous.

Devaraj

Very meticulous. Because these were all government houses, they had to make sure everybody's house looked nice from the front.

Hampapur

Did you get to spend a lot of time with your mother? Was she working, or was she at home?

Devaraj

No, no, she was a full-time mom. No. We used to spend a lot of time, but the thing is like we would leave in the morning. Our schools would start at I think ten o'clock. The school bus would come and pick us up. By the time we came home, it was already like five-thirty or so. Come home, eat something, some snacks. If you had time, we would go and mingle with our friends for an hour or so, come home, do the homework, eat dinner and then go to bed. And those days when we were growing up, we didn't have television. The television, I think it came in '66, '67. At that time we had TV in the house, and not everybody had a TV those days. So because my dad was in the government, he in All India Radio, he got one. He got a TV set in the house, and then you would get like two-hour program in the evening, that's it. The programs were all nationalized. There's only one station, that's it, so that's it. We would watch TV in the night, and most of them was like news or something, no entertainment.

Hampapur

No movies?

Devaraj

No, no.

Hampapur

Any religious programming?

Devaraj

No, nothing. It was government owned. So then later on, I remember in '72, more people [unclear], then they had a lot of other stations also. They had a cooking show, entertainment they had, and then religion I don't remember. And they would show movies. By early '70, '71, '72, they started showing movies, feature Hindi movies, on TV.

Hampapur

Was the TV in black and white?

Devaraj

Black and white, no color.

Hampapur

What happened if you turned on the TV aside from that two hours in the evening?

Devaraj

[unclear] but the radio will be on, so I'd listen to the news. My dad would listen to the news. And then we were not that keen, unless there was a cricket match. We would listen to the cricket match on radio. Other than that, no. We didn't spend--and then once a week we would all glue ourselves to the radio, because they used to have a Binaca Geetmala. They would play all Hindi film songs, which we liked. That was a one-hour program. We would listen. So most of the time, no. We were never glued to the TV, because there was no show, no program, and then radio also not much.

Hampapur

Did everyone have a radio? Was it common to have a radio?

Devaraj

No, no, no. We just--oh, you mean all the other people?

Hampapur

Yes.

Devaraj

Oh, yes, definitely. Everybody's house, they had a radio. Oh, yes, they had.

Hampapur

And was cricket, following cricket popular while you were growing up?

Devaraj

Very popular. And then by that time, when I was growing up even the women, they got involved in the cricket, so they would watch the cricket match, and they'd listen to the commentary and all that. So it was pretty good.

Hampapur

That was nice.

Devaraj

Yes. My mom said when she was growing up, then women never bothered to listen to the sports or anything, but just exclusively for men. But when we were growing up, women were very much involved with cricket, yes.

Hampapur

Okay. What about the movies? Did you go to the movies?

Devaraj

Yes. Most of them were Hindi movies. I didn't go to an English movie till I went to college. So, yes, most of the time we would just go to Hindi movies with friends. And once in a while my mom--we would go to a Kannada movie if it came from Mysore. They would show--just like this, they have movies out there, a Hindi movie coming to certain theaters. In Delhi also those days, only certain theaters would get special screening of Kannada or Tamil movies. Then

we would go. And then we had our own association, like just as you have Kannada Koota in California, we used to call it Karnataka Sangha. All the Kannada people would get together and they would have entertainment programs, one for all the big occasions, and they would have food, so they would get people from the South to come and entertain in their association, so it was pretty good.

Hampapur

What kind of entertainment did they do?

Devaraj

They would get folk songs from Bangalore and Mysore. They would come, and they were all from the Tourism Department, and they would have bharatanatyam, and then a lot of singers from the South, they would come, so it was pretty good. And then the Kannada Karnataka Sangha itself, the people, local people, they themselves would put on some shows, so it was pretty good. As the days progressed, the years went by, there were more South Indians in Delhi, so then bharatanatyam, almost everybody, all the South Indians were learning bharatanatyam there, and they used to have a Kalakshetra in Delhi.

Hampapur

What is that?

Devaraj

Kalakshetra, I think it's used to call--where they would teach dancing. I'm trying to remember the name. It used to be some Kalakshetra, I think. I hope I am pronouncing that name right. So they would have my neighbors' kids, the daughters, both the daughters would learn bharatanatyam there. They would go, the driver would take them there, learn for an hour or so after school and then come home, and then just as you have arangetram here, some of my friends who were learning bharatanatyam, they had arangetram also there, so it was pretty good. So when we were very little, we didn't have no interaction with South Indians, because we didn't know. But as we were growing up, more South Indians were coming to Delhi, settling down, so, you know.

Hampapur

You could have programs like those then.

Devaraj

Oh, yes, right, yes.

Hampapur

Did you learn any cultural dance or music or anything?

Devaraj

Music, yes. My parents insisted that I had to learn South Indian music, so the music teacher would come to our house three days a week. So he used to play music in All India Radio, so then my dad hired him. So he would come and teach me and my sister Carnatic music three days a week.

Hampapur
Vocal?

Devaraj
Vocal, yes, vocal.

Hampapur
How did you like that?

Devaraj
Some days I would like. I didn't really like it, to put it frankly. I did it just to please my parents. Because I would come home from high school or then college. As it is, we were so tired, and this man would be waiting there, and he had to sit with us for an hour to teach the music, so practically just to please our parents. On my own, I don't think I had any interest in learning music and all that.

Hampapur
Why do you think your parents wanted you to learn?

Devaraj
When we were growing up, most of the marriages were arranged marriages, okay. The boy's family would ask, "Does the girl know how to sing? What has she done? Does she go and does she work?" Working was not that important when we got married. I got married in '74, and in the late sixties and the early seventies, I believe, the boys wanted what education the girl had, does she know dancing, does she know music, so these were all extra qualifications.

Hampapur
Okay, so it reflected well if you could.

Devaraj
Reflected well when they were looking for a boy.

Hampapur
Okay. Jumping back again to your childhood, what games did you used to play with the neighbors and your relatives and things?

Devaraj
See, we had our own clubs there, so I used to play badminton. That and then we used to play throw ball. It's like a volleyball court, but we wouldn't hit--it's not volleyball. It used to be called throw ball, so six people on either side, the girls. But when I was in high school, then I would go to the club. I used to play badminton a lot, so I learned. Then another game we used to play was with the neighborhood children, was pitu. Pitu means you stack up the stones, and you have two teams, and you try to throw the ball and try to break the thing. And then the one team, one team is trying to catch the other team. Before you stack up the ball, they have to catch all the other people, hit the ball. If you just hit the ball and it touches you, then you're out. So but in the meantime, you're

trying to stack up the stone, because that's how we used to play. That's called pitu.

Hampapur

Okay. You used to play that with the neighborhood?

Devaraj

The neighborhood kids. And then when we went to college, we used to play badminton in the club. That was one pastime, and then go for walks or just go out with friends and have ice cream. It was a big thing for us.

Hampapur

When you say clubs, was it like a sports club or a country club or?

Devaraj

No, it was like a neighborhood club. They maintained--it was not really very exclusive or anything, just because for the government, they had all these facilities. Because it was a club there--men would play table tennis, and they had badminton, so boys and girls would play together. So we didn't have anything only girls had to play with girls, and boys, no. You grew up playing with each other. So the neighborhood kids would come. You would play badminton with them.

Hampapur

Okay, so it was like a recreational type of center.

Devaraj

Recreational type, yes.

Hampapur

Did you have any religious activities while you were growing up?

Devaraj

Yes, we did. My parents were very religious. Even though they were socializing and all that, in the house they were very religious. They would do pooja every day, and they didn't insist that we had to do everything with them, but there were certain things they insisted, like maybe to take the aarti, and go to the pooja room and do namaskar to the god and all that. Yes, they were very insisting on those things.

Hampapur

Okay, so you did that every day?

Devaraj

Oh, yes, we had to. We did that.

Hampapur

When you were learning music, did you also learn religious songs?

Devaraj

Whatever music he taught, the music teacher, that was all classical. So it was not light music; they were all classical. So I think maybe that's the reason we didn't care too much. Unless you have a love for music, classical music, you

know, at least I didn't appreciate that much. Like Hindi film songs and all I would love, which they won't teach. [laughter]

Hampapur

Did you attend the temple at all?

Devaraj

Yes. My dad--my parents would go to temple at least once a week, and then, yes, we used to go to the temple all the time, go with the parents, go there. Yes, we did all that, and I enjoyed it. It was not like a punishment. Used to enjoy that, go there, and then other Indians would be there and we'd socialize with them, so it was nice.

Hampapur

What kind of temple was it?

Devaraj

They had one Hanuman temple very close to where we lived, so we could walk there. It, I think, was a mile or so. We would walk there. Hanuman temple, we used to go there a lot, and my mom would take a vow. They'd do vada mala at the Hanuman temple, so she would do that. We would go there. And there was another temple, Ganesh temple it was. There was a Ganesha temple. There was Murugan temple, and then they had--in the late sixties or I think at least seventies, they started building a Sharaddamba temple, and because his holiness from India, Mysore had visited Delhi, and then they started building a Sankara Vidya Kendra, so it's Sharaddamba temple, Isvara temple, so we used to love all that. And there were lots of other temples, and Birla Mandir was there, so mostly like a big huge Krishna statue used to be there. Yes, so it's a beautiful temple. Yes, we used to go to the temple a lot.

Hampapur

Were there any religious festivals or holidays you celebrated?

Devaraj

Oh, yes. They used to have a lot of religious functions. I'm trying to remember. Any big function came, anything to do with that particular god, the temple would have a lot of festivities, so we would go and participate there. And then as usual, like here, then after all the poojas were done, they would give food to everyone, so it was nice.

Hampapur

Okay. And aside from your trips to the South in the summer, did your family do any other traveling?

Devaraj

Not really. That's one thing, because my dad was a workaholic, and he used to travel a lot. And my mom didn't travel too much with him, because we were all very young, so her main object in life was to make sure we all attended our

school, finished our school, college and all that. So my dad used to travel a lot, all over the world.

Hampapur

Oh, internationally too?

Devaraj

International also, all the time. So it was just, we didn't go anywhere. So over summer, sometimes my dad never even came to Mysore for the whole two months. He would just come for maybe two weeks, later and later. We would all go first. Then he would join us for two weeks. So he was a workaholic, to put it frankly, so we didn't travel anywhere other than Mysore. But once we went to Mysore, we would go to the other places around Mysore, so Sringeri we would go and Belur, Halebid, sightseeing places around there, we would go there.

Hampapur

Were there tourist attractions there?

Devaraj

Yes, those were the tourist attractions, yes. We used to go there, those places, just in the Mysore-Bangalore area, that's it.

Hampapur

Were most of the tourists from that area as well, in the South?

Devaraj

Those were the places which were recommended by our relatives to visit, so that's how we would go, and take them also. The whole bunch would come with us, so we would go as a group and do picnic and all that. But it was like that.

Hampapur

Sounds really nice.

Devaraj

Yes, but we didn't do--a lot of people I know, like some of our friends, they would travel to other parts of India. We didn't do all that.

Hampapur

Was it common for people to travel around then?

Devaraj

Yes. By the time I was in college, most of my friends' families, they would all go to all the hill stations. Around Delhi they had Simla, Kashmir. You could visit Kashmir without any problem those days, and Nainital. Those were the hill stations, beautiful places, so they would all visit there. So all we had when we were in Delhi, most of the summers we would just go to Mysore, Bangalore, that's it.

Hampapur

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

Devaraj

Elementary, I don't remember much. But I remember my high school a lot. I loved my school. It was a beautiful school. It was a--I tell you. The reason we went to Madrasi school was it was a very academic school, okay, very highly recommended in everything. But when my dad got transferred, he used to work in Trichy, one of the towns in the South, I believe, and when he got transferred--he was moving when we were all little, from place to place. And then when he came to Delhi, we came in the middle of the academic year, so none of the schools would give us admission.

Hampapur

Wait. Where did you go to?

Devaraj

We came from Trichinapalli, from one of the towns from the South to the North, Delhi, when we moved. My dad got transferred, so when he came to Delhi, we came in the middle of the school year, and none of the other schools, big-name schools, would give us admission, because they said the year has already half gone. Only the Madrasi school, which really gave preference to the South Indians, they gave admission without us losing any year, so we all joined that school.

Hampapur

What was the language medium?

Devaraj

Medium was English. Just the name was Madrasi High Secondary School. So they had elementary, middle school, and higher secondary.

Hampapur

I see.

Devaraj

So we all joined that school and all of us, all the siblings, we all did our elementary and middle school, high school in that same school.

Hampapur

Were all the other students South Indian as well?

Devaraj

Yes, South Indians, yes. They gave first preference to South Indians. We would see very few North Indians here and there, that's it. But 99 percent were all South Indians.

Hampapur

Okay. Did your parents encourage you to do well in school?

Devaraj

Oh, definitely. That's all their aim was, study, study, study. Yes. I mean, we were not excelled in our studies, so we were okay. We were all mediocre students.

Hampapur

Why do you think education was so important to your parents?

Devaraj

Because you can't get a job. You have to have good education. If you get good grades in high school, then you get into good colleges, and then you can do, you know. See, when we were growing up, my parents all day for the boys, "Either you be engineers or doctors." That's all they knew, nothing else they knew other than that. And then the girls, same thing. If you take arts, liberal arts and all that, you do that, and then they insisted we had to get good grades so we'd get into good colleges.

Hampapur

So were you always expected to go to college, then?

Devaraj

Oh, yes. That was the main thing.

Hampapur

So you were saying that everyone was expected to go into engineering or medical track?

Devaraj

Yes. Either engineer or medical, that's all the men had--parents wanted them to do, so a lot of stress was put on that.

Hampapur

Had both your parents gone to college?

Devaraj

My dad went to college, and he was an engineer, electronics engineer. My mom, no. She got married. I think she did middle school, and she might have done maybe one grade in high school. She got married, I believe, because she was the youngest in the family, and my grandfather had passed away, so her older brother was responsible and all that, and their main concern was to get her married. So she said she just did elementary, middle school, and maybe one year in high school. That's it, nothing else.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like there was a big shift from her generation to your generation.

Devaraj

Oh, definitely, yes. But I wouldn't say all of them, because [unclear] older sister is the same age as my mom. She went to college. She did extremely well. She was a gold medalist. She came first in the whole state. Those days they would award gold medals for the first-rank students. So in my mom's family, they

didn't insist. Maybe they didn't have the money. I don't know what happened. So they all did middle, high school maybe, that's it, not more than that.

Hampapur

And in schools, were boys and girls equally encouraged to achieve?

Devaraj

Yes, we were. I went to a coed school, so it was a stress was put on each and every student. They were not lenient on girls or anything, but they insisted, all the teachers, we all had to get good grades.

Hampapur

Did you have any other activities besides school and your vocal lessons?

Devaraj

No, not really, no other activity. Just by the time we would come home from school, it used to be so late. Just interaction with our friends, and then high school and college I used to go and play badminton in the club. Other than that, no, no other activity.

Hampapur

Okay. So you mentioned earlier your family had gone down south for some time. How long were you there?

Devaraj

Oh, I have no idea. We were all very little, I believe. Maybe for a couple of years. My dad, after his college, he got his job with All India Radio. He moved to Delhi. The Britishers were still there, I believe, so that's what he tells us. And then he moved to Trichinapalli. It's one of the small towns in the South, I believe. He was transferred there for a couple of years, so then he came back to Delhi again. Yes, I think from Trichinapalli he came to Madras, Madras to Delhi he came, so all his life he spent in Delhi, except for three years he spent in Bombay. That was later on.

Hampapur

Were you there then too?

Devaraj

Oh, yes. I had already finished my college. It was '70, '71, '72. So then I joined the Reserve Bank there to work.

Hampapur

Okay, I see. So after high school, what college did you attend?

Devaraj

I went to Miranda House. That was one of the very Westernized universities in the Delhi University, very westernized colleges in the Delhi. [unclear] My parents were very much against it. They didn't want me to, because now Delhi University was about twenty miles from our house. It would take almost a little over an hour by bus to reach college. They didn't like that. But I insisted that I wanted to go to that college only.

Hampapur

And why is that?

Devaraj

I loved it. It was in the campus, Delhi University campus, and a very Westernized college. I just liked the atmosphere there. They did have some ladies' college closer to home, away from the university, which I didn't care.

Hampapur

And that's where your parents wanted you to go?

Devaraj

Me to go, but I didn't want to. [laughs]

Hampapur

And what did you study in college?

Devaraj

I did economics honors, so I went there and it's a three-year course, so I did economics honors there.

Hampapur

Did any of your siblings go to the same college too?

Devaraj

No. So what happened was my dad, when we were in college--by the time my younger brothers and sister, they finished the school, somehow they all went to Mysore to study. They joined colleges in Mysore.

Hampapur

And your oldest brother had gone to Madras?

Devaraj

Madras, yes. He went to Madras. So I was the only one who did college also in Delhi University.

Hampapur

And how did you enjoy that?

Devaraj

Oh, I loved it. Away from home, but I had to commute every day. But it was nice. I had a whole bunch of--we were like eighteen students in our economics honors class. We had good professors, good social life. It was nice. And then once you are in the campus, the lifestyle is entirely different. They had their own--just as you stay in the dorm, they used to call hostel there, so that we had a lot of friends from the hostel also, who lived there like a dorm. They would live--and some of the students would live in the dorm. We didn't have too much of restrictions, boys, girls, and all that. After classes, boys and girls, we would all go to the library. I went to a ladies' college, but there were other students from other schools, from other colleges. You would all get together, go to library or go to cafeteria together, and go to movies, so it was pretty good. The social life was good.

Hampapur

Okay, sounds nice.

Devaraj

Yes, it was nice. I enjoyed it.

Hampapur

Right. Okay. What happened after college?

Devaraj

After college, I didn't want to do my master's, okay, so what I did, I joined--I was very much interested in German, so I joined the Max Muller [unclear] in Delhi, and I started taking classes in German.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. How did you develop an interest in German?

Devaraj

Some of my cousins when I was in Mysore. They were living in Bangalore. They said they were doing German, and then somehow or another when I was talking to them all, I said, gosh, I want to learn a foreign language. I always had a desire to leave India. I just didn't want to live in India at all. Even when I was in high school, I would always tell my parents, "If you're looking for a boy, look for somebody outside India." I just, I don't know. I just wanted to leave the country. I wanted to just get away from India, come to a foreign country, so like that.

Hampapur

Did you have anyplace in mind, or you just wanted to go whichever?

Devaraj

Just to anyplace outside India. Somehow, I don't know--because my neighbor's daughter, she was a stewardess for Air India, and she would always come and tell me, "I flew to London, I flew to New York," and all, so maybe that's how I developed that feeling. I just wanted to leave India, come to a foreign country. So then I started in German.

Hampapur

I see. And how long were you learning German?

Devaraj

I did one and a half years in German after college. Then my dad got transferred to Bombay, so then we all moved to Bombay. But by this time, my younger brothers and sister, they were all still studying in Mysore, and '70 we moved to Bombay. And then my older brother had joined the army by that time. He went into that field. So I went to Bombay and then after a few months I took an exam, entrance exam for the Reserve Bank of India, and I got in there. So I started working in Reserve Bank, and then they had a Max Muller [unclear] in Bombay also. Then I continued there, German. So I did German for three years.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. Can you still speak?

Devaraj

No, not anymore. [laughter] I did learn broken German. I wasn't fluent. See, in the class we would interact with others, so there was an incentive to--the professor, he stressed that we had to talk to each other, even if it's a lot of grammatical mistakes. He said, "That's okay. You still have to talk in German." But once we left, slowly everything I forgot.

Hampapur

Okay. Were the other students in the class just learning other interests too, or why did people take German classes?

Devaraj

I think, I don't know. German was a very--Max Muller [unclear] was very popular with most of the people there, younger generation. There were a lot of students, college kids, working people, that were taking German classes, more than the French. So somehow, you know, so Max Muller [unclear] was very well known.

Hampapur

So the language school.

Devaraj

Language school, and just school simply for German. They had their own programs and everything. We would attend that. And then another interest--the reason I did was my dad was invited to a lot of these United Nations programs, so I always felt if I go there, if I told them I knew another foreign language, maybe I can leave the country and come, so I had my own motives to plans to do that.

Hampapur

And what other languages did you speak?

Devaraj

I could speak Tamil, the local language, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada I could speak, that's it, and English.

Hampapur

So what were you doing at the Reserve Bank? What was your role?

Devaraj

Oh, just as a bookkeeper, clerical. I joined as a clerical job only, that's it.

Hampapur

Was it common for women to be working?

Devaraj

Yes. There were a lot of women who were doing that, and they paid us well. Of all the banks, they said Reserve Bank paid well. And I liked it. I made a lot of friends. I spent more time with friends than my relatives, so wherever I went, I

made a lot of good friends. So I had a good time. I was in Bombay till '72 end; two years I worked in Reserve Bank.

Hampapur

Where were you in Bombay?

Devaraj

First we were in Malabar Hill in Napean Sea Road. Again it was a government thing, because of his job, my dad's job. We were living there. Then we moved to Marindri, so they gave us a flat in Marindri.

Hampapur

Oh, nice.

Devaraj

So it's true, there by the ocean, so it was beautiful.

Hampapur

And it was just you and your parents at this time?

Devaraj

My parents, and then my brothers used to visit. They were all in college, but they would all come. For the summer, they would all come to Bombay. No, my youngest brother was still going to school, that's right. No, only my sister and my other brother were in college, but my youngest brother was still going to school in Bombay, so he was there too in the house.

Hampapur

Was it common for kids to go so far from home for college?

Devaraj

The reason, because my dad knew he was going to be transferred to Bombay. See, he didn't want the kids to be all in the hostel, like a dorm. It was not too common there. So my dad said, and then they'll have to break up their studies, discontinue and then start again, so he just sent them both to Mysore, because my grandparents were there.

Hampapur

Oh, they could stay with the family. I see.

Devaraj

Family; so that's the reason they both--and they stayed with the grandma and the aunts and all. They went to college there.

Hampapur

What did you think of Bombay?

Devaraj

Oh, I loved it. Once--life is like New York. After coming to New York, I said, "Life is just like New York," a very fast life in Bombay, and I loved it. The transportation is excellent. We didn't have to wait for the car or the driver to take you anywhere.

Hampapur

How did you?

Devaraj

You can get into your subway, go anywhere you want. The bus was very good. In Delhi my parents were very scared to send us anywhere, because transportation wasn't that good. Then we had to wait for my dad to take us, or the driver to take us. My mom wasn't driving, and none of us were driving. We didn't have drivers' license. We were still not old enough to learn driving. So then that's what happened. So I loved Bombay very much.

Hampapur

And what would you do for fun, when you weren't working?

Devaraj

Oh, us friends, we would just see movies and then hang out with friends and then go to restaurants. Any nice restaurant, we would just hang out there with friends.

Hampapur

Was it very different from Delhi?

Devaraj

It was just very different. The life was very fast, fast life. And then even at ten o'clock at night, people will be moving on the street. Everywhere it was nice and busy. Whereas in Delhi where we lived, by nine o'clock or once the darkness set in, the life was absolutely quiet. [laughter] So here Bombay was different. So now everybody says Bombay is like New York.

Hampapur

Yes, I can see that. Has Bombay changed much since then? Is it like how it is today?

Devaraj

Bombay was very good when I was young, I'm telling you in '72. I was there. And then after I got married, I wanted the kids and my husband wanted--I want to show them where I lived and all that. So I insisted--his brother was living in Matunga in Bombay, so I told Dev, "Let's go, and we have to visit Bombay and all that." So in '85 when I went to Bombay, by that time I had lived here for almost ten years, so I had something to compare at that time. By comparison, I felt Bombay was very dirty, filthy. I said, "Oh, my god, there are so many people," and all that. But when I was there in '70-'72, I had nothing to compare except for Delhi, and I just loved it. So that's how it was.

Hampapur

So you mentioned your desire to move out of India. Aside from the Air India hostess, did you know many people who were going out of the country?

Devaraj

Yes. Some of my classmates--they were all very good in their studies--they came to Harvard [University]. Two of my classmates came to Harvard. And

then our friends' kids, they got married. They came to America. They went to London, so a lot of people were coming.

Hampapur

Okay, so it was fairly common.

Devaraj

Oh, very. It was. Say, common in the sense--it was still a novelty at those years. If you say your daughter got married to a boy in America or London, it was a big thing in the seventies, early seventies. But nowadays, almost every family has somebody here in America or London and anywhere.

Hampapur

Back then was it prestigious to have that?

Devaraj

It was, yes, just to day--my dad felt very proud, "My son-in-law is from America," and all that. "My daughter is moving to America." My parents felt very proud, I'm sure like any other parent. Those years, most of the parents' kids who were coming here, I bet they all felt very nice.

Hampapur

What did you know about America?

Devaraj

Oh, all I knew was I used to read Perry Mason, okay, so I knew that I was going to come and see Vegas. [laughter] And I thought I'd be in Hollywood. I thought it was very good, like I will go to Hollywood, I'll see all these movie stars and all, which none of it was true. [laughs] So I had heard about Vegas, Palm Springs, and then Chicago. I had heard about Chicago and New York. That's all. Those are the main big cities I had heard about. And I thought--when I came, I'd heard like America, no poverty, nothing, so I thought everything is like bed of roses. But it was. When I came in the seventies, it was. Everything--the prices were very cheap, not too much of crime or nothing, so life was--not too many people, not too many immigrants. You never saw this many immigrants on the street. And then we had only one Indian store in Hollywood, and we used to go once in three months, stack up all the groceries to last for three months.

Hampapur

You mentioned that when you went to college, you started seeing English movies then?

Devaraj

Yes. Because in college they started showing English movies also. Once a month they would show English movies. And by that time, you had made other friends who would see English movies, so then I started seeing English movies. So that was another big thing for me. I used to think, like, when I saw those English movies, all the women wore hats and stuff. Then I thought, oh, my god,

once I go to America, if I come to a foreign country, I'll be wearing dresses and hats and everything. [laughter] So I had my own imagination running wild there. Oh, gosh, when I come to America--if I go to it--I didn't know I was going to go to a foreign country, but I used to imagine, oh, if I get married--but I knew I had to get married and come to a foreign country, because I wasn't very good in studies to come on a scholarship or anything. I was a mediocre student.

Hampapur

Okay, so you saw the English movies when you were in college. Were they played before then? Or you just started watching then, because you were older?

Devaraj

English movies were all running everywhere. My brothers, they all would see English movies and all that. But for the girls, like all my friends, we would see only Hindi movies. But once I went to college, you made new friends, and they would see English movies. Then we would go to English movies. English movies were running everywhere.

Hampapur

Okay, so it's popular before you started watching.

Devaraj

Oh, yes. Like Dev [unclear], they never saw Hindi movies. He says even when he was in high school, he was watching English movies.

Hampapur

Okay. Wow.

Devaraj

So he's a movie buff. He knows everything about Hollywood English movies.

Hampapur

On television, was there anything in English at that time? Like from America?

Devaraj

In the seventies, yes. They would show--but it was not this much exposure. Even then--see, I left India in '74. At that time also, they didn't have too many stations. Now it's become a private sector, but when I was there, it was still owned by the government, so they would have only one station. But they had other--like in one station they would have some cooking program, they would have Hindi news, English news, and some variety program, and they would show some of the English shows. I remember "Count of Monte Cristo" they would show on TV when I was there, and "Laurel and Hardy," and then "Abbott and Costello." They were showing all those shows. We used to watch the comedy shows, yes, used to watch all that.

Hampapur

Okay. So you said you were in Bombay for two years, working.

Devaraj

Three years.

Hampapur

And then what happened?

Devaraj

Then my dad got transferred back to Delhi. Then he went back as a chief engineer, and then I was prepared to stay in Bombay. My dad didn't like that. He said, "No, you are coming back with us to Delhi." And the Reserve Bank will give me a transfer. It was not easy to get a transfer from Bombay to Delhi, and he knew the governor of Reserve Bank, a very good friend of my dad, and he just spoke to him. Because of his influence, I got a transfer back to Delhi to Reserve Bank. So they transferred me to Reserve Bank in Delhi. I didn't want to lose my job.

Hampapur

Right.

Devaraj

So I liked it. I had made good friends, and they were paying us well. In those days, whatever they paid was good for pocket change. It was good.

Hampapur

So how long were you working in the bank in Delhi?

Devaraj

Delhi, I worked from '72, end of '72 till '74 beginning, and then my dad retired in '73 December. Then as soon as he retired, he was offered a position as an advisor to Iranian government--

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Devaraj

--for broadcasting and television.

Hampapur

So what did he do for that?

Devaraj

They offered, because he used to travel all over the world. Then the Iranian government, at that time Shah of Iran, he was still there, and Iran was very Westernized in those years. Then he was offered advisor's position for Iranian government on radio and television. But my parents--the whole family was going to move there, but my parents wanted me, being the older daughter, they wanted me to get married first. So we went to Mysore, and he insisted that I also take time off from Reserve Bank, go to Mysore for a couple of months. So I took--I think I had some vacations left. I took leave of absence or something. So I went to Mysore and within a month I met Dev. He was visiting from U.S.

Hampapur

Okay, he was already here?

Devaraj

He was in Mysore. And then his sister, she knew my mom's cousin. They were all members of this ladies' club, so while just conversation, then his sister was telling my mom's cousin, I believe, that, "My brother has come from U.S. He wants to get married, and he wants to go back." Then she told my mom, and then we met his sister first. He comes from a very literary family. They're all very popular writers in Mysore, Mysore and Bangalore, and they're very well known there. Their novels are all made into movies.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Devaraj

Yes. So then my dad knew the whole family. My parents knew the whole family, just by name. They didn't know the--no socializing with them or anything. So his sister invited me and my mom and my dad also for tea, afternoon tea. Then we went, and then she called him, so he came there and we talked to each other for about an hour or so. Then we just decided to get married. So within a week I got engaged, and within two weeks I got married.

Hampapur

Did you get married in Mysore?

Devaraj

Mysore, Mysore, yes. Then Dev left after three days after marriage, he had to come back. His vacation was getting over, so he came back, and then I stayed back there. Then I had to go back to Delhi to Reserve Bank to resign my job, everything. So I went back to Delhi for--they told me if I want to get paid--I had accumulated some vacation time and all other things--they said I have to work for two weeks, then I should resign. Then only I'll get my money. So I did that, went back to Delhi, did that, worked for two weeks and I resigned and went back to Mysore to live with his mom. She was living alone. Then they thought like I'll get my visa soon, so he said, "Why don't you spend some time with my mom also?" Because Mysore was still--I wasn't familiar with Mysore. I would just go for summer vacation. That's all I knew about Mysore. So I spent some time there after wedding.

Hampapur

And what was Ankul doing in the U.S. at that time?

Devaraj

He was a civil engineer, so he used to work for McDonnell-Douglas Aerospace Company when he came to India. When we got married, he was with them.

Hampapur

Okay. So did he do his schooling here too?

Devaraj

Yes. He did his master's here in California, in civil engineering. I think he did one year of Ph.D. or something, then he didn't complete. He said it was difficult for him or I don't know what happened. He didn't complete the Ph.D. Then he got started working for the government.

Hampapur

Okay. So he was living in California at that time.

Devaraj

Yes. He came to California, he came to Los Angeles, he lived all his life; he never moved anywhere else.

Hampapur

Did he tell you anything about California or the U.S. before you got married?

Devaraj

Right. He told me like all about--the first thing he told me was how life is going to be here--we had to do everything ourselves--and about the credit cards. We didn't know about credit cards and all about that. And then the life as such. He lived in Hermosa Beach. When he came first, I believe he lived in Seal Beach. He always loved the ocean, so he always lived by the beach. So then he told me how the lifestyle is here. And he didn't have a single--he had only one Indian friend, I believe. That's it. Most all his friends were Americans, so he was telling me how I have to get used to that and all that.

Hampapur

Because there were few Indians here at that time.

Devaraj

Yes, very few Indians, and he wasn't socializing with any of them. There was one, he was from McDonnell-Douglas, I believe. He knew one Indian, that's it, and he lived very far. I never met--I think after a long time I met him once, that's it.

Hampapur

So how did America sound to you after his description?

Devaraj

It sounded pretty good, because I was always thinking I wanted to leave the country, so it was glorified. So I really was looking forward to that.

Hampapur

And how long did it take for your paperwork to go through?

Devaraj

Oh, my. It took me over a year. What happened was in '74 the Vietnam War had just ended, and my papers--to my luck, my papers got lost or whatever. We had filed everything from India, and everything got lost. Then he had to hire an attorney here, and it took me over a year to come here. Yes, in that period, by that time, I thought first three, four months I enjoyed very much. I said, oh, my gosh, I'm leaving the country and all. But when it took so long, I had doubts

whether am I going to get my green card to come to this country. And once they found--he hired the attorney--the paperwork, everything, then it moved fast.

Hampapur

Okay. That's a long time to wait.

Devaraj

Oh, it is, especially when you grew up in Delhi, the lifestyle is a lot more liberal than the South.

Hampapur

And you were in Mysore for that year.

Devaraj

Mysore, and one year staying in Mysore, and his mom was alone. I wasn't working, because I had resigned my job. I was just staying home, and it was really getting so boring. It got to a point, I was really detesting. I wanted to just leave, come back here, but I had no choice. I had to wait.

Hampapur

Right. Sounds very different from your experiences in Delhi and Bombay.

Devaraj

Definitely, yes.

Hampapur

Do you remember when you found out you were getting--your papers went through?

Devaraj

Yes. So what happened was, when he hired the attorney, then everything went fast afterwards. Then to get my visa--all my friends were in Delhi, so they had told me, "Come to Delhi. Don't go to Madras." So I had made arrangements my visa and papers should come to Delhi. So once I got that, got a call, then I flew to Delhi, first time in a plane. I'd never flown before. So first time I flew from Bangalore to Delhi. So then went there, spent about ten days with my friends, and I got my visa, everything, had a good time with all my Reserve Bank friends and everything, and then I flew back to Bangalore. Then I and my mother-in-law, after a week or so, then we came to Bombay. I was flying from Bombay to L.A. So my mother-in-law said I should spend a week with her son, his older brother; he lived in Bombay. But I had so many friends in Bombay too. So I went to Bombay, spent a week there, so I must have spent a few days with his brother, but most of my time was spent with my friends. So they were all waiting for me to go there, so we had a good time.

Hampapur

That's nice. You got to see your friends and all the different cities before.

Devaraj

Oh, all of my friends, both in Delhi and Bombay. I say all my friends before I came.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (July 16, 2010)

Hampapur

This is Veena Hampapur, here again with Asha Devaraj. We're going to start the second half of our interview, so thanks again for joining me.

Devaraj

Oh, you're welcome, Veena. It's my pleasure.

Hampapur

So last time we left off talking about your upcoming move to the U.S., so I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about your preparations. I know you had to do your visa paperwork. Was there anything special you packed to bring, or what types of preparations did you make?

Devaraj

Yes. See, some of the friends who had come from India, they had told me certain things, pots and pans I had to carry, especially for making chapattis. They don't have skillets here, the flat skillet. And then even some of the spices; they said there are no Indian stores, I'd have to carry some of the spices with me. So my mother-in-law and my mom, they prepared all this. They did shopping and bought a lot of these things, skillets and all that. And after coming here, I found out it was unnecessary bringing all the skillets, because you can buy them all in the American store. The shape might be different, but they do the same thing. I could have bought an American skillet here and did chapatti and all that. But I was pretty excited just coming here, doing shopping, bringing things. But most of the things, especially the spices, it was good I brought them from India. It wasn't available here.

Hampapur

Did you bring them with you through luggage? Or did you ship it to the U.S.?

Devaraj

No, no, no. I brought it. We were allowed to bring one suitcase. I had put everything in one suitcase. So I remember, I took Alitalia from Bombay to--I broke my journey in Iran. My parents were living there, so they wanted me to spend some time. So I went to Iran, spent four days in Tehran. From there--and then my friend, who worked for Alitalia, so he had told me that I should spend a night in Rome also, "So go and look around Rome before flying to LAX." So I spent four nights in Iran and then one night in Rome.

Hampapur

How did you like that?

Devaraj

I loved it. I was a little scared in Iran, because I was all by myself in a new country, and the hotel which he had arranged was about forty miles from the airport. So I had to take a bus and then they had their own airport shuttle bus. I went. It was good. It's a new experience for me.

Hampapur

This was in Rome?

Devaraj

In Rome, yes. But I didn't do much sightseeing, because I went around the hotel, that's it, because I was a little concerned to do anything. I might miss my flight or miss my way going back to the hotel, and all that. So overall it was good. I enjoyed it.

Hampapur

And how did you like Iran?

Devaraj

Iran was very good. This was my first foreign land. In those days--I'm talking in the seventies, '75--pretty Westernized, very nice. Everything was nice and clean. And then my parents lived in Amir Abad. It's supposed to be one of the very nice neighborhoods in Tehran. My dad, he took me around town and I saw a few places of interest there. The most interesting thing was I went to the palace, the shah's palace, and I saw the jewelry. Just like the crown jewels in London, you have all the crown jewelry of Iran, so I saw all the precious stones and gold, diamonds, and all. That was very exciting. And did a little shopping there, and that was the first time I stepped on an escalator. I had never seen an escalator before in India, so the first time I stepped on an escalator in Tehran. It was really interesting. I loved it.

Hampapur

Did people speak English?

Devaraj

Not much. But who my parents were socializing with, they all could speak broken English, so it was okay. You could get by with them. So we did a lot of shopping also there, so it was good.

Hampapur

Did your parents live there for a long time?

Devaraj

They lived there for four years, and luckily, before the shah was overthrown and then Khomeini took over. They didn't know what was coming. But my mom insisted she just wanted to go back to India. She didn't want to live in Iran anymore, and I think she had a sixth sense, something is not going to be right. It was good my dad left at a time when she insisted. Otherwise, he would have

lost everything when Khomeini took over; everything he would have lost. So he went at a good time back to India.

Hampapur

Back to India, okay. So on your initial journey to the U.S., where did you land?

Devaraj

I landed first in New York. The funny thing was, my friend suggested that I should ask Dev to come to New York and then pick me up and then we fly together to L.A. So I called Dev and then I talked to him. He said--I told him, "Some of my friends' husbands are coming to New York. How about you?" Then the first thing he asked me was, "Do you speak English?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You can manage. Yes, I don't have to come all the way to New York." Just he had told me to keep some dimes with me, because the phones took a dime. He said, "Just put a dime, call me and let me know what time the flight is going to be landing in L.A. I'll be there." So that's what I did. So I came and the first excitement was when I saw the Statue of Liberty. When the plane is landing, you can see the Statue of Liberty. I was so excited. I liked it. I was a little nervous, but I was excited and then spent a few hours on changing, because all the immigration took place in New York, because that's the first American city I landed, so I did all the paperwork. After that, I had to take a bus to go to LaGuardia Airport to the domestic airlines. I did that. So then I took the flight and it landed in Phoenix, and then came to LAX, so by the time I landed in LAX, it was two o'clock in the morning, early morning. So Dev had come to the airport, came home, and then next morning he fixed my breakfast. He made an omelet and bacon, which I had never tasted bacon before.

Hampapur

Were you a vegetarian then?

Devaraj

I used to eat meat in India, not in the house, with my friends. We used to eat chicken or shrimp, those things. But I wasn't used to bacon and all that. So he cooked. He was still a stranger to me, because he left three days after the wedding, so I didn't want to even say no to him. I just ate that. So over a period of time I got used to it. So he made breakfast. It was pretty exciting when we came to the house. He was living in an apartment in Hermosa Beach by the ocean, so it was nice.

Hampapur

And what were your initial impressions of Los Angeles?

Devaraj

Only it was early morning, two o'clock, so I still was a little nervous in the morning. Then he took me--since he lived at the beach, he told me, "Come on. Let's all go and I want you to meet all my friends." So first impression was I was so shocked when I went to the beach. I saw all his friends wearing all those

shorts, all torn, like completely ragged, worn-out shorts, and I was just thinking--I expected everybody to be in suit and nice tie, everything. So I was so shocked to see them all in that outfit. Then they all gave me a beer, so I said okay and I also had a beer to drink. I used to drink beer in India, so it was nothing new to me. So I had a beer with them, and they were all surprised to see that I could speak English. They thought, since I came from India, I can't even speak a word of English.

Hampapur

Oh, because all his friends were American?

Devaraj

He didn't have any Indian friends. All of them were American. So I had a little difficulty understanding them. They also had difficulty understanding me, because I still had the accent, everything. So it went by. It was okay. So it took me a while to get used to it. Then slowly I started missing the Indians. I was asking, "How come you don't have more Indian friends?" and all that. So he said he was very comfortable with the local people, so he just continued with that. So then he introduced me to some of his friends and their wives, and they showed me--even though I was driving in India, he didn't want me to take the driver's license right away. He said, "Just get used to the traffic, look around, let your eyes get used to it," everything. So I used to walk around at the beach, and then I would go bike riding, so one of my friends, she had a bike at the beach, so I would just ride her bike. She would give me her bike and then she went to work, so afternoons I would just go for a bike ride. But still, I missed my Indian friends, and I was slowly getting homesick. But then afterwards, slowly I was getting used to it. I would walk to the stores and bring the groceries, so I somehow spent the time. We lived on 19th Street on Hermosa Beach, so the 19th Street people, all of them had a welcome party for me. So each one of them brought a cake and some cookies, everything. Then I had to introduce myself to everyone. They introduced themselves to me and then even including a mailman. He also had to come and see me, because they all knew Dev's wife is coming from India. [laughter] The funny part was once what happened was the animal controller, he came and he knew Dev, and he said, "Oh, I've heard Dev's wife is here. I want to meet." So I thought whoever came, I should just invite them inside the house, give them a drink and everything. So I remember when the mailman came, I told him also to come and sit down inside. I was going to offer him a drink. [laughter] So but over a period of time he said, no, I shouldn't be doing all that to everyone. He said, "Don't invite anybody inside the house."

Hampapur

Right. Get used to some of the--

Devaraj

Get used to it, because everybody was--to me, I thought everybody looked so friendly, I should invite them. When I came here, I was told there's no crime in this country, I don't have to be scared about anything, so.

Hampapur

How did you keep in touch with your family?

Devaraj

We used to call. As soon as I landed here, I had to make a phone call to Iran. My parents were there, and it was very difficult. You had to place a call. It would take you about six to eight hours before they would--it has to go through an operator, foreign operator, and they would say a person-to-person call. And then it might be the middle of the night for them or whatever. It's not that right away you could talk to them. There was no direct line or nothing. So I would call my parents, and they were happy I landed. Then I had to call his mom and tell her also. She didn't have a phone, so we had to call his neighbor, tell them they were placing a call, so if you can get his mom to come to their house so we can talk to her and all that.

Hampapur

Wow. It sounds like quite a process.

Devaraj

It was a big process those days to place a call. So most of it was through writing, correspondence. That's it. We would write to each other letters, that's it.

Hampapur

When you said you were homesick, was there anything in India particularly that you missed?

Devaraj

Just the people, because everywhere I went I just saw these people, local people. They were nice, but still, I felt like I wanted to talk in Indian. Even Dev, he was talking most of the time in English and all that, so I was missing all that Indian talk.

Hampapur

It was a big change.

Devaraj

Big change. So it took me a while. It took me at least a couple of months to slowly get used to it.

Hampapur

Were people familiar with Indians at that time?

Devaraj

No, nobody knew anything. Nowadays, people know about India, but when I came, they thought the tigers were running on the street. That's what they asked me. And I remember one of the girls at the beach, she asked me--I didn't know-

-my mom had told me put kumkum on. So I put kumkum on. I was wearing a denim and a red T-shirt. I go to the beach. So one of the girls asked me, "Oh, my god, what do you have on your forehead? Did you crush the rubies and put it there?" I said, "Yeah." I wasn't going to tell them what it is. I said, "Yeah, I did crush the ruby and I put it there." [laughter] I wanted to see their reaction.
[laughs]

Hampapur

Yes. What a question.

Devaraj

This is what they used to ask me. "How come you speak English? When did you learn English?" I said, "I just learned it two days ago." I told them we all speak English in India. Our accent is different, but we all speak English, so like that. So people were very ignorant of India. They didn't have no knowledge about India. Maybe all the professionals, they had, but the local people whom you interact, all the neighbors and all, they had no idea what India is.

Hampapur

Were they just ignorant of India, or did they have a positive or a negative reaction towards India?

Devaraj

They were ignorant of India. They had no negative attitude, nothing. They were just ignorant, that's it.

Hampapur

Were there any other like immigrant communities around? Or was everyone white?

Devaraj

All white. The beach community is all white. My cousin was a professor in USC at that time. She and her husband both were professors in USC. My dad had talked to her and said--so she visited me. So she came from USC, she and her son. They spent a whole day with us, and then somehow we didn't continue a relationship with her. But she moved to Rochester. So other than that, no. It took me a few years before I had started talking to other Indian friends, so for a long time--it was till '87, '86 or so, I had no Indian friends.

Hampapur

And that was because there was no one around?

Devaraj

No one around, and we never made an effort to go anywhere to meet Indian people. We had gotten used to all the local friends, some of them from his work and their wives, and then every weekend we would all play volleyball at the beach, go out, go bowling or ice skating. I and Dev, we didn't know ice skating, but they would insist on it, because some of them were from Chicago. They

were all speed skaters, so they would just take us around the--we would just hold their hands, and they would just go.

Hampapur

It sounds kind of scary.

Devaraj

It was scary. Oh, my god. Once I remember I stood in the middle of the skating rink. I said, "Come on. I don't know how to move now. Help me out." [laughs] So it was good. We got used to it. Then we started going out on weekends. Friday night we would all go to the bar. They would all come. After dinner we'd all go, have a few drinks and throw darts. There used to be a Mighty Mart next to the bar in Hermosa Beach. We would go there around one o'clock in the morning, all of us would have sandwich and then go home and sleep, and then play volleyball. They taught me how to play volleyball at the beach. We were playing volleyball, and then we would go out bowling, and Alpine Village would have Oktoberfest. We would go for all those, so it was fun. So then we got used to it. They became like part of the family, all the friends.

Hampapur

Were those all new things for you?

Devaraj

Oh, yes, definitely. They were all new things for me, like skating. I had never seen ice before. So when I came, we had no time for honeymoon in India, so Dev, after I came here--I came in September. December we went to Mammoth. He used to ski, so he wanted me to learn skiing. So he took me to Mammoth and then I took the lesson, beginners' course. So it took me a while, do snowplowing, stopping on the ice and all that. So then we used to go to Mt. Baldy for skiing, so we did all that.

Hampapur

And you were in your twenties at this time?

Devaraj

I was still in my late twenties, yes.

Hampapur

Did you go a bunch outside of Hermosa Beach area at all?

Devaraj

Oh, yes. We used to go all over. We went to Mammoth. Mt. Baldy we used to go a lot, and we went to Death Valley, we did that. And some friends in Irvine--Irvine was just starting to develop at that time. Irvine hadn't developed. They were just building homes and all that at that time, in the seventies, '75 I'm talking, '75, '76. It was just a developing place. So it was pretty nice in those days, because it was a new town coming up.

Hampapur

Right.

Devaraj

And then all these malls. I had never seen such big malls in India, so walking. [unclear] with May Company before, and then they didn't have all these stores near May Company. They had a couple of stores and just one May Company, and they used to have old stores. Like Sears was there, and there was a store, Treasury, and then a K-Mart was there, and then Woolworth, all those.

Hampapur

In Torrance?

Devaraj

In Torrance. Hermosa Beach didn't have any of those stores. They had all these mamas and papas stores, like small ones, that's it.

Hampapur

Okay. So you're talking about like the Delamo, where Delamo would be now?

Devaraj

Right, Delamo Mall. Now it's the Delamo Mall. At that time there was Sears, and they had a Woolworth, Orbach's, some old stores. They're all gone. Those were all like K-Mart standard. Those were the stores.

Hampapur

Were there any areas of L.A. that were popular to visit at that time?

Devaraj

We went to the county fair in L.A. once. We went there. And then what else we did? Not much more. We all used to spend it around the beach most of the time, so we didn't do much of traveling. And then we visited San Francisco. His nephew was in Stanford at that time, so we visited him. We spent a few days there in Sunnyvale, I think. That's where we spent. So it was a new thing for me. Then we went and saw the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz Island, so it was all new thing for me.

Hampapur

Right, sounds like. So you did some traveling around California.

Devaraj

That's it, around California. We didn't leave. We didn't go anywhere else.

Hampapur

Did you ever go into like downtown Los Angeles area or that side?

Devaraj

Not really. We never went there, because there was no necessity for us to go. The only place we went was Hollywood. Because I wanted to see Hollywood, we drove around there, and there was one Indian store [unclear]. So we would go in the store, stock up on all the Indian groceries.

Hampapur

Was that owned by Indians?

Devaraj

It was owned by Middle Eastern, not an Indian, a Middle Eastern guy. I think he was from, I don't know, Lebanon or somewhere. I have no idea.

Hampapur

So that's how you replaced all your spices and things?

Devaraj

That's it exactly. That's where I would buy.

Hampapur

Wow.

Devaraj

But the thing is, when I came from India, I wasn't cooking much Indian food, because he was eating meat, and I had to learn how to cook meat. Then I learned from--some of his friends' wives would teach me the basic things. So I went and bought a book "Joy of Cooking," so then I started learning from there just basic cooking, chicken, how to cook chicken and meat and all that. Then I also started slowly eating.

Hampapur

Right. Were there any other new skills you had to learn after coming?

Devaraj

Then I was ready to just start driving, so I can move around. Then I came in September; December I got my driver's license, and January I started working. I went and found this job on my own. It was in Manhattan Beach. So Dev was working in the city of Manhattan Beach. Then I went, there was this Metlox Potteries, so I would just in the afternoon I would drive around. I asked them. They offered me the job, and it was paying \$180 a week. So at that time it was seven rupees, the exchange rate, so I immediately multiplied by seven. I said, oh, my god, I'm making so much money. I tell you, I'm taking the job. I came home and then he got so upset. He said, "Most of the people who work there are illegal aliens." [laughter] I said, "Well, it doesn't matter," since I was doing their bookkeeping. I worked there for six months. Then I saw the ad in the paper for Crocker Bank. They were looking for somebody with bank experience. So I went there by myself and talked to them. They called me for an interview. It was a brand-new department they were opening here in Rosecrans, so the other side of Manhattan Beach. So they offered me the job and I started working.

Hampapur

So they had no problem with your work experience being in India?

Devaraj

No, not at all. They just talked to me. Two or three people talked to me, that's it. Then they taught me how to [unclear], because I had never seen an adding machine in India. We never had adding machines, none of those, so it was a big thing that when they took me around the office, I saw the whole office is carpeted well and nice equipment and photo-copying machine, which I had

never seen any of those. See, in the seventies in India, they didn't have any of those. I hadn't seen, to put it frankly, so.

Hampapur

It sounds like you learned a lot very quickly.

Devaraj

Yes. Then I should take--when I came, I used to go to this other school. They had a class for office machines, how to operate the office machines, so I took that class in the evenings.

Hampapur

Okay. You became familiar with them.

Devaraj

Familiar with some other things.

Hampapur

How did you enjoy working there?

Devaraj

Oh, I loved it. They taught me how to do all that. It was a big office. They had their own cafeteria, everything, so and then made friends, so it was fun. I liked it. I used to work from eight-thirty to five-thirty, so a full-time job, forty hours a week, and then I would just drive around. TRW--it used to be TRW, what is Northrop Grumman now. Now they have the movie studios and you cannot go through, but I used to just go through, cut across. Within four, five minutes, I would be at my work, so it was good.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. Yes, this area has changed then.

Devaraj

Completely changed.

Hampapur

Can you tell me about some of the other changes you've seen?

Devaraj

See, when we came here, they didn't have the Manhattan Mall. It was all absolutely dirt everywhere. The Pollywog Park was all dirt. There was nothing there; ditches and all that. And then Northrop Grumman was TRW. It was like this, but they didn't have--they just had one street to go through. You could go to the other side of Rosecrans. And then we didn't have too many two-story houses, all single-story homes.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Devaraj

Most of them were single stories. Yes, and then Inglewood Avenue, if you see there, this was a dirt road. They didn't have tar road or none of those. It was all dirt road there. It wasn't developed. And then what else? It's developed so much

now. So then slowly, by, I think, the eighties, the Manhattan Mall, they started building the mall and all that. And then this Pollywog Park was actually Dev's project when he was working in Manhattan Beach. They made a nice park, everything, so those are it, pretty much.

Hampapur

When you came to the U.S., did you have to make any changes in your dress or anything, or were you already wearing Western clothes?

Devaraj

I was wearing denims, pants and shirts and all that. No, that was nothing for me. Luckily, I knew driving. I was driving in Delhi, and I used to go bike riding, so I knew bicycle riding. So I didn't feel left out. So I knew all that, so that's what I was always telling anybody who asked me. I said, "Before coming here, try to do so you don't feel left out, so you can join the group. Otherwise you will be just sitting by yourself." So only thing I had difficulty was them understanding me and me understanding them. It took a while for them also to understand me.

Hampapur

The accent.

Devaraj

The accent, everything. But other than that, no. Once I started driving, I used to explore a lot. I wasn't driving on the freeway, just all around the city. I used to go to all these malls and see what's going on and all that.

Hampapur

Did you do any of the same things for fun, like did you go to the movies or watch television?

Devaraj

Here? Oh, yes. Very first day, I used to love--by that time, one of my friends, her husband worked for airlines, so every year they would come to Cincinnati, go to Rome, everything, so she knew all the places. She used to always tell me, "Watch all the game shows and try, if you can, try to go to the game shows. People win cars and stuff." I never went to any game show, but I used to watch all the game shows. Soap operas I never liked, but once I started working for the bank as a full-time job, then I was busy, and by the time I would come home, then we would cook dinner and all that.

Hampapur

Okay. So you mentioned after you were here for a few years, that's when you started to see other Indians. Is that right?

Devaraj

Yes. See, like I came in '75, and then Neil was born in '80, and then we still had all these American friends. Raj was born in '83; no Indian friends. Then they started going to preschool, and I stayed home for six years, like quit my job and

stayed home. Then I think it was in '86, I think, Ushanti and Kamala, they both did a picnic. They called all the Indians. Somehow they found all the Indian numbers, phone numbers, and they called. They arranged a picnic in Hesse Park, Hesse, that's the one by P.V. [Palos Verdes], Hesse Park, yes. So we went there, and that's where I met most of the Indians who live around here. Then once I met them all, I took their phone numbers, everything, then slowly I started socializing with the Indian people. So but till '87 we had no Indian friends.

Hampapur

When Ushanti and Kamalanti called you, did you know them then?

Devaraj

No. They introduced themselves. They said we are so and so. I think Usha called me; Kamala didn't call. Usha, I think she called me, and then they told me to make mosaranna for the picnic. I said okay. So the kids were very little. We went there and there I met Kamala and Ananth. They had come from Canada. So she said she knew Dev's cousin, who lives in Montreal.

Hampapur

Okay, there's a connection.

Devaraj

So somehow then we started talking and all, and then we met Jayashree, Madhusudhan, and Shanta, Uglett. Your mom and all, they were not there, I think, at that time, '87. And then who else was there? Usha was there, Kamala, and then Padma was there. Padma, she was there. And then slowly, one by one - Vimila, Guruprasad, I don't think I have seen them. They went back to Boston, so they used to live here. We met them. See, we started exchanging phone numbers, and then Dhinamani, she was there, so we started exchanging. Then slowly what happened, we just started socializing, once one Indian friend, then we started socializing only with Indian friends. The beach friends, socializing became less.

Hampapur

That must have been nice for you to--

Devaraj

Oh, yes, I enjoyed it, because I could sit down and talk and everything. It's nothing like our own people talking. Other people are nice, but still, it's not the same.

Hampapur

So it sounds like most of your Indian friends who you met then were Kannada.

Devaraj

Kannada people, most of them were Kannada people. Yes, they were all Kannada people; even now. Hindi-speaking are very few. Maybe there were a couple of them from the bank, that's it.

Hampapur

So the picnic you went to, was that all Kannada people then too?

Devaraj

All Kannada people, yes.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Devaraj

It's all Kannada people.

Hampapur

They must have done their research.

Devaraj

They must have. [laughter] Yes, true, they were all Kannada people.

Hampapur

Did the Indian population in Hermosa-Manhattan change at that time too?

Were you starting to see more Indians here then?

Devaraj

No. Actually, when we moved here--see, I came in '75. We were in Hermosa Beach. We were the only Indians around. I didn't see any other Indians. Then there was another Indian who lived--yes, she introduced herself. They lived up on the hill in Hermosa Beach, and then they moved to Fullerton. They moved away. Then we came here in '76, so we were the only Indians, so I didn't see not a single person. But slowly, eighties I started seeing one or two Indian families in Manhattan Beach. Even today I don't see too many Indians on the beach area, no.

Hampapur

That's interesting.

Devaraj

In Manhattan Beach, I can count--maybe there could be less than ten families in Manhattan Beach, Indians. So once in a while we run across somebody; that's it.

Hampapur

Okay. So after you met your like circle of Indian friends, what types of activities would you guys do?

Devaraj

Like getting together for some functions, poojas, functions, and inviting each other for dinner parties, and then slowly--all of our kids were very little. So we would get together, and the kids would do sleepover. Then any pooja, we had an excuse to get together, and we thought even if the pooja was not there, dinner parties, get together. So it became more and more, more people we were introduced to, so the circle just grew.

Hampapur

Would you visit any temples at all?

Devaraj

See, the first time, yes, there was Hare Krishna temple, which we knew. That was--I came in '75. I think till '83 or '84, I hadn't gone to the temple. I didn't even know there was a temple.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Devaraj

And then Malibu Temple I went, I think it was in '84. Malibu Temple was just starting then, building, '84, I remember. Hare Krishna temple was there, but we went, I think, around '83 or '84, I think, around that time.

Hampapur

So there wasn't much besides the Hare Krishna temple?

Devaraj

No. And I didn't even know there was Cerritos. The Pioneer Boulevard where all the Indian stores are? I didn't even know it for a long time, till I think it was '89, '90.

Hampapur

Okay. And were all those stores there then?

Devaraj

Must be, because somebody--Dev's friend told him, I believe, "There's a place called Little India. You guys should go there." When we went, we were so surprised to see so many Indian stores, so it must have been there for a long time. We didn't know about it. So slowly our circle of friends also increased. You would introduce somebody, then they introduced, and somehow invariably they'll say, "Oh, I know your uncle from India." "I know this person." The relationship starts.

Hampapur

I see. Were there any Indian organizations at that time?

Devaraj

Yes, they did have. They did have, and they invited us. In the eighties, I think, Kannada Koota was there, and they invited us, but it used to be very far. And Dev was not too much interested in all those things. But we used to go because of the friends. We could go and socialize with them. We did. So the Kannada Koota was there for a long time, yes.

Hampapur

And what types of programs would they do?

Devaraj

Same thing, drama. They would have some plays, all Kannada plays, and music, dance, and then they'd cater food, Indian food, so that was a big thing for a lot of families, Indian food.

Hampapur

Sounds like the association you used to go to back in India.

Devaraj

In India. I told them the same thing. I said, "There they used to say Karnataka Sangha. Here they say Kannada Koota." That's all. Because Delhi was a foreign place for a lot of Indians there too, Kannada people, because they were all from Bangalore and Mysore. Coming to Delhi was a big thing. It was like fourteen hundred miles from Mysore, so it was a big thing for those days, those years. It was like a foreign country for the Kannada people there.

Hampapur

Right. Okay. And did you start seeing any other types of Indians around besides Kannada people?

Devaraj

Yes. I think basically we tried to concentrate on Kannada-speaking people, on the South Indians especially. North Indians and all, very few we saw in somebody's party or anything.

Hampapur

And they had their own associations and things.

Devaraj

They have their own association, right. Dev had a North Indian friend. We invited them for dinner once. They came. But other than that, no, not much socializing with North Indians, no.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like there were enough Indians around for people to have their own regional and language groups.

Devaraj

Exactly. Nowadays, I believe they have their own associations, like Kannada Koota. The Tamil people have their own gathering, people from Kerla have their own gathering, North Indians have their own, Gudjeratis have their own, so there are so many Indians, it's mushroomed all over now.

Hampapur

When did you start to see more Indian stores and restaurants and things like that?

Devaraj

We started seeing it in the late eighties. In the seventies, no, because we never bothered, maybe, even to look for that, so we didn't do that. Eighties, once we got introduced to all the Indians, they told us there's a store here, there's a store there, a store there. Then we started going. Then we heard about more locations.

Hampapur

I guess they would be hard to find out if someone hadn't mentioned it.

Devaraj

Exactly. Because we never bothered. We were happy within our circle of friends. We had all the Americans. We just lived by that. I remember when my parents came, poor things, they had not a single Indian I could take them to. I feel so bad nowadays, because they just had all these American friends.

Hampapur

So did your family visit often from India?

Devaraj

No. My parents came in 1980, when Neil was born. So they went around the world. My dad wanted to go around the world, show my mom, because whenever he was traveling, she could not go, so they went round the world. They went to London, Rome, Paris, and then they came to New York and Washington, D.C. Then in L.A. they spent two months. From here they went to Hawaii. From Hawaii they went to Japan, then they went to Hong Kong, so they went round the world.

Hampapur

Wow. They really did go around the world.

Devaraj

Yes. That's what they wanted to do, so they did that, and then after that my mother passed away. They never came. And my dad came in '94, and he just came to L.A. because he was missing my mom. He just went back after three months, three or four months.

Hampapur

Did you visit India at all?

Devaraj

We used to go once in four years, not every year. The first time I came here in '75, after I got my visa. The next time I went was '81. Neil was a year-old baby. We went. Then again we went in '85. Raj was--at that time he was two years old, and then Neil was five, he turned five. We went there. And then after '85, we went in '90, so five years, then '93, and then afterwards the kids never came, because my parents had passed away. I went--my dad passed away in '97; I went for two weeks. Then afterwards, I never went to India till last year, 2009, so I went after twelve years.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. Okay. And your brothers and sister, are they still there?

Devaraj

My one brother was in Dubai. He moved back to Bombay. And then two of my brothers, we got them over here. One lives in the valley, and one lives in Seattle, and my sister lives in Mysore, so they have their own business, so they are there.

Hampapur

So she's the only family member left there.

Devaraj

She's the only family. Now my brother, older brother, is also back to Bombay. He was in Dubai, but he moved back to Bombay.

Hampapur

Okay, so now you have people to visit.

Devaraj

Right.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you have any concerns or things you were excited for raising your children in the U.S., since you were unfamiliar with growing up here? Did you have any concerns at all?

Devaraj

No, not at all. But when they were in high school, middle school, high school, I was a little concerned about the kind of friends they would have, because I had heard about drug problem and all that, so we were a little concerned. We made sure they socialized--who their friends were and all that, and even if they wanted to go sleep over anything, unless we knew the parents, we wouldn't send them. So we started taking extra precautions. So even though a lot of people--"Oh, they're boys. Boys are--." But still, the kids are kids. We didn't want--so we were scrutinizing a lot of things. But having feared--because I didn't know. Like we had already spent so many years in this country, so I didn't have all the--except, besides that fear, drug problem and all, I didn't think of any other stuff.

Hampapur

Were there any positives you saw to raising your kids in the U.S. versus India?

Devaraj

Oh, yes, definitely. I like the education system here. They give a lot of--they encourage the students, irrespective of whether they're Indian or they're brown or black or white, whatever. They encourage all the kids who are good in studies, and then they give you an opportunity to do your own thinking. See, in India when we were growing--I don't know how the studies are now back in India, but when we were growing up, all we did was memorize, memorize, memorize, and there was no opportunity for us to even think. So but now here they wanted the originality here. They stressed on originality here; I loved it. And the school system is so nice. The colleges are so nice. We loved it.

Hampapur

Did you want to teach your sons anything about Indian culture, or try to pass on anything?

Devaraj

Not really. See, I used to do like--we followed everything. Like we followed the East and West both. All the Indian poojas I would do, and I would insist on them participating. As long as they were still young, they would do it. Then we did Thanksgiving also. We did Christmas. We used to have a Christmas tree, decorate the house with Christmas decorations, turn the lights on outside, have Christmas parties. Thanksgiving we would have a turkey dinner, so they didn't feel left out. At the same time, I had Indian stuff also, made sure they knew about Indian culture and all that. And they did all that till they were in high school. They would follow things which I told them. They would come to the temples, everything. But once they were older, we didn't insist. But at least they still know, because they have talked about India in their school when they were in middle school, both of them. They had taken a few Indian things from the home. They had to talk about their culture, everything. They did talk about that. But we didn't insist on them learning Kannada and all that. No, we didn't do that.

Hampapur

Did you celebrate those holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, before your kids were born? Or was that mostly for them?

Devaraj

Before the kids were born also. As soon as I came to this country, because Dev was following all that, so we were doing. We used to actually have Thanksgiving dinner, till the kids were born, in our house. All of our American friends would come here. So we would cook a whole Thanksgiving dinner in our house, and then Christmas dinner also. And when the kids were born, it became more to look forward to, so the kids also enjoyed, so everything. So we did both, East and West both. Even today we do. When the kids come, if they come for Thanksgiving, we have Thanksgiving dinner. Christmas when they come, we have ham, and we tell them, "We're going to have Indian poojas," and all. I tell them, "Okay, you have to come and do, come and follow what I'm doing." I don't insist too many stuff. At least come to the pooja room. I do that.

Hampapur

Did you enjoy celebrating the American holidays?

Devaraj

I did, yes. I liked it. Easter also, we used to have Easter, the egg hunt for the kids. Easter and all we did after the kids were born, Easter egg hunt and all that, and birthday parties we would have. It was fun.

Hampapur

When did you move to Manhattan Beach, to the south?

Devaraj

Seventy-six, yes, '76 December we moved here.

Hampapur

So you've been here for a long time, then.

Devaraj

Yes, right. Gosh, can you imagine, thirty-three years? The kids were born here, everything. So Hermosa Beach, I think I lived there only for a year. I came in September '75; '76 December we moved here.

Hampapur

So you mentioned that you stopped working for a few years when your kids were young?

Devaraj

Right, and they were born, yes.

Hampapur

Okay. So when did you go back to work?

Devaraj

See, Neil was born in '80. I worked till the end of August. He was born in September seven of 1980. I worked till the end of August, then I quit. I stayed home, and Raj was born in '83. Then I waited till Raj went back to preschool; he could talk. Then I started working. So '87 I went back to work.

Hampapur

Did you go back to the same job?

Devaraj

Oh, not the same job, because Crocker Bank was bought by Wells Fargo, and this office where I used to work, they had moved to El Monte. So they told me if I want my position back, I should go to El Monte. I said no, I don't want, because I want something in Manhattan Beach, closer to the school, closer to the home. Then I joined First Interstate Bank in '87. So '86 I worked for six months at the data center, part-time I did, and then I quit. I didn't like it. In '87, I joined the Manhattan Beach First Interstate. Then I was working full-time. The kids were going to the school in Meadows here, and then we were paying too much for--Neil would go to daycare in the same school for two hours; Raj would go for four hours, and they were charging us too much money. Then we decided I will take part-time job. Then I took the--Wells Fargo offered me in Manhattan Beach, so I wanted the hours and they agreed on that, nine to two. So I would drop the kids at school, work, and then after work I would go and pick them up and come home. So I continued there part-time in Wells Fargo till I got to 2009, twenty-five years, yes. [laughs]

Hampapur

And what were you doing there? What was your position?

Devaraj

I started as a teller and then became a supervisor, and I didn't want to go any higher than that, because I didn't want no responsibility, nothing. And then if I had accepted, they wanted me to go as a service manager to Westchester office.

I said no, I don't want to go, because I want to be in Manhattan Beach only, so I can be closer to the home and those kids. So I stayed there. I retired as a supervisor. That's it.

Hampapur

Okay. So I guess coming to more present time, what do you like to do since you have retired?

Devaraj

The first two months--I retired in December 2009. The first two months I really went crazy. I said, oh, my god, what do I do? I have so much time in my hands now. A lot of people said, "Oh, you can do a lot of traveling and all that." It's not easy just traveling, because Dev has to take time. He's a consultant, and he's busy with his work and all that. So it took me a couple of months to settle down and get used to that. So somehow I'm now spending my time doing some gardening, and then we go on Wednesdays to the church, help them cut the vegetables. They feed the homeless every Wednesday night at the church.

Hampapur

How did you get into that?

Devaraj

Yeshodhara was there, Kamala was there. I think Gita, one of the friends, she's a real estate agent, she found out about it, and she told, so word of mouth. Then I heard about it, so I also go there. And then I join yoga classes, and then we go to a stretching class, and then we go to the beach for walks at least three days a week, so somehow or another I'm slowly getting used to this retired life now.
[laughs]

Hampapur

Before you retired, were there any other activities you had aside from work?

Devaraj

Not really, no, nothing much. Nothing to talk about. I used to crochet a lot, so I used to crochet, and I crocheted blankets and stuff; I did all that. But other than that, no. The work used to full-time. Even though I worked part-time, I was working there three days a week. But still, the other days I was looking forward to staying home. And then we did more, a lot of traveling for the last three, four years. We wanted to see Mexico, so one year we went to Cancun, came back, then we went to Cabo, then we went to Puerto Vallarta, so we did a lot of those things. Then we went to India, and then where else did we go? Egypt, we went to Egypt. We wanted to see the Pyramids; we went there. So for a while, for three, four years, we did a lot of traveling. Again, it has come to a standstill now, so we haven't done much.

Hampapur

World travelers like your parents.

Devaraj

We did, a little bit. Before the kids went to college, we wanted to make sure-- they have gone all over the U.S., and then we have gone to Japan, Europe. We have shown them all of Europe, Western Europe, not the East, and then all that. We did a lot of this traveling before they went to college. We knew once they went to college, very difficult to get hold of them. I'm sure your parents are finding it the same way, same thing. So we did a lot of traveling before they went to college.

Hampapur

Okay. To change topics slightly, how long was Ankul living in the U.S. before you moved here?

Devaraj

He came in '66 to do his master's, then he settled down here. So he's been living since '66 in California, what, forty-four years now.

Hampapur

And you came in '75.

Devaraj

I came in '75. We met each other in '74, but I came in '75 because of my visa and all that.

Hampapur

And when you first moved to the U.S., did you know it was going to be a permanent move? Or was there ever any expectation to go back to India?

Devaraj

I didn't know it was going to be a permanent move, because Dev hadn't even taken his citizenship. I think he was also waiting to get married and decide whether we would like to live here. So we decided after I came here, we decided we'd go to take the citizenship and live here. But the first couple of years I thought that we were going back and all that. Even though Dev didn't show me any inclination of going back, in my mind I used to think maybe we were going back, and all that. But afterwards, we just decided to settle down here.

Hampapur

Was it like a gradual thing that sort of happened, or did you decide one day, like, we're going to stay in the U.S.?

Devaraj

It was not gradual. He just decided after five years after I came here, we just decided whether we'd like to live. I said, yes. He wanted to make sure that I also liked to live--yes. Then we applied for citizenship, so that's it.

Hampapur

So like in 1980?

Devaraj

Yes, 1980. Yes, I got my citizenship in 1980, because after you get the green card, you have to be living here at least for five years, I believe. So you cannot get citizenship before the five years is completed. But Dev had already completed nine or ten years. He was here since '66. So we both got our citizenship. He got it in '79; I got it in '80.

Hampapur

Okay. So what did you have to do for that?

Devaraj

For that, like it was so funny. My experience with citizenship was pretty unusual, because '79 Dev applied for citizenship. I said I'll also apply. I didn't know that we had to complete five years. The immigration office, they sent me also a letter. They called us for interview and all that. But we had to take some tests, because they ask--you had to read about American history. Like what is a term of a senator, what is a term of a congressman, the governor, who is the president, all these questions they ask you. And then you had to take a couple of witnesses, a couple of your friends who are U.S. citizens as witnesses, to be there present when you get your citizenship, when they pass you for citizenship. So '79, Dev went. He got everything. He took two of our American friends. He got his everything, he passed the test, everything, he was granted the citizenship. Then I went. I had my interview, everything, passed the test, and then everything was fine, and they were going through my paper. Then they realized they made a mistake. They had called me for interview even my five years have completed. So then they realized their mistake, and they told me, "You don't have to go through all this again, but 1980, after another six months, we want you to come here, so we'll give you the paperwork, everything." But I had to take two citizens with me, so we took two of our friends. So Dev got his citizenship celebration at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and I got mine at the Coliseum at 1980. So then we had to turn in our green card and then they'll give you the U.S. immigration, U.S. passport and all that.

Hampapur

Okay. Is there any sort of ceremony?

Devaraj

Big ceremony. You have to take the pledge. You have to take an oath and everything. So Dev was done in a nice way. It was done in the Dorothy Chandler--there are hundreds of people who take the oath. And then when I took it, it was in the Coliseum. Mayor [Tom] Bradley was the mayor of Los Angeles. There were like thousands of people who were taking the--at the Coliseum. It was so hot, everything. And then he gave us--and then we took the oath at the Coliseum. So it was fun. Then after you take the oath, everything, you turn in your green card, and our friends, they made a big celebration, had

all of our American friends, they had a big celebration welcoming us as U.S. citizens and all that.

Hampapur

Was it exciting to get your citizenship?

Devaraj

Yes, it was pretty exciting. Then at that time we didn't know that we had to give up our Indian citizenship. We didn't know that. But anyway, we took it, so it was fun.

Hampapur

Now do you foresee yourself staying in this area in the future, in Manhattan Beach?

Devaraj

Yes. All our life we have spent, and the kids are here. We are just looking forward to them getting married and settle down, so once they are here, we would like to be here only, so they can look forward to coming home here.

Hampapur

Right. And you've been here for so long now.

Devaraj

Right. Exactly.

Hampapur

So you've spent more of your life in the U.S.?

Devaraj

U.S., yes, both of us, than back home. I was in my late twenties when I came. He was in his early twenties when he came.

Hampapur

Right, for the schooling. And when you would go back to visit India, did you visit Delhi, or would you visit down south?

Devaraj

Last time we--all before, we used to just go--if the grandparents were there, we would just go to the South. But after they were gone and the kids wanted to see the northern part of India, so the work we did we planned so they would come. They came for two weeks. So we went to Delhi, Ardra, Jaipur, they wanted to see golden temple there, so we went to there, [unclear] also. We spent almost ten days in the northern part of India. We traveled a lot. And then they came through to Bangalore, so Mysore they spent three days. But I and Dev had gone earlier, six weeks before, so we spent two months in total, but they spent two weeks. So they spent three days in Mysore, that's all, and then they flew back.

Hampapur

Do you feel like India has changed a lot since your time there?

Devaraj

Yes, it has changed. For the last twelve years I didn't go. In twelve-year span, I have seen it has changed so much. It has become more--people, their standard of living has gone up. People make more money. Their lifestyle has changed so much, and a lot of high-rise buildings, more people now. It's simply people are enjoying more now, so I'm happy for them. So people enjoy more, they spend more money. Most of the wives are all working. They have like here, husband, wife working. They both have their own cars and all that, so I saw a lot of that kind of a difference; change.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of interview]

Parent Institution | TEI | Search | Feedback

Date:

This page is copyrighted