

Transcript for Oral History Interview
Conducted for University of Maryland Course HIST428M – Spring 2017
Instructor: Dr. Anne S. Rush

Interviewer's name: Ajay R. Mysore
Interviewee's name: Ramchandra Rao
Interviewee's Country of Origin: India
Interviewee's Current Residence: Clarksville, Howard County, Maryland, U.S.A.
Date of Interview: March 4, 2017
Place of Interview: Clarksville, Howard County, Maryland, U.S.A.

Note: I have tried to omit some of the short stammering from Ramchandra and have omitted any vocal indications I made such as “hmm” or “ahh” in response to Kaakaaji's answers and stories. This way the stories he tells are left in more cohesive chunks. There were two recordings used for this interview. I used the more audible one to transcribe the interview carefully and cross referenced points of contention with the other recording. I checked the entirety of the transcription again while listening to each recording at normal speed once. At the end I have included an appendix for end notes and appendix with a map highlighting places mentioned in India within the interview.

I have included some corrections and included sounds in the recording throughout the transcript identifiable by:

(...) : Audio Notes

[...] : Corrections for transcript text cohesion

Footnote: Outside source information, context and clarifications.

AJAY: This Ajay Mysore and it is March 4th, 2017. I am recording Ramchandra Rao and it- at Clarksville, Maryland for the D.C. Immigrant Voices project. Ramchandra, or, I will refer to Ramchandra as Kaakaaji as that is his relation to me.¹ And Kaakaaji, will you introduce yourself?

KAAKAAJI: OK, Ajay. Uhh good morning everybody. Uh this is uh my name is Ramchandra Rao, um we came to this United State in 1969. I am an immigrant. Myself and my wife we landed in New York. And uh New York as soon as we landed we had some problem but everything was resolved. Finally we got into my friends place in Queens who we were there for uh 2...2 nights or so. Then I had a job. I had to go to Danville and take up the job [as] an immigrant. So I came uh to this country on a third preference (he means sixth preference) and uh started working in Danville for six months.² Then I moved to New Jersey to take up a job and also I wanted to go to school in the evening. So, I took up a job in Hewitt-Robins. Then I started working. Then I joined myself in the school. Essex County College in Newark. And uh we moved to Hoboken. We started staying in that place. Then everything went good. When my wife joined Pratt Institute for computer science in New York City. Everything went alright for two years then we moved to (pause)

A (Pause) Take your time (Pause)

K Yeah, afterwards we moved to Hoboken, we stayed in Hoboken for um 2 -2 and a half years then uh we, I took up a job in Kennedy Van Saun Corporation in New Jersey. I worked for eight years there, then we moved to New York City. Then uh we stayed in New York City for uh three, four years and everything went alright. Then I joined the school in the evening. I started going to school in the evening. I, I finished my BS and also MS in mechanical engineering. Then we joined where I worked as a consultant in a couple of companies as a civil engineer. Then uh in 19 (long pause) And my wife also finished her MS in Computer Science from Pratt Institute Brooklyn and in the meantime she was working in the daytime in Metropolitan Insurance Company.³ Somehow everything went alright and we settled in. Then we got our second child that is Sudhir, So now he is 43 and he is a doctor and he has his own company. And uh then after... after few

years then we got another child, Savitha Rao and she is also a doctor and she is settled in New jersey and she is um she is going to practice soon. Then in the meantime I joined Metropolitan Transit Authority in New York. I worked there for twenty years. Then, I just retired 2 and a half years back. Then I am a living a retired life. So, myself and my wife also retired and we are living a retired life and doing everything. Going everything fine. Presently I moved to my son's place and I am in uh staying with him in Clarksville, Maryland.

(Loud Noise from moving of the recording device)

A Okay. So what year did you come?

K 1969 September.

A Yeah. Was it exciting?

A Oh ye, it was very, very (laughing). Because we didn't know, we didn't. As a matter of fact, I didn't even travel airline anytime. That was the first time to come in uh airline and landed in New York. Of course uh New York, you know, because we didn't know a lot of thing. We had some uh problem there in the after landing, so everything it uh straighten it out.

A What kind of problems did you have?

K Problem is that uh we lost. We were supposed to meet our friend in Queens, in New York, and uh we lost his address. OK. Then instead of uh coming one day, and we came one day late. So they had messed up, you know? My friend couldn't trace us back so we landed in the airport and we don't know what to do. We had uh three dollar (chuckles) money only left with us. So, somehow or another, some strange person came to us in the airport. And he was watching us. We were struggling a little bit you know? He asked me "why, how come you have come here and what is this one". That person is really a nice person and uh. He's from Jamaica. He took us to his apartment in Queens. We stayed with him for one night. And next day somehow I tried to find uh my friend's su- work place. I went to New York City and uh I, I wanted to trace him. But I couldn't trace him, he had left that company. Anyway, there my, I met my ex-boss he was in new- in India building Aluminum factory. He was working with uh-

A You Ex-boss or next boss?

K Ex, Ex-boss

A Oh ok-

K he was uh uh. Somehow or another he was in that company. He told me to locate my friend and he gave me his address. I called my friend he was supposed to come and pick us up. Anyway it was couple of one night late. So then he came back and he picked us up and we went to his apartment in Queens and we stayed there. That was the problem.

A You got very lucky with that!

K Yeah

A Nice people helping you out

K Yeah yeah. Then I ha, (laughing) believe me or not, and after few years, I met that Jamaican guy in some park!

A Woahh

K (Laughs) Then everything went good so. Ummm. That, that person had difficulty for maintaining his uhm he and his wife and very small place not much uh communication and also, you know? He was also struggling is that uh, uh this one thing, he--he welcomed us and he accommodate us and he was very hospitable.

A Who was the friend who was meeting you at the airport?

K So, my friend is Mr. Badrinath, we worked together in India. So he came early to Canada. Then he came back to America as an immigrant.

A Oh, ok-

K So I was supposed to meet him and stay with him. So that was little bit messed up because of date.

A So the, the, the plane got delayed and it came one day late...

K Yeah that is correct. Yeah, that's right.

A Where did you say you... already had a job offer when you came here?

A Yes, that that is I came under uh sixth preference. So to do. To get that job, I was working in in India, Kennedy Van Saun Corporation in uh Asansar (now, Asansol, West Bengal). So there, you know that was run by American company. I requested my boss that I want to go to America and uh do my studies and work. So he was so kind. And he really helped me to get a job. Their company in America, KVS. So they offered me a job and uh that, I came to this country. I did not have a degree. If I had a degree, I could've come on a third preference on my own. At that time, I didn't have degree so I had to come on a job call. Uh job, you have to acquire job first then come. And preference, sixth call, they call it sixth preference.

A OK. I'm thinking like woah, that's very interesting. Um where, where were you. Where were you working in India?

K In India, in Asansar that is company called Kennedy...uh Kennedy Van Saun Corporation. Mackliney Bird they called it, in Indian, Mackliney Bird. They used to make a boilers and uh crushers and that kind of things.

A So, industry company,

K Yes

A What were you, what was your job there?

K I was a draftsman first. I came just from the India, you know? I took up a job there. I was draftsman. I was working in a civil engineering draftsmanship.

A Hmm and what did you, what was your job when you came here?

K Came with same type of job.

A Same?

K Same, I uh I-I what Hewitt, Hewitt- (pause while thinking). The company's same as Hewitt-corporation I joined. They were also doing the same belt this one.⁴ So I joined that company here. I was doing for six to eight months there. Then I left, I joined another company, Macklin an... Mackliney bird, no no..Kennedy Van Sau- this one, what is that... Mackliney umm, Kennedy Van ok, (long pause). Ok, I joined um uh this one what is that Bunsen Room. Bunsen Room Corporation. They were building uh you know, this nuclear power plant. You know?

A Oh wow. They were building nuclear power plant...

K In New Jersey

A Oh wow. Oh that's cool. Uh you only had a high school equivalent degree then, right?

K No I was uh I did after high school I took uh training like, you know?

A Oh OK

K Industrial training like they give this puh-professional craftsmanship training like that. If somebody wants to become a fitter, if somebody wants to become a draftsman, somebody wants to become some carpenter. Like that, a craftsmanship jobs. They were giving in India training about 18 months training.

A There was a technical-

K Yeah technical institute yeah

A It was a technical degree. OK, so you.. you.... Went to school and everything and after Independence. After Indian Independence.

K Yeah, yeah, sure, sure so, much [after]. Independence came in 1947, so yeah by that 1947 I was in Bangalore or something.

A Mhmm

K Yeah

A Where did you, where were you born in India? Where did you grow up?

K Madhugiri. Madhugiri that is Tumkur district, uhh it is about 75 miles away from Bangalore.

A Mhmm. So, that's is in the state of Karnataka.

K Yes correct yeah. Karnataka.

A So what was growing up there like?

K Now?

A What was it like when you grew up there?

A Ohh (laughs). Nothing much you know, everything was uh so-so middle-y school primary school everything was there. Not much population at that time. Now recently I visited that place but it completely changed place.

A So back then it was more like a village?

K Village, yeah exactly it's a village type place.

A So what was, what was everybody, what was your family doing then?

K So I stayed with my grandmother. She had a big house and she had uh land. Cultivation of land and uh they used to cultivate uh rice and this one they used to get [mumbles Indian grains]. Most of them are uh um.. farmers-type of thing. They used to get everything from uh their land. That was the earning thing. Other than that there was nothing there. So my mother, my grandmother took care of me. I was with her. So I finished my high school there and then moved to Bangalore.

A Ohh. Where was, was it just you living with your grandmother?

K Yes. Because nobody was there. Now my grandmother had uh four uh..four daughters and two sons and they're all grown up and they got their own family. They moved out. Nobody uh lived in Madhugiri, except myself with my grandmother.

A What about your siblings and your parents?

K No, my, my parents, my father died long time back. My mother was with my one of my relatives in Bangalore. And my two brothers also in Bangalore. They were, you know in (pause while thinking) uncle's place. Yeah, I was only in Madhugiri by myself.

A So what, what age time are we talking about?

K Probably I was, uh eight or nine years old.

A Oh, ok, so when you were nine years old is also in it was 1947, right? Or so

K (Pause while thinking) Almost 1947. When, when Gandhi, when Mahatma Gandhi died I was in um Madhugiri.

A OK. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated 1968,

K 19-

A sorry, 1948. Yeah sorry

K 48, yeah. After Independence, right?

A Yes, after a year, uh almost a year after Independence-

K Yeah I was there, I was there in Madhugiri at that time. Yeah

A What do you remember from that time?

K Uh there are lot of confusion you know, going uh...panic when Mahatma died, when Mahatma Gandhi died and uh. It was actually different state of uh thing. Everybody was panic. You know, because all of a sudden he was killed. He was assassinated. So. I was um not much remembering so. (Pause) But we were all feeling bad for uh for assassination

A Who was that, what do you remember about independence, and about, I don't know, about the, all the wars that was happening throughout .. the forties.

K Yeah war was going on at that time I was in Bangalore. You know, people were not. Curfew was declared. In Bangalore. People were not supposed to walk on the street. And uh still you know some people used to walk. So there was scary situation in uhh this one, at that time. So we were, somehow we were managed. Nothing serious happened. Except you know, all this food item and other things are all. Sometime so it was difficult for people to...move on.

A How, how was, um how was your family's life in Bangalore? Why did you leave them other than school and education? Was that the only reason?

K See what happened, when my father died I was very young person. 1-year old or something. So there was uh my mother has to struggle hard to bring us up. Two three chi- siblings you know. So, I was with my grandmother. And um my two brothers with my, my father's sister's children place in Bangalore. So, like that we were all separated we were not together anytime because it was that hard for my, my mother to maintain us. That's why we are all separated in the different places.

A What can you tell me about your father?

K My father I don't remember because I was very, people say I was eight or nine year- nine month old baby. Umm afterwards only, my mu, my mother and everybody told me that my father had difficulty. He was sick or something. Something like that. It was sickness. Because of sickness he passed away. And when he passed away, you know it was difficult for my mother to maintain with three children. My grandmother really supported my mother and uh my mother's brother, my uncle, he was a teacher. He took care of us also. So you know, like that you know, we, a lot of relatives took care of us so that's all you know. Everything went good.

A What can you tell me about your mother?

K My mother really, you know, she's very ... really intelligent lady. Somehow or another, in at that time when my father passed away, my uncle wanted to send her to school and get some job and maintain her family like you know? But you know, at that time situation was little different. Uh nobody was allowing all ladies to go for school or uh this one especially she was a widow. And uh, she really struggled hard and uh...uh because of her, you know, courage and strength and other things, we came up good and also of God's blessing.

A So she was able to support you together for that time

K Yeah support, yeah.

A So, did you, so you primarily grew up at, your earlier years you grew up with your grandmother and then?

K Yeah correct. Till high school I was with her. Then uh I after high school when I left Madhugiri, that our village. Then came to Bangalore. Bangalore somehow or another my brother, eldest brother, he finished his diploma then he got a job so we started our own uh, living in our own hou- apartment not house whatever it was. We used to live three person, three brothers together and my mother also used to come and live with us.

A How much older were your brothers than you?

K My brothers and all were only two years different. My.. so my eldest brother is four years, you know, so he is about 84 or 85 now, my second brother is 82. So I am 80.

A And they and they, you were the first of the three of them to come to America, right?

K Yeah, that's right. Because I was working in American company. That's said in an Asansar, I requested my American boss. So he helped me to come to America. Uh once I came with my wife, here, and for initially we had a th- teaching problem our life like anything that happens in the factory like this. So we didn't have any help. No guidance. Nothing. Everything I had to dig myself. To go to school. Where to go and what to do that thing, everything. Somehow you know, it worked out good. So. Then I started um, I became um citizen of this country. Then I started calling my relations like my brothers. My wife also become citizen. She also started calling her relatives. So today everybody settled now, nicely. We are all doing fine.

A Ok. What year did you become a citizen?

K Umm, I came here in '69. '69, within five years. '74.

A Ok. So you think it was around 1974-ish?

K '74.

A And your wife also became citizen at that time?

K Yes, yeah yeah (laughs)

A And immediately, you sponsored..

K Sponsored all our relatives. So at that time sponsorship was very easy. Very easy means, you go to office and apply. Within six months you get uh, you get, you know, sponsorship approved and you can call anybody you want sponsored. There's, like that we would started calling. Everybody was settled here um within uh within...in fifteen years everybody came here.

A When you say everybody, who do you mean?

K Who mean is, my two brothers. And their family. And my wife's uh hold on- four sisters and two brother. Of course it took you know long time, six months time for each person to come here. And finally they all came here and settled.

A Wow. So every six months, you would sponsor somebody new?

K Yeah. Yeah.

A Would, would the people you sponsor also have the ability to sponsor or would then have to wait till their citizenship, right?

K Yeah sure. See, without citizenship you cannot sponsor. You have to become..to become.. spir- spon- citizen you can actually you know as per law five years you have to be here. Once you finish four and half years you can start paperwork. Then you can apply for um sponsorship.

A And you came, and you immigrated right? You stayed here, you wanted to become a citizen of America. You didn't want to go back to India at that time, right?

K See at that time, there was no question of...when we came to this country at that time we told a friend we will be back, to India. Once you come here, you know, you're still in the processing of settling. So you never think of going back. So everything was working out good. So you don't want to go back. At that time it didn't occur to us, that we should go back.

A So you just, sort of happened that you stayed here and settled

K Yeah we, yeah we settled. Started staying you know, family broke big. Then everything settled. So now, we visit only Bangalore. We don't want to, go back and settle there.

A And all the people that you sponsored, they also wanted to stay here? They also wanted to

K Yeah, so far, nobody has gone. Everybody is nicely settled. They've got, uh family settle, children born and you know. So, I don't think anybody wants to so far, I have not heard anybody going back to India.

A So, so, it was common back then, when you got to go to America, it was, you, you go there and then, you didn't realize that you'd stay there, but it so happened that everybody enjoyed

K Yeah exactly, exactly, you know everybody think I'll be back, like that of you know

A Yeah

K Even I told I all my family, I'm just going and come back after five years. (coughs) Five years to settle down here it took so much time...so. Even today, I'm quite good because you know, sickness and other things we cannot go back to India right now...so.

A Uhh what was the perception, what did everybody think when you first told them, 'oh I want to go to America? And when you, when you got to go.

K They were all (laughs) they were all surprised, 'How come you, how can you go?' Nobody thought about America at that time. Though everybody educated you know, they've got a master's degrees. Like my wife, my wife had a master's degree. Nothing. Only a certain category of people in India, they wanted to go to America. Because they were, at that time you know (President) Kennedy opened immigrants, at that particular time for the educated people on third preference. Like scientist, engineers, all other you know. Disciplined people. So nobody thought, that like my category, I, I didn't have a degree. I never thought that I'll ever go to any foreign countries. First I got the immigration visa from UK. But I didn't want to go to UK because people scared me.⁵ So I waited for this uh America, to go to America.

A Why, why were you interested in America In particular?

K Particular because I have seen lot of people, I worked in forei-American companies. There is all American Indian engineers they went to America, at that time, particularly after coming to America education, you can uh study, after study you can stay there for 18 months. Then you have to go back to your country. That was the rule. So I saw, I used to work in American companies. I lot of see American Indian people coming from America at that time. Somehow you know I got into this one, you know, in my lifetime I have to go to America and uh get educated.

A So it was very like a fascination, so you wanted to come here for education

K Education, and also America means we heard a lot of things, good things about America. We thought you know it is nice to go there and uh work.

A How were things, how did you, what good things did you hear about America that weren't available in India?

K Oh, first of all you know, job situation. And also, um medical. And opportunities. Somehow you know it is fascination, anybody, and even today you talk to anybody, of course little things are little changed, but

everybody fascination. You wish to go to foreign countries and visit and see how things are there. If everything works out good, people want to settle. Like that it happened. So I saw a lot of my friend circle they came, so I thought I should also go. That was the fascination.

A Then were you. You told me, so you were very close with your grandmother who you came up with right?

K Yeah

A So, uh what did , wha- what was her story after you had, after you left and then after you were coming to America?

K After my, my coming to America, of course she was getting older. When I left that place she was about 75. You know she started, uhh she was living alone in the village in Madhugiri. But afterwards you know she couldn't maintain herself, she had to come back to Bangalore stay with her sons. And uh I took up a job in North India afterwards before coming to America. Then you know, the contact was a little less now. At that time. Myself and my grandmother. My grandmother used to live with her first son, second son, like that moving on to. So contact low lesser than. Once I was in North India I got a message that uh--uhh this grandmother is sick and uh--uh one day then they sent me so said she passed away. 35, 80 years, at 75 years she died.

A So this was, so this was before coming to America?

K Yes, before.

A Then this is..OK,

K Before coming to America, I worked in North India at some or another company, Root Kellar Steel project, and uh Durgapur Steel Plant, afterwards only I came to America.

A OK. And uh, So back then, main form of communication was letters and ?

K Letters only, Letters writing, no telephone, nothing.

A No telegram, not even?

K Oh telegram was there. But um mostly we used to write letter. In-land letter you know, they'd call it. So we used to communicate like that.

A So, when you came to America, that's how you'd communicate with families back home?

K Yes, that's right, yeah. Writing letters.

A Were people worried about you when you went to America, after you'd moved? What was, how did your family and friends perceive you after you had gone to America and uh after you'd settled there?

K No uh, people were, of course we used to communicate. At that time, you know things have a little bit, little better. We used to use telephone. Communication started talking with phone. But things were a little better. So that, we used to communicate well about our uh living condition and what we are doing and this one, and like we were happy and they also want to also come.

A So uh, your uh wife, you said had a, also had a master's right?

K Yes, she has a...she had a master's in India, Mathematics, uh mathematic- Master's in Mathematic. And uh she never thought that uh she could go herself to America. Nobody thought about it, you know, going to America. So, when we came here, it worked out good. She joined the computer class and uh, she did very well. She passed that computer class in eight months. And professor of her, Chinese professor he recommended 'So don't give up, go for Ph. D or something,' he highly recommended her. And also she took up a job in the morning time. This is the only she did evening school. I did not, I That job was also good, but you know, I used to go to work at that time , I used to go to school in the evening. So we spent like that for six years. And she finished in eight months so. She joined afterwards Rutgers University, she joined with Ph. D in Mathematics. She did, she did her qualification and afterwards somehow you know family started growing and lot of people, we sponsored lot of people. And you know, because of this so much, uh so many things going at that time, she couldn't finish the Ph. D. If we had heard- this one, this

one, she could've finished the Ph. D, but she stopped it. At that time you know, family growth also started coming so, because of all this things, she has to stop the Ph. D.

A So, she had a Master's Degree in India as a, as a woman. Wasn't that, was that rare? How did she get that?

K In India you know what happens, in India they want to educate everybody. That, that time, at that time, so this ladies were not encouraged to go to college. Not allowed this one. Somehow, my father-in-law is very much. He was a doctor, he wanted to educate all his children, regardless of what society say or anything. So, that's how you know, he educated her. She became a mathematician from Mysore University. Manasa Gangothri University there.

A How did you guys meet?

K Oh we, we met in some, my brother's marriage. Yeah.

A So it w-it was just the two of you when you came to America. What was her perception of when you, when you got the offer to come to America?

K Umm, no, everybody excited. So, we want to come here. So. (Pause)

A OK.

K I wha – I told her you know, if we go to America, you can do your Ph. D and I can go to college, and you know. BS and Master's so that was the...

A So you were working in the day here and?

K Yes. Yes working in the day, at night go to school. And our communicates- our traveling in the night is too much, from New Jersey to New York and I have to travel everyday. I have to take bus, I have to take train. I have to (laughs) take again bus to go home. We were living in a campus in uh Pratt Institute. When she was doing Master's in Mathmat- eh, Master's in computer science.

A Wha- what was it like after coming here, after the first few months, what was your perception of America, um here, when- after you'd come here versus what you'd thought about it back in India?

K No, we came here, after coming here, you know, we our goal was to see that uh how we will bring our family here, if we want to settle down here. And uh, that kind of a thing.

A Were you particularly, uh did you, would did you want your children to be born in this country? Was that a goal?

K Not it is just like a family thing, you know, so once you get married, you want to become parents. Nothing like uh anything else. We just started uh...our family started to be- growing, so it became family first or so.

A So you spent most of your life there in New Jersey and New York, right?

K That's right. New Jersey, mostly. You know?

A What was the, was the society like there? Was it welcoming to Indians? And was it?

K Yeah, yeah, sure because um. Once we came here you know, beca- all this communica- community, their own community. Like Gujrati community, Tamil community, Kannada community. They've got their own association. And there was a association like uh Kannada community. So, we joined there and we came in contact with a lot of our, uh other community- other Kannada people. So, we meet um sort of a society. We started getting together and uh you know, Kannada functions. Attending Kannada functions and all the festivals. Conducting festivals in the society.

A Yeah, ok

K So it was good good uh feeling. We feel lot of people there. Then uh, umm we brought our, we had our first child born in India, we left her there and we brought her to America. Then uh

A But when did, when was she born?

K I think she born in India, 19..60... 8 or something.

A Oh ok

K Yeah

A And she didn't come with you guys?

K No, no

A you, did she-

K Because we didn't know, how to manage, you know what to do.

A OK

K We got immigrants only for, immigration visa only for two, we applied for two. Then afterwards, we sponsored her, when she came

A What year did she come?

K Uhh she came um, 1969, four years, uhmm (pause) I think '73 or '74. 1974

A OK. And then, the rest of your children were born here? As American citizens.

K Yes, yes. Yes, as American, yeah.

A OK. Umm, what was, so the, you were still able to take place in lot of cultural...

K Yes, I used to

A ...activities?

K Back then I became umm uh president for the Kannada association in um uh New Jersey. They call it Trivani. Then I was president there. I used to get myself involved in lot of um activities. (pause) So then um my daughter, I put my daughter into dancing classes. And she used to learn Bharatnatyam (Karnatakan folk dance). Then she started um growing and also this one, we celebrated here Arangatrum (Bharatnatyam Dance Mastery/Graduation). And she did very well. So....(pause)

A Did your, did you change any cultural things, when you were in India, was, were you more active in

K No,

A some of these things?

K No, no, no, in India I was uh I was not doing anything there. No cultural program nothing. Yeah. Only coming here, so we are exposed you know? So that's how I came in contact with a lot of people and also became uh president, and I used to get involved in...myself with other association also. Tamil associations also.

A So that, there was like, what made you change that? What made you get more active in cultural roles?

K Somehow, I liked it. You now I want to get involved and move with people and come in contact with other people, like that. So that, that made me encouraged.

A So what did you need more Indian people

K Indian people, Indian- not only Indian, you know, this other people also. So we used to invite other American friends to our association. And get them also, you know, learn our culture. Like that.

A What was your, what-what-what did you think. Why did you think other people came to America, just like you did? So I imagine, a lot of people like you would meet at these societies would also be Indian people from the same areas.

K Actually, (laughs), even today people are in America and in India, they want to come to um foreign country especially for America. So America is a land of opportunity and people know that once they get in here, even any kind of visa, even student visa, H1 visa or anything, they can, they want to just come and land. And they can establish themselves afterwards. So that is the main reason that people want to come.

A Is did that,

K (sneezes) Excuse me

A Did that uh, that perception that you had when you left there, did, did it change in any way when you came here? Did you find any difficulty with that or did you still believe that that was the case and was it all exactly like you expected it to be?

K No, there was, there were no difficulty. So you know, once you, once you come here, you have to manage yourself. You're a grown up person and you have to learn in this one. So this is a new country. There is nobody to help. American system is like that you know, you have to be independent to do everything. So, that is how you know, we learnt our, um.... How to run this... in this country. So, somehow you know I just managed. And of course anybody who comes you know, for first few months, it will be difficult to establish. So afterwards, you know, you gradually do by yourself.

A So that's kind of uh morals and that's the kind of ideologies that that

K Yeah even people who come here they of course, [if] they have a problem, they panic and this one, they don't know where to go. They learnt lot of bad things about this country and uh there are good things also there and you know, gradually you have to put up with that. Even I now I see some girls, educated girls coming alone to this country take up a job. So, they are all doing fine.

A So, ok, what, tell me about what kind of education you got after coming here

K uhh I came here you know, I studied BS in civil engineering. Four years. Then I wanted to do um MS, at that time you know, nuclear power industry was growing fast here. They wanted lot of mechanical engineers. So I changed to mechanical engineering in MS. Um with these two degrees, I could do very well. So, I was the consultant for the nuclear power plant. Worked for PSE&G for eight and half years. Then you know, I moved to consulting companies. Big companies. Finally I joined uh, Metropolitan Transit Authority. As an engineer I joined there, I worked for 20 years. Then I just retired 2 and half years back...umm.... I am doing alright. (Laughs) Cannot say... cannot say anything bad. So, in the meantime my children grown up. They got married and they all got their own children. Uh they are all doing good.

A What, what's your view on Ameri- Americanization? Did you become more Americanized by coming here? Did that, did you find any difficulty with that?

K No, no. No, no, no. We didn't become Americanized, we still are Indian. And uh we follow our culture, and we get into American culture also. But you know, we, we never changed anything so we are living in America. So, we still follow our footstep of our this one. So we celebrate our festivities and we feel celebrate our cultural thing you know, like uh...remembering, you know, past people: like father, mother, we conduct ceremonies and other thing. We follow our Indian culture very well. No, no changing to American system. Here, I am still maintaining my complete vegetarian system. I never got into anything. So, I am a totaler, I don't drink, I don't um smoke, I don't eat meat, I don't (chuckles) do anything. So I am still following our own culture.⁶

A Did you want to, when you came here uhm, you miss India after coming here for a while?

K Yeah, naturally, sure. We miss our country, our people. I know, you see, they call it, you know, like kids going to school they call it. Away from home they feel the homeless- ho- home... homesickness like that we, we had few months for that kind of thinking about our Indian. But uh we never regretted it. We felt happy about this one, this place, you know, we got into good place.

A What, wha-what can you, you expand more about how you brought all your family members here and how they got established here and can you tell about me what that led to?

K Oh yeah, this, we ah, as they said earlier, America is the land of opportunity, so I called all our people. My brothers came and uh as you know, as we, beginning we had some difficulties. Then you know, gradually you know the system, you get into the job. So, I called my eldest brother. He was a civil engineer. So initially may not get the job, right job, so he has to work for odd jobs. Then he very well established gradually afterwards. My second brother also. He came, he is a mechanical person. He came here, he got a good job in the beginning itself. So, like that, everybody who came here, so for, um, I accommodated them. So, they were staying with him. So gradually I, there was that guidance available. I was there to guide them. So everything went alright to everybody.

A And all, all of them, they established themselves in New Jersey and New York?

K Mostly. Mostly because, I was there you know then, that is what happens. So initially wherever you are there, you know try to establish there. So, everybody mostly is in New Jersey, yeah.

A And eventually, a lot of us now live in DC, we live in Maryland

K Yes, you see now, you know, uh scattered now. All my children this, is scattered. Mostly my, my children, two children are in...settled in Maryland. My other one in New Jersey. So all of my relatives, my brothers' children and everybody settled in, mostly in Maryland.

A Why do you think they came they came to Maryland? And why did you come to Maryland?

K No, there, the reason is, um you know, this first job. So my son after graduating, (laughs) after getting MD degree he got an offer in MD, eh Maryland. So you know he started working here. Then he knows the system there. Then he quit, he started his own company. So naturally like that you know, he established very well.

A Would you still take pla- take part in of those cultural societies and activities around here?

K Uh no, no not uh I don't think so. I may not be wheeled person but, you know? If there is any program, we attend.

A So, tell me more about um about your life in Maryland now? How does that compare to what it was in New Jersey?

K Maryland, I just uh I just um, my son wanted me to, I we wanted to move to our own house in Maryland because my children are here. But then my son said he is building a house. So he wants me to accommodate with him. So we just um moved to my son's place now. Because uh I am not uh keeping good health, so you know? So they want to take care of, my daughter is the doctor and my son is doctor. They say that they can take care of me. So live with them. So, and now presently I am living with my son.

A And you brother also lives right here in Maryland? His children are also here?

K Yes, yes. My brother though he is not here, his children are all established here. Are two daughters and one son. So, they're in uh so Maryland. But uh now, second daughter moved to New Jersey now. So just because her husband there, and she has got job in New York.

A What about your other, other brother?

K Other brother, children also here in, in Maryland. One is in uh, uh Florida, daughter. And another son is here

A Where I- what makes you think, why everybody collected here in Maryland even though it started out in New Jersey?

K (Laughs) It's not like that, it is not our choice. It is just you know, first job, so they got a job, like my son, he got a job from one of his friend, in Maryland, so he established here. My, my son-in-law, he studied in uh, what is that, (pause), he finished his MS in, uhh what is that- [mumbling] – which hospital is he studied in...?

A Maryland? University of Maryland?

K No, no no here, in uh.... Big hospital is here you know ...in Maryland, so where is that... in Baltimore what is that hospital?

A Baltimore General?

K Yeah, some there, you know, he got some um education, so he, he just started um finishing that. Then he got a job in Maryland, so he established there.

A So it's just circumstance then that you all settled ?

K Yes, circumstance, that's all, no our choice. First, first job and then they didn't want to change it. Job.

A Do you miss anything about back then, when it was just you guys coming up and living in New Jersey and working in the, in, in the Metropolitan areas over there?

K No. But, you know, things are a little different here. Because things, shops and other things, are all away from home. Whereas in New Jersey and New York everything is so close. So that is the only, only a lot of temples and other things, you know in New Jersey. And here it is a little away. So, that is only thing, we miss, that's all, that's it, have everything

A Uh, what wa- Tell me about your retirement and after your post working, post-career life

K Yeah you know, retirement of course, retire- after retirement um We, we never felt back, back you know? 'Oh I should not have retired' or anything. Everything move good, I do it sometimes when I don't know the date, (laughs) what date and what time, you know? So things are working out good. So we're enjoying retirement.

A OK um hmm (pause) Let's see, we still have some time, we can talk about some other things. Uhhmm (long pause)

A So, did you know much about America when you were a, still a child?

K No, I did not know. I had just heard,

A You had just heard

K Heard, and some of my friend's relatives were in America. We used to, they used to visit India at that time, you know. We used to see them and enjoy.

A What do you think, what did, what were your hopes for the future, if you hadn't been able to come to America?

K If I had not come to America? I would have...spent my life in (laughs) India that's all . Like any other person. Probably I would have worked and retired earlier than this place.

A So eventually, you brought your, your mother also came and stayed here for a while

K Yeah, yeah, my mother came with me and uh ... um ...everything went good. She started collect- she , [Indian] government started paying her money and everything so. Good good.

A So, in India what was she doing? She was still working, when you were also when you were uh you and your brothers were working in India?

K No, she was not ... she was not working means, she was not taken up any job. She was you know, working in the house, relatives house that's all.

A So, what was that, what- what I am trying to ask is like, what was it like after the revolution and everything, for the two decades after Indian revolution that you were still there and you were uh trying to work was it like. What was the climate in India, what the atmosphere of being an independent country and how was that affecting your life there?

K Ah life of course it doesn't matter to us, independent or, individual person like us. You know, overall it might affect the system. Umm so much, you know, red tape, and that kind of a thing. So if things are not moving fast. So, now things are a little bit better that what I was, uh, when I was young. So it is getting better. India is getting better. Because of the new government. That change is still there.

A So was there no- there wasn't any um fa- family ties like freedom fighters, or any particular reasons to like go, no world war times. Or just revolution war times

K No, nobody, nobody, we know, nobody was there in our family.

A So the immediate family was not so concerned with it

K No, no.

A Was there anything else you want to talk to me about? Any other stories or anything you remember? (Pause)

K No, our children life and ch- child, you know after, you know, my father passed away, so it was tough for my mother to ... take care of us. It, it is OK. Somehow things were worked out good.

A So, we covered a lot of topics in this interview, did you want to talk, or tell me anything more about those things or? Anything you that you wanted to let me know, or audience listen to?

K No, no my sincere this one is that, you know, if you really work hard you will gain you know whatever you want to do it. So only you have to determine what you want to do. Uhh you have to have a positive attitude for everything. Cannot have negative.

A OK, thank you. So, this is once again, Ajay Mysore interviewing Ramchandra Rao. Signing off

K OK, thank you Ajay.

Time ends (52:31)

Appendix I – Contextual Notes

1. Kaakaaji loosely means Great uncle in Kannada which is the language that he and I speak. It is the state language in Karnataka where we are from.
2. Ramchandra is referring to the preference system dictated by the Hart-Cellar Act. It ranks which requests for immigration visas get granted and in what order. The law prioritized reuniting families as 1st preference and the bringing in of professional workers as 6th preference.
3. Actual insurance company now known as MetLife.
4. He is referring to industrial belts for machines that he had worked on at the company.
5. I think he was more frightened by the British because he grew up during the war for Independence and was swayed propaganda.
6. "Teetotaler" - British term for a person who does not drink alcohol

Appendix II – India Map



Madhugiri

Bangalore

Asansol/Asansar