

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

Narrator: Santosh Wahi
Date: November 20, 2007
Interviewed By: Amy Bhatt
Place: Seattle, WA

Amy Bhatt: So this is Amy Bhatt and I'm here with Mrs. Santosh Wahi on November 20, [2007] at the University of Washington Libraries. Mrs. Wahi, do you consent to this interview?

Santosh Wahi: Yes.

AB: Thank you so much for joining us today. So I was wondering if you could start by telling me where and when you were born.

SW: I was born in the [19]40's and I was born in India. My parents are from Lahore, which is now Pakistan. What else can I say on that? The basic...the language spoken at home was Punjabi. But we go between Hindi and Punjabi at home.

AB: Was your family in Lahore for a while prior to your birth?

SW: Yes, my parents, my grandparents were from Lahore.

AB: And what sort of work did your parents do?

SW: My mom was a homemaker. And my dad worked with the diplomatic core of the Indian Foreign Service. As with the Foreign Service, you travel a lot, which he did. And we, when I was...do you want me to just continue on?

AB: Yes.

SW: Okay. By age...before I was eight, my dad was transferred to The Hague, Holland. We spent four years there. I went to the Dutch school for the first year. And then I went to the English for the second year. And my third and fourth years were at a French convent.

AB: And what was that like for you, moving at such a young age to another country?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: You know, as a child, you think it's the norm. There's nothing different. And it's as if, you know, you were moving from, within the city even, moving from one place to another place. And it didn't make much of a difference, nor did I think it was unusual. Which is also...the English school and the French school, they were basically mainly for the children of the diplomats. So, we were all from different countries, so we didn't see any difference.

AB: Who else was in your family?

SW: My younger sister. And then I have twin brothers.

AB: And are you the oldest?

SW: I am the eldest.

AB: So were they born by the time you had moved to Holland?

SW: My brothers were just infants I think. They were just a few months old when we moved.

AB: It must have been a lot for your mother!

SW: Um, yes. It certainly was. But fortunately we had very good help in Holland. This person who was working, our housekeeper, she was just the most wonderful, wonderful person. Took good care of all us, I mean, the four of us. And my mom had to, as you know with diplomats, they have a lot of parties to go to and a lot of entertaining at the same time. But this lady, Nina, just took very good care of us. And then in the evenings, her mother would also come when my parents had to go out. So it was...it's wasn't. It was and it wasn't. I don't know, I can't speak for my mother. But I think it wasn't very difficult to have us four. So it was very nice to have, I think twins are a wonderful thing. They're so good for one another.

AB: I'll bet! You have a built-in friend.

SW: Absolutely. Yes, a built-in friend and they entertain themselves. So yeah.

AB: So were you very close to your siblings?

SW: I was. Yes.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: And so how long were you in Holland for all together?

SW: Four years.

AB: Four years. And then after that, where did your family move?

SW: We came back to India. And then within a year, my dad was transferred to Pakistan. And he was there, but then since the education for the children does get disrupted. So my mom stayed back with us in Delhi. And my dad was in Lahore. And he would come every month. Then we would go on holidays every time there was a vacation, there was a chance, we would go. Summers we spent in Lahore, with my dad. He came back. And then a year later, he went to...where did he go? He went to Ethiopia. And by then, I was about to graduate from high school. And then my younger three siblings, they did go with my mom and dad to Ethiopia. I stayed back and I went to college in Pilani, India. And then when my dad came back, I had finished my undergrad and I started my graduate school there. Um, my grad school was in Chemistry. I did my Master's in Organic Chemistry as well as in Biochemistry. By then, my dad was transferred to the United States with the United Nations in New York.

AB: And while your father was in Ethiopia, did you get a chance to visit?

SW: I was going to go, but then suddenly, there were so many air crashes. Just that summer. And my mom said, "We'll just forgo your ticket. Don't even bother coming." I don't know why, when these air crashes happen, they happen in succession, several of them. So I did not go.

AB: So while you stayed back in, for college, did you live at school?

SW: Yes, Pilani is the, is a college where there's nothing but the school. And it's away from Delhi. It's about a hundred and ten miles. And there's nothing but the campus there. It's right in the desert.

AB: What was that like?

SW: We didn't see anything different as students. It was, the whole place was...you didn't really see the desert. It was all well...there was a lot of agriculture in there. I don't know how they did it. But I don't know if you

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

know, Birla, the great industrialist, was actually born in the village of Pilani. And then he had this academic school. Even high schools, little elementary schools, and then there were these colleges. These were the, it's actually called the Birla Institute of Technology and Institute of Sciences. It's a beautiful campus.

AB: And how did you like living in the dormitories?

SW: As you know, the first year anywhere is fun. Second-third year, it was okay. But then it gets to be a little too much, when there's nothing else to do but being in school. So then grad school is a lot of work. And especially with Chemistry, one has to be even more in the lab than even in your theory classes. So that took a lot of our time, or my time. So, you didn't miss too much, but you somewhat did a little. Also, since my parents and family were not in India, it was okay. And there were students who came from South India. Well, there were students from all over India, but the ones that were from the south, didn't necessarily always go back for every little holiday. So I stayed back with those students. It was fun. It was nice.

AB: Do you still keep up with anybody from those days?

SW: Um, yes I do. Yes. Um, I have a couple...in grad school, we were thirteen students in the entire Chemistry department. It's a small school. Thirteen students of which 12 were boys and one poor me. [Laughs].

AB: Oh my goodness. What was that like?

SW: Um, a little hard. I really think it was hard. And at that time and also Pilani was sort of conservative. And our head of the Chemistry department was ultra-conservative. That made it a little hard.

AB: Was that unusual for you to be taking Chemistry at that point in time?

SW: I don't know. I just thought that's what it was. What was maybe...initially, I really wanted to go to [medical] school. And right after my first year of college, after you can apply for med school. Which I did and I was going to. But then I got a letter from my dad saying, "You know, I see some of my colleagues and their children who have gone into this profession. Their daughters have no lives at all. I really wish you wouldn't and have a normal life instead." As a child, being the daughter of a Foreign Service person, it's

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

not really a normal life. You're constantly [moving]; you don't have that stability. So I think that sort of was important to them. And he very much discouraged me. So, then the next thing that I, the next subject that I really liked was Chemistry. That was really my choice, to go into Chemistry. It's fascinating. Everything is Chemistry, really.

AB: That's true. It's very applicable.

SW: Yeah.

AB: So while you were in school, you took your Master's at the same college as well?

SW: Yes. I stayed there.

AB: And so were you involved with any organizations or activities?

SW: Yeah, there were many activities. And also since I did not...go away for the holidays, there were a lot things that were happening and I would be part of it. Yeah, I was the president. Now there would be two presidents: one from the Institute and one from the boys and one from the girls. And for a couple of years, I was [for the girls].

AB: What was that like?

SW: You know in the entire Institute, we were only 50 girls, I think. Not very many. That included the undergrads and the grads that were in the dorms. There were a few that were day scholars, whose parents were either professors or who worked there. Otherwise there was no reason for anyone to be there.

AB: Right. Did you have to campaign when you ran?

SW: Nah. Not really, I didn't. Yeah. Well then, see, since there's no...Pilani's not really a town, it's just a village. And there aren't very many locals that were going to the Institute because it wasn't easy to...even now. It wasn't easy to get into the Institute. It's called the BITS. Birla Institute of Technology and Sciences. I do know someone who applied at Columbia in the United States. Columbia and some other universities, NYU and so forth

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

and applied at the BITS. Did not get in BITS, but got in Columbia. So that tells you where we stand.

AB: Very prestigious.

SW: Well, it's a small school. But it's done very well. Yeah, after, during the time I was in grad school, they opened up the Electronics Department to students, to female students. And that's when we started getting a lot of students in engineering as well. That's female students.

AB: Did you experience any difference than the way that your male colleagues might have experienced their education?

SW: Probably. In one respect yes. They could go to the lab anytime of day and night. I did have restrictions because you could...you had to be back by a certain time at the dorm. That's where there was a problem. And then also they could sit and study a lot together, if they wanted to. I did have some restriction in that sense. I don't know whether it...it wasn't really self-imposed. But, it was, you know, it was--you knew that it was expected of you to keep that distance.

AB: Right.

SW: Unfortunately.

AB: [Laughs]. So did you go back to Lahore at all to visit your extended family? Were they still there?

SW: No, no. After the Partition, no body was there. They all moved to India.

AB: And where did they settle?

SW: Most of my uncles and aunts were in Delhi. And in the Punjab area.

AB: And so while your parents were out of the country, did you see them very often?

SW: When I was in India and they were there?

AB: Yeah.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: Yes. Yes, I did. I did go and stay with my aunts and uncles and my grandparents.

AB: Were you particularly close to any of those family members?

SW: Yes. I was quite close to an aunt, who's my mom's younger sister.

AB: So that makes it easier at least!

SW: Oh yeah, yeah. They would have liked me to come every holiday, but it felt easier to be, just be back where I was.

AB: Right. So then after you finished your Master's, what did you do next?

SW: Then, by that time, my dad was in New York. And then after I [finished], he was already in New York. Then I finished college there, I came to New York. And I did go to grad school here. I did go to Hunter College and NYU. Took a lot of graduate math classes. And I did...I did eventually go to the New York Medical School [laughs].

AB: Oh!

SW: For some graduate classes, which were in enzyme studies. And at the same time, I was working--I did work at the Rockefeller University in their research department.

AB: So where did you live in New York at this time?

SW: We were living in Queens.

AB: And how did you find the move to New York?

SW: Interestingly, I went from academics to academics. So, it was again, school-school. And since my childhood, it was always moving back and forth, here and there. It didn't...it was very, it felt normal. It wasn't anything that, "oh, out of my comfort zone to another place." I was just fine.

AB: Around what year was this?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: This was in the [19]60's. [19]66? [19]67? [19]68. No, I'll go back. Sorry. [19]67 I think.

AB: [19]67. Okay.

SW: And then I was working toward my PhD, which I was doing in natural products, the enzymes and so forth. But part way through, my heart was into synthetic chemistry. So I decided that I'd go back to India. By then, both my parents had moved back to India. And I decided that I should get away from the situation to clear my head and see if I really wanted to make a change. Because it is quite a change--you come so far and then you want to backtrack. And the reason I did, was [that] it's no sense in getting your PhD in something that your heart wasn't completely in it. And once you have that label, you are labeled as that high point.

I went back [to India] and stayed back for a while. And then I met my present husband. And then it was sort of an arranged, to an extent, an arranged meeting. Not an arranged marriage, so to say. My mom and dad had met my husband's parents before. And then they had...and then my mom's classmate's son—this was a good friend of her husband's. So they knew I'd be coming back to India. They contacted my parents and said Pran's coming to India. Why don't you have them meet? So, we met.

AB: What was that first meeting like?

SW: You know, interestingly, when my father introduced him to me, he says, "You know, here is Pran and he, um, just finished his PhD at Yale. And he did it in two years." I was floored. You know, to start out with school. And then do it in two years! You know, that sparked a lot of interest.

AB: Pretty impressive.

SW: Yeah, yeah. So, that was it.

AB: What was his degree in?

SW: Operations Research.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: So, going back a little bit before we start talking about your married life. You said that you arrived in the middle of the [19]60's to New York City. What was New York City like at that point?

SW: Hmm...compared to now when I go back, it was different. It wasn't all that busy. It wasn't all, you see so many people now. It's so crowded. You could drive around then. Now, driving is very difficult. Difficult in the sense that it takes forever to get from one place to another. And I think crime was not that prevalent. I used to go out every morning. I would take the train, the subway, which was a wonderful thing. I think that was, that's really saved New York. Otherwise it would have just been a total mess.

AB: Absolutely.

SW: Have you lived in New York?

AB: I'm from Philadelphia, so I've spent a lot of time there.

SW: Okay. Yeah, yeah. I did go to school there and I also did work, as I said.

AB: So what did you think of the culture, of the American culture at that time?

SW: Um...you know, it would've made a lot of impact on a person who wasn't exposed to different cultures. I wasn't, I wasn't suddenly surprised. That was probably the difference. You took a break. You were in this country for a while. You were in that country for a while. And then you were in India for a while. I don't think it had that [sort of] impact that it would've had on people who are coming first time out of one country to another.

AB: Was there anything that you liked in particular?

SW: Yes. The first thing...I do remember writing back to my friends: Manhattan is built on a grid. All you needed was to know was the address and you know exactly where that place is. That was the most impressive thing, to me. It was getting from one place to another was, that wasn't difficult. I never felt lost. And I think that is one big security. Otherwise, one does feel insecure not knowing where you are going and how to get to where. There was no Mapquest at the time.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: So in the midst of the [19]60's, um, there were many social movements happening in the [United] States. Were you aware of the Civil Rights Movement or the Women's Movement or anything like that?

SW: Uh, yes. There was the Civil Rights Movement. There was the Women's Rights. The other thing that did, um, affect me, was the shootings. There were a lot of shootings in campuses. There was Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy. JFK had been shot, of course, not that long ago before I came. And you heard so much of that. That was painful. The Vietnam War. The marches. The draft. My class fellows here, their siblings dying in war. It, it was painful. It was. I remember at the New York Medical School, where I was sitting in classes. One of my class fellows who used to be sitting across from me generally, I could see that he could not concentrate. It was affecting him so much. That was his only sibling. And a lot of others. It would happen every now and then, you heard of casualties. It was painful. Yes.

AB: Were you involved with any of those movements?

SW: No, I was not. No. See, the thing is when you are a dependent of a diplomat, you do stay away from all these things. Also, to let you know, because of having been with the Foreign Service, being the child of a Foreign Service officer, we were always aware that you, you're, you put your best foot forward and portray yourself as an Indian. You stuck out sort of. I always wore--I did not wear the Western clothes at the time. No. I always did wear either salwaar kameez or a sari. Even when I was going to school, I did. And probably if I wasn't my dad's daughter, I would [have] immediately shifted to Western clothes, which were easier. Because New York snows. New York rains. New York, running in subways, it would have been easier. But, that certainly was something that I was very aware of. And [I] made sure that I portrayed myself well.

AB: Do you think that people at that time had a sense of what India was like in America?

SW: I don't really know. I wasn't very involved in trying to find out what they thought. But I was more involved in telling what I, what, mostly the good things.

AB: Did you get [asked] a lot of questions?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: Yes and no. The thing is, since I was a lot with the academic circles, they're not that, they're not so ignorant. If I was probably with the working class, maybe. I did miss out on that. When you do ask about if I was, if I felt New York was very different from what I was used to, I will give you once incident, which...and I have narrated that several times and I still will. One day on my way to school...I don't know if I've already told you this. I was going with a friend of mine very close to Hunter College. I remember I was going to a class at Hunter. There were two guys talking as we were heading forward. They were talking, and they were...I don't know, they were arguing or whatever. One guy pushed the other. They were standing on the pavement as we were passing by. I would normally have, you know, I could see him as he was falling, going to fall on the pavement. And normally what my intention would have been to stop his fall. But as we got closer. Of course, it was very close. It was just a split second. This friend of mine, Joan. She said to me, "Do not even look at this. Just walk." And she saw, you know, she saw my hand ready to move out and she pulled me off. And she said, "No, don't do anything. Just walk." Just two steps, just one step ahead, and I heard a thud on the pavement.

To this day, it's been, I don't know, more than 30 years. I can still hear that in my head. I felt very guilty and I still do feel guilty. And she told me, "Don't even turn around. Just walk." After we'd gone a block, I stopped her and said, "Why did you do this to me? I feel very bad." And she said, "No you do not ever, ever want to get involved with these things." Which was very different from my culture, or what I would have done normally. If I was alone, I certainly would have stopped. And I may have gotten involved. I may have gotten hurt. And I would have gotten involved. Who knows what? But at that the same time, that guilt still stays with me.

AB: Yeah. That is a difference.

SW: Yeah. That's what it was. Then when we would go back to India, even now, even until recently, when my children were in school. People would ask us in India, "How do you let your children go to school? There's too much crime. There's so much shooting around." But, you know, it's the bad things that one hears in other countries about another place. Just like, you know, here in the United States. All we hear probably what is not normal. The bad things. The good things, yes, that's normal so we don't talk about it.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: Yeah, that's very true. How did you find the people in New York?

SW: In New York? Self-centered. People...we did not know our next door neighbor really. For overt purposes, yes you know who they are, but not, you did not [know them well]. Nobody has the time there. Not only, this was when you were coming back from school or you, people were going to get off the subway. The hand would go in the pocket to get the keys out. The key is out even before you're getting off the subway. You're going to go up the steps, go out onto the street, and your house is right at the stairs. Bu they were so rushed for everything. Everything is done ahead of time. No one could beat them in the category of stress.

AB: It certainly doesn't help!

SW: No, and it's wanting to be a step ahead of yourself. Wanting to get this done and get that done. And keep your key ready. Yeah.

AB: So you lived with your parents at this time.

SW: Yes I did.

AB: So were you able to maintain any customs from India, such as cooking Indian food?

SW: Since I was going to school a lot, or I was working in the labs. During the time that both my parents were here, mostly my mom did. But, of course, I did help.

AB: How was it for her to find spices and ingredients at that time?

SW: Not very easy. But fortunately, we, the embassy was very helpful. You could get all your...you know, we didn't even have to send our mail to India through the U.S. postal service. We had our own, what they call it? Bag, that went with the, I don't know if it was Air India or what. But there was, somehow they did it, so that it all went together. Whatever you wanted to send and so forth.

AB: Sounds helpful!

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: Yeah, no postage needed.

AB: So did you live in Embassy housing?

SW: Well, the Embassy did provide us with a place, yes.

AB: And your sister and brothers were there as well?

SW: Yes, they were going to school.

AB: And how was that for them?

SW: My brothers were in Junior High at the time. It was very different. They had been also traveling also; they went to Addis--to Ethiopia and everywhere. So it was traveling for them too. They fit in. The thing certainly is that the Indian standard is much higher than the U.S. standard. So that was easy. Just to let you know, when my dad was ready to be transferred back to Delhi and my brothers, when they would finish school, they were going to go back to India with them. And they would, and when they applied to go to college in India, the Indian universities did not recognize high school from the United States. So they would have had to repeat high school. And that, that wasn't going to be good. Since I was in grad school and I was staying back, they stayed back with me. So then it was the three of us. And also my sister was finishing college. She stayed back. So she did her undergrad here and then went back to India.

AB: So then, um, where did you live after your parents had gone back, with your siblings?

SW: We rented a place. We rented an apartment.

AB: The four of you?

SW: The four of us.

AB: What was that like?

SW: Not bad. I was here only for a year, and then I went back. And then I got married and then I came with my husband to Boston. I did not move back to New York.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: Okay. But your siblings stayed on?

SW: My siblings did. And then when my sister finished her bachelor's, she went back to India. My brothers stayed on.

AB: Did you feel like you had to run that household while you were there?

SW: No, we were...well, I don't know. We were all kind of equals at the time. And we did things together.

AB: So then, after you had met your husband, when did you get married?

SW: 1970.

AB: And what sort of wedding was it?

SW: It was a traditional Indian wedding in Delhi.

AB: And was your family able to attend?

SW: Oh yes. My parents were already in India. My brothers did come. My sister could not come. She was in New York.

AB: Was it very large?

SW: Yes, unfortunately. [Laughs].

AB: [Laughs]. So then, after that, when did you decide to come back to the States?

SW: Oh, shortly, right after the wedding. We went to Kashmir for the honeymoon and then came back. Came here. We got married on the 12th and we were here by the end of the month.

AB: Wow. What time of year was that?

SW: July.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: In July. And so what were your initial impressions of Boston once you first arrived?

SW: Boston, compared to New York, was sloooow. I really felt that it was really slow. And life was different. I came and I did not pursue...I did not go into school after that. Well, marriage is an adjustment to start out. And then I couldn't, I didn't want to put another stress and be gone for...my professor was in Ann Arbor, who I would have probably liked to have worked with. And I did not see myself, you know, going away and making the adjustment harder. So I stayed on and I did work at Harvard in the research [department].

AB: In their Chemistry department?

SW: Yes, indeed.

AB: And how did you find that...

SW: I'd say more, it was like Harvard Medical School, connected with Children's. And they were working on the synovial fluid, which is the fluid that is in the knees. You know, the lubricating fluid, which, when it dries up then we have problems with our movement. It was in its initial stages of research. Which eventually, what we were doing was studying the chemistry of it and eventually the application would be to synthesize it.

AB: Must have been pretty interesting work.

SW: It was. It was very interesting. And then we left Boston.

AB: And what was your husband doing at this time?

SW: He was working at IMB.

AB: And so was there anything that was surprising to you about your early married life? Anything that you didn't expect?

SW: Um, yeah. It, you know, right away from being a student to being a wife. I think I worked hard at...at trying to be, taking care of the house and cooking. My husband's a very easy person. Didn't mind the way

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

I....whatever I presented to him. [Laughs]. And then I did go into working myself, so. Then we came to Seattle after three years.

AB: What year was that?

SW: In [19]73.

AB: [19]73. And what brought you out to Seattle?

SW: Boeing. And my husband's brother was working here. And he had some friends here who, you know, wanted him to come here. And Boeing was a good move.

AB: Did you visit before making the move?

SW: Uh, yes. After we got married and when we were coming to the United States, we came by the West Coast. We went to stop in Japan. There was the World's Fair. And then came through Seattle. My husband's brothers were here; two of his brothers.

AB: And how did you actually move across the country? Did you drive?

SW: No, we flew. Boeing is very good about moving their employees. Even our car got put in a truck and brought here [laughs].

AB: That makes it a lot easier!

SW: Yeah.

AB: So where did you live when you first arrived?

SW: When we came here, we, my husband's brother was living here in the U-district. So we came and lived in a hotel here in the U-district. I don't even remember the name of it now. It's on 45th --the corner of 45th and Brooklyn.

AB: Oh yeah, I've seen it.

SW: You know that tall tower?

AB: Yeah, there's a nightclub underneath it now.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: And now I find out that it's my daughter's very good friend's husband's...he's the owner. They own that place.

AB: Wow! So how long...

SW: It's very interesting.

AB: It is!

SW: It was owned by her grandfather, and then...

AB: Oh my goodness. So how long did you live there?

SW: We lived there for I think a couple of weeks. And then we did want to buy a house. I think a little more, I don't remember now. Then with the real estate agent, we...since I didn't know much about Seattle, I had a real estate agent drive me around everywhere to see the neighborhoods to see which I liked. And water is really fascinating. So, I wanted to concentrate on Mercer Island. And then of course if we were going to live on Mercer Island, I wanted a house that had a view of the water. And so we rented a place on Mercer Island in July...no, I would say June. June-July. By the end of July, I had found a place, a house. And we got the place and are still living in that house.

AB: And you've been there ever since then?

SW: Yup.

AB: So what were your initial impressions of Seattle, having come from the East coast now?

SW: Another step down from Boston. Quiet. More civilized. The first year wasn't easy because I wasn't used to this gray weather all the time. But then I was quite busy. Initial time was looking for a house. And then once you have the house, um, then that's we decided, we planned on having Charu [older daughter]. So that kept me busy. Yeah. So after that, it was fine. After the first year, it was okay.

AB: But that first year was a little tough?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: Yeah. Yeah, when Charu was born, shortly, a few months later, my husband was working in Alaska, through Boeing. So he would be gone for the week and come home only on weekends. Or sometimes two weeks and then come home for the weekend. So that was hard, with the baby, not [being] used to that.

AB: And what year was Charu born?

SW: Charu was born in [19]74.

AB: And so he was gone for a year...

SW: Year and a half!

AB: Year and a half doing that [work]?

SW: And not realizing, a house can be a lot of work. And we have a big yard. It's on a half acre. And suddenly everything started to grow, tall and big, and needed care. So that was a little hard.

AB: Did you have any friends at that time that you could rely on?

SW: Yes, we did. We had...since, you know, my brothers-in-law were here. And my husband had been coming here. Yes, we had good friends here. Yes.

AB: And so were you able to use their support a little bit?

SW: Yes. Yes we did.

AB: And so after Charu was born, how did you find that adjustment of becoming a mother for the first time?

SW: Fortunately, a friend of mine, even when I was pregnant with Charu. I met the person who lived maybe four or five blocks from us. And I guess she liked children. She had the background of the Ayurvedic_medicine. And as soon as Charu was born...now, Charu was born 9 lbs, 2 ounces. A big baby. So that was easier. Before Charu, I don't think I had even really carried or picked up a little baby. I was very scared. This friend of mine,

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

she took over. She had two children who, one was in kindergarten and the other was in school all day. The kindergarten child would go to school mid-morning. So she would come over, give Charu a full massage, give her a bath. And she did that for a couple of months, every single day. By then, it was easier to take care of Charu.

AB: I bet it helped!

SW: Oh, a lot. And then they were very good friends with younger, with two of her children. And both the husband and wife were really a great help to Charu and us.

AB: Did you find yourself lonely at all at that time?

SW: No. I never found myself lonely. No.

AB: And so then when was your second daughter born?

SW: Anshu was born in 1980. August 15th.

AB: India's Independence Day!

SW: Absolutely. She won't forget that. Or she won't let anyone forget that.

AB: And so, did you find that it was different to raise a family in the U.S. than the experiences you had had growing up?

SW: Again, my experience was not a typical one. As I said, when my brothers were born, they were, you know we had, we had housekeepers all along. And by the time they were old enough, they were on their own and I never had to do anything. So I don't really know how it would be. And my mom, as a mom, if I compare her to me, to myself, in that situation. Certainly, she had us. She had four of us. But then she had a lot of help. And not to minimize her responsibilities; certainly, she had a lot of responsibilities, to care and see that everything was just right. I think it was different in that sense. Yes, we had the children all to ourselves. Whatever was to be done for them was done by us. When my husband would come home from work, they were his. And he would to put them bed every night. Read to them. He would lie down with them in bed until they fell asleep and then come out.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: So he help a lot?

SW: That way, yes. I think nowadays when they say that children don't get read, I find that a little strange. Because they couldn't have been any other way. He would take care of them in the sense that they were [together for] the play-time. The reading time. They were playing rhymes, doing rhymes and all kind of fun things they used to do together.

AB: So at this time, were you working outside of the home?

SW: No, I wasn't. I did not go to work at all. In Seattle, no I did not. And then when they were in school, I was quite a bit...I took quite an active part in schools. First, initially volunteering here and there, and everywhere sort of. And then with the PTA [parent-teacher association], and then I did chair quite a few activities that the children did. Then, even after Anshu graduated from high school, I still was involved with the school system. During that period, yes, I did give a lot of talks in schools about India. It just started by, I was asked once to come over and tell the kids, when they were still in the elementary school, about India. That just went on until high school. Not only was it in the Mercer Island school district, but I did talk about India in various other school districts and private schools. Oh, from Everett to where now? To Tacoma. Very recently, I did, oh my gosh...I don't even know. I do know it's about 200-150 miles from here. It a little school in a little place.

AB: So what sorts of topics would you cover?

SW: Mostly about India things that people would not know about or are ignorant about. The reason started doing was, I'll answer your question, the reason I started doing that was I did see some ignorance and I did notice unless I or people who knew about India could dispel that myth, 'so-called' about India. No one was going to go and make the effort and look for it and find out. They may, but that would take time, for lack of a better word. We, now I'm talking as an Indian. We have to market ourselves, sell ourselves, or else the world is not going to know about us.

So the topics that I did cover were about the civilization that is so old, so ancient and so knowledgeable, so educated, and has contributed to the world to great lengths. And we Indians are not known to market ourselves. Therefore, a lot of inventions, a lot of research, stuff that was done, in India,

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

to this day is not known. It has come from India, gone into the Middle East. And from Middle East to the Greeks. And then the Greeks into the West. It was traveled west. And by the time it reached the West, it was forgotten where the source was.

For instance, giving you the example of the Arabic numeral system. Interestingly, it's called the Arabic numeral system, but it's not. The Arabs got it from India, the numbering system. And the Arabs called it "Hindu-stat." Meaning "the art of the Hindus." They call it Hindu-stat. But when it went further west, it was called the Arabic numeral system because they thought it was coming from the Arabs. And everything else. The old civilizations, Mohenjodaro and Harappan, which have been excavated. They're about almost 5,000 years old. You can see so much there. The cities, most of the cities, were planned on a grid. Meaning, they knew how to plan cities. They had underground sewer systems, which, to this day, even in very, so-called civilized countries, not every place has underground sewer systems. They had underground sewer system, which went into from each house and then went into a central system. And then there were glazed tiles. They weren't using porous tiles there.

And also in the Mohenjodaro, there's a big swimming pool. The tank, so-called. To this day, if you fill that tank up with water, the swimming pool, there's no leak. So it's about almost 5,000 years old. The bricks. The houses were made of bricks. The bricks were baked, totally baked, because to say they had that technology. They had tubs. They had, I don't know, jewelry. They had the artist culture. They had the art of art. They knew, now going back to the Indian civilization, let me go. I can talk to you about every subject. Start from astronomy. They knew [about it]. Agriculture: they had all these equipment.

Then you go into medicine, for instance. Ayurveda. Herbal medicines. They knew about surgery. There are surgical instruments that were, the forceps and the tweezers, were fashioned by looking at the beaks of birds. Because not all flowers are, not all beaks are equipped for all kind of flowers, to get their nectar. And when they studied the beaks, from there they, they structured their tweezers and forceps and their instruments as to how to go to into the body, and how and where to get what they needed to get. Medicine--wonderful at that. Surgery, yes, as I've told you.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

Uh, drugs. They knew a lot about herbal drugs. And of course, all our present-day synthetic drugs are fashioned after the natural-occurring medicines and drugs from plants. Now, not going far, turmeric was used extensively as an antiseptic. Even to this day, even when there is no so-called antibiotics. Synthetic antibiotics. To this even, I'm sure, in everyday families, they'll heat up a little bit of oil and they'll put turmeric and apply that to a cut or bruise. Not a bruise, wherever there's a cut, where there is blood. The reason they used oil was because the active ingredient of turmeric, the anti-biotic, is fat-soluble. And they knew that at the time.

The neem tree: extensively, the twigs were used as brushes. They would take a small twig and it was chewed in the mouth. And the anti-bacterial component would be released and the mouth automatically was taken care of bacteria. And then the brush that was formed was used to brush the teeth. So it was all, they knew. They really did know a lot about these things.

Now, another topic: mathematics. Gosh, no end to that. Everything. I think I don't even want to touch that. Because everything that I can think of, whatever we touch, there is, the Indian brain has tackled it and brought it forth. The computers. The computer wouldn't have been a computer, as simple, if it wasn't for that bit, the one and the zero that they use. Um, the Pythagoras Theorem. That was proven in 600 B.C. Whereas Pythagoras gets the credit, who did it in 600 A.D. But no [one knows the] name of the Aryabhata and Ramanujan who did it. A lot of other stuff in mathematics--trigonometry, algebra--all was known, all over. And this is a whole, whole topic by itself. Ramanujan, I'm sure people have heard of this great mathematician who died at the age of 30-some. He was invited to come to England because of his abilities. That was, uh, I don't even know the timeframe. I'm sure it's 50-60 years ago. They are still trying to prove what he had deduced already. So there's still research going on what he had performed. So, that's as far as math is, was there.

Chemistry. You don't have to go very far from the Iron Pillar in New Delhi, which has been there for what, 2200 years now? From Ashoka period. It's still standing there and not rusted. So they had that technology. Zinc. There's evidence that zinc was isolated in its pure form 700 years ago. Whereas the West didn't know what zinc was at the time. Um, well this is going to be a whole, whole talk in itself. I don't want to go further, but any

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

subject, every subject that you can talk about, the Indian brain had [thought about] it.

Lastly, I'll even say a little bit about the language. The alphabet, which I find very interesting--it is so organized. Your vowels are separate from the consonants. And in the consonants, there are rows of five. And every row comes from a different part of the mouth that you use. The first letter has a relation to the next letter. And the next letter is related to the next letter. There are five in each row. And in columns. Every column has a relation from first column to the next column, as to where they come from. So, they were very, very smart, very intelligent, very civilized people, which the world had not given credit to them.

AB: How have you done the research for all of this information?

SW: Um, my interest.

AB: So you are self-taught?

SW: Pretty much, yes. And I do have over a hundred slides of Mohenjodaro and Harappan, which I like to show to schools and children. Just because visual, color...however much I may be talking about, I cannot impress upon anyone as much as a picture of that particular place [would].

And then I did also teach Hindi. I taught Hindi. I actually started to teach children of two of my friends and my own daughter Charu. And because it is very difficult to teach at home, to teach your own child. So the thing to do is to have an environment that would be a neutral environment. Not a home environment. And also, like a school environment where it would be away from the house, like a table and chairs and a blackboard. The Mercer Island Library has been very generous in letting me have their conference rooms one day a week on the weekends. I had to make reservation, of course. But they were very kind and I would have my classes there. And I started out with two, three, four, [maybe] four-five children.

And I would only teach them the alphabet and the grammar, Hindi grammar. Because once you know the alphabet and you know the grammar in Hindi language, then it's all, you cannot make a mistake in how to pronounce [when you] read. Anything that you read was pronounced

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

correctly. Because there's no such thing as, let me give you the example of 'C-U-T'--cut and 'P-U-T'--put. So you don't know. If I saw those two words and I did not know these words, I wouldn't know whether to say 'put' or 'cut'. But in the Hindi language, it is not so. It is phonetic. Whatever, however it is written is the same way you pronounce [it]. You can't really make a mistake. Beyond learning the alphabet and the syntax, the grammar, beyond that, it's only the vocabulary. And so that I encouraged the children to go home and speak with their parents. Whenever possible, if they spoke, they would pick up the words. And try to read.

AB: And did you speak Hindi at home with the children?

SW: I did. It got loaded though because one mistake and we would correct them. And I, I have learned, but too late now, not to make so many corrections. That intimidates the speaker. And they don't want to make mistakes and especially your own child does not want to make mistakes in front of a parent. I think that's what discouraged them to speak Hindi with us. But, whenever there is a need, they can converse and speak and they can read.

AB: Which is a lot!

SW: Yeah.

AB: So how, do you continue to do those Hindi classes?

SW: I stopped doing this two or three years ago. Yes. Because there is another, because there's a lot of young people who have come to Seattle [for] Microsoft and other dotcoms. And they have younger families. They've gotten together. And they've got, they run a regular school, kind of a Sunday school now.

AB: And so what made you decide that there was a need for this sort of schooling?

SW: Uh, I started actually because of my own self. Since, um, there was a lot: my early childhood. Four years of my childhood, I was away from India. My Hindi was... I was not exposed to Hindi. All I was exposed [to] was Dutch, English and French! [Laughs] So, when I came back to India with my parents from Holland, the Indian schools are very strict. I tested to get admission in schools. I, when I tested at the convent, they were ready to

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

take me in the eighth grade. And when I went to a Hindi, a good Hindi-medium school, they wouldn't take me beyond the sixth grade. And they the school that I eventually did go [to], they took me in seventh grade. And so I did go to that school. And I did feel that my Hindi root wasn't all that good. And it was necessary. It was there and wasn't there. I did have Hindi in the seventh and eighth grades. That's all of my Hindi was. After that, I went into the science group. And that's when you break off from the Hindi language. And that's why I did feel that if the children have a knowledge, and they should have a knowledge of their heritage language.

AB: And so, how do you think it was for your daughters to be growing up living between two different cultures and trying to manage that?

SW: Um-hum. I'm sure it was very hard. And I think, you can probably relate that to yourself, it is two cultures that they have to work with. At home and what our expectation was of them, was different. Probably more strict, stringent, versus what their school environment was. And there were a lot of things that the other...as they were growing up, there were certain restrictions put on our children than what the child who had been living in this country for generations [would have]. You know, their families were here for generations. Of course everyone's an immigrant here. But it's just that the length and degree and numbers of generations.

Yeah, I think there was lot more, or a lot, no--less freedom that I wanted for my children comparatively as they were growing up. And they had to live with two different sets of cultural [expectations]...they had to, they had to work with the Indian cultural environment and stay with the culture. Also they wanted them, we didn't want them to lose that also. So they had to do double the work [to] keep up with the Indian festivals, keep up with the Indian celebrations, keep up with Indian language, the religion. Name it every which way. The food.

I am vegetarian myself. My husband is not. He was born a vegetarian. He was a vegetarian until he was in India. And then he, when he came here, he did [switch]. Because when we were here, it was...I mean, initially, when he initially came, vegetarianism was not too, not too many people knew how to cater to the vegetarian diet. Since I came with my family, it was easier for me. He came alone. He came as a student. So he was living in the dorms and there was nothing else. Anyway, he eats meat. I did, uh, tell my children that they could eat meat if they wish to, which they

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

did. I didn't want them to be feeling too different in every which way. But, they themselves became vegetarian. They decided not to eat meat. They both don't.

AB: So do you cook mostly non [vegetarian] or [vegetarian]?

SW: Well, that was very nice [of] my husband, no meat comes in the house. Yeah.

AB: That helps.

SW: Yeah. Well, since now, my daughters are both vegetarian and myself.

AB: He's outnumbered.

SW: He's outnumbered. Even when the three of them were eating meat, no meat came.

AB: So what challenges or advantages do you see for your children being brought up here in America?

SW: I am sure, just with every other culture, every other immigrant that has come here. The first generation is deeper in the heritage. And the second generation gets diluted. And then with time, it's a total assimilation. So I do see that. And we are very happy Charu met somebody...who is not from India. And who cares a lot for her and they're married. So we're happy with that.

AB: Was there any problem around that for anybody in your extended family or...?

SW: Not in my extended family. I would be lying if I said initially that, um, I encouraged her to see if she could find somebody who was of Indian origin. Or their parents were from India. I honestly yes, I may have discouraged it, initially. But, once she had decided, we were both 100 % with her.

AB: Is he from this area as well?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: He is from here. His parents were in Wenatchee. Close to Wenatchee in the summer. And in winter, they have a house in Los Vegas. So one house here and one there, depending on the weather.

AB: How was it getting to know you in-laws that are not Indian?

SW: They are very, very nice people. Initially they were, they weren't sure [either]. They were nervous. Their ancestry is Italian. He, Mike, is third-generation. Third or fourth. His grandfather, his grandpa was born here, or was he born there? I don't know, he's third generation I think. Um, since people do know that, you know, the Indian culture is an older culture and we do like to stick to our ways, they were a bit nervous. But, that was just for a few minutes. After we first met. And after that, it's no different.

AB: That's nice though.

SW: Yes.

AB: So while your girls were growing up, did your family celebrate any Indian customs or religious holidays?

SW: Yes. We did. We celebrated a lot of our holidays, but Diwali was a big thing, which I did do. Every year, we celebrated Diwali on two days. Of course we had the lights put up and all the rest that goes with it. We celebrated on two days. Fridays I would have only the children, maybe about 30 or 40 children. And I would do everything with them, starting with, it was a regimented party, I'd say! The first half hour, they sat and had fun. All the kids together, they talked. The next half hour, we played a game on Diwali. It would be, it would start out with the story of Diwali, which after about two years, the kids knew it. Then we would devise games on that. The second half hour was this.

Then after that, I would have a speaker other than myself; a guest speaker who would sit and talk to the kids about the culture, the holiday. In the meantime, I would have set up tables downstairs for dinner. This would be in the evenings. And the half hour after the guest was done, the kids would come downstairs and we would have dinner for an hour. And that would be [an] Indian dinner. And after the dinner, they would all come back again and we would have games. There's no running around because there's 40 kids. So it would be all like, I would have...for instance, I would have slides,

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

a slide show. And there would be a quiz. And the slides would be about India. And they would have to, they were all given their papers and pencils and would write. Games and prizes and so forth. We would have this until 10:00PM. 9:30-10:00PM. Because at 6:30PM, they'd come. Yeah, it would be about 9:30-10:00PM. I would not any parent to come on that day. Their children were just mine. And I would have help just setting up table and food and so forth. And the only other adult I wanted was the guest speaker. So the children were mine. And that part, I enjoyed thoroughly.

The next day, Saturday, was the parent's day. No children. So it was a party for just the adults. They would dress up. Jewelry-ied up. And we would have a lot of fun. That party would go on until 3:00AM or 4:00AM. Yeah, a lot of singing and all.

AB: So you would host it at your home?

SW: Yes, I did. I did that until two years ago. And that was something that I enjoyed doing, but now with...the reason I did stop it was because people, our friends, and that would be about between 60 and 70 people, I mean the adults that would be coming. It was that everyone's sort of grown-up. Their kids have grown up. Either they're married or extended families and people like to do their pujas for Diwali and that would be with their family. And either they would not be able to come or come late. And they'd feel very torn between being with the family or coming here was a tradition. So in order to make it easier for everyone, I decided to just let everyone have their own way. So I stopped doing that, though I do miss my children parties.

AB: And so those were children of your friends?

SW: My friends, yes.

AB: Wow. That's a lovely idea.

SW: It was and I am so glad I did that. I thoroughly enjoyed it. If I, and the other day, one of the kids, who is now 30 years old. 31. She was talking to me and I was telling her, I said, "If I was given a wish, I would say I want those times back. When you kids were all small. Now everyone's grown up and gone." Yeah. I miss that.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: So, you must have developed quite an Indian community here in Seattle.

SW: I think so. I think so.

AB: What was it like when you first moved to the area? What was the Indian community like then?

SW: Um, there weren't very many people. I'm sure people were doing things their own way. But, there was a certain group that we did get together and we, together with. And there were a couple of friends that we would get together on the weekends, who had children about our children's ages. We would get together, have dinner together, and the children would sleep at that place. Whoever's place we were. And then we would either play cards or just have time together.

AB: And how did you meet these families?

SW: You know, in those days, there weren't very many people. And so whomever you met became your friends. Now, there's so many people from India that, you know, probably there's a lot of selection and they're selective about who and who not [to be friends with]. At that time, it was whoever.

AB: And so, was your family, did your family keep up with any religious traditions?

SW: Uh, yes. I personally belong to the Arya Samaj. The main concept of the Arya Samaj is that you do not believe in idol worship and there's just one God. And you just do the meditation on a no-face, no-figure. It's just the, just a vacuum. So for me, it was, it's an easy religion in that respect. All it believes in is 'do good.' And you'll be rewarded. Do bad and you'll be rewarded that negatively.

AB: So you were saying that it's more about how you live your life.

SW: How you live your life, that's what I believe in. Now, my husband's family is Satyanarayan. They believe in, they do have a temple in their house and idols and the pictures and stuff. Um, when Charu was very little, there was...when Charu was actually born, Bapu-ji. Mr. Upamchod, was here who started what's called the Hari Om Satsang. Which was getting

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

together and chanting and he would speak on the religion. It would be every Sunday for an hour. And we started going there. And I think both my children benefited very much from that. And their basics, their understanding of the religion has in part from there. And partly from, there are comic-book like books, 32 pages [long], called the Amar Chitra Katha.

AB: Of course!

SW: Are you familiar with that?

AB: Yes. [Laughs]

SW: Yeah. I thought that was the most wonderful thing that they had done. And children love to read books. And both my children are great readers. They just love to read. But starting with those little books, you can learn about anything and everything. There are about 40 issues of, it's a series. So there's the Mahabharata. And there's Ramayana. There's every topic. Every great person that has lived, is living, or anything that's going on, they have them. So that was, I think that was a great tool. I must have, I think I must have 500 of them now. So, reading those helped. I do remember talking about Amar Chitra Katha in the Mercer Island High School. In their senior year, I think, kids studied the Mahabharata and the [Bhagavad-Gita]. So I gave them my series of Mahabharata, 40 of those. And there's one of [the] Gita. And I gave those. As you know, children love to read the comics. If it's in that form, it's interesting. It isn't huge. It is just the facts. So I think, the students learn from that too. I did give a set there.

And now, my son-in-law, he was asking me about the festivals, if I could give him a date of what the festivals, what days our festivals fall on. Because they keep changing being on the lunar calendar. And then to explain to him what, uh, what the significance was, why do we celebrate. I thought, wait, I'll just put together some of my Amar Chitra Kathas and give him the dates, give him the calendar, and he can read. It would be much easier to read than my trying to tell him. So that's the power of the Amar Chitra Katha.

AB: Still useful!

SW: Oh yeah. I still go back sometimes and just at night, it's nice to be able to read those things.

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

AB: Yeah. So do your daughters identify as Hindu today, do you think?

SW: Yes. I think so.

AB: And so have you been involved with the Hindu temple [in Bothell] at all?

SW: Um, we did donate. We became members, life members initially. But no, we don't really go to those temples. My husband, yes, he goes to the Vedanta Center every weekend. There are talks on the weekends, so he likes to go there. My children did take a lot of classes in college on the Indian religions, or religions of the world that emphasized on Indian religion.

AB: So are there other South Asian organizations that you're involved with?

SW: Yes, we are, my husband more so than myself. There was an organization—there *is* an organization called People for Progress in India. PPI. Which was founded by a handful of us. And we do get donations, which we initially started our own selves. To put in some money and we pledge. A lot of people pledge money every month how much they'll give for the year or whatever to take on some projects in India. We don't just dole out money. We want to give the money so people can become self-sufficient. For instance, there is one of our projects. Probably one of our first or second projects. The first was in a hospital. But the other project was in a village where we gave them money to buy buffalos or cows to nurse the children. Give them milk and lots of things are made from milk. And gave them sewing machines so they can make clothes and clothe themselves. After a few years, the village gave us the money back and we wondered why they were giving it back to us. And they said that, "Now the cows have, their calves have grown. And the machines, we have sewn a lot of clothes and we have benefited, profited by sewing for others for profit and embroidering. So, please take this money and give it to another village to start off."

AB: Wow.

SW: Yes. And we have a lot of those projects going. It's about 30 years now, we've done that. My husband's been very involved in this and after 30 years, I think he's been president of it for, I want to say 8 years or more. I don't even remember anymore. We've been, we do a fundraiser every

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

year, once a year for that. And then my husband's involved with the India Association of Western Washington. Very recently, he's doing things for the seniors, which he started because lot, especially the Microsoft people, and the people who had come [in] our generation who had come. And their parents come to visit or their parents have come. They don't know what to do with themselves. Or they feel lost not being able to meet with other seniors or get some senior help.

So my husband started this group, what [do] they call it? The Senior Board. And they have a lunch for the seniors in a senior center, once a month. An Indian lunch is catered by a restaurant. And then after the lunch, they'll either talk or some entertainment program. And that gets some of the people who would not have gotten to meet one another, that gets them going. And then we do a senior health fair. We used to do it once a year, but now there's two. Yeah, in which we invite...it starts in early morning where people come fasting. So there's glucose test, blood pressure tests, bone density tests, dental tests, and cholesterol. All kinds of tests are done from 8:00AM to 10:00AM. And right after their testing is done, they're provided a breakfast if they come empty stomach.

And then at 10:00AM, we have a doctor speak for an hour. During that period, the doctor can speak on their specialty, or on say, arthritis, depression, cancer, orthopedist, any of those. That doctor will speak for the time and if there are any questions, people get their questions answered. And then for the next hour, we do the same thing until noon. And at noon, we provide them lunch. For an hour, they have lunch, socializing and then 1:00PM we start again. We have another doctor speak for an hour. And then at 2:00PM, we have a panel of doctors who are of different specialties. And they provide index cards to the people. And they can write their questions and their questions can be answered by the panel. That goes on for an hour and a half until 4:00PM. It is very informative and very much enjoyed. Over a hundred people come.

After this first one was done, the people from mainly down in Kirkland, people in the south had said they want one there. So Valley Medical Center had said that they would take it upon themselves to make all the arrangements, if we would use our format and get our doctors to speak. So we did this a couple of weeks ago. So that keeps us quite busy.

And also the projects that People for Progress in India is doing. I

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

particularly want to talk about one of the projects in PPI. Um, you probably know of Baba Amte, now he is I think 93 or 94 years old now. And he was 92 when we were in India last time. We visited them, the whole outfit there. Anandvan. It's in Nagpur. Baba Amte started this when he was 32 [years old] I think. He was a lawyer by profession. And he, one day as he was going home at night, he, by mistake, hit something which he thought was a bag of old cloth, clothes, sitting on the sidewalk. And since it got kicked by his leg, by his foot, he thought he'd look at it. And it pulled it up. It was not only clothes, it was a human being: a leper. Who was under that, those clothes. He was so badly mutilated. As you know, leprosy attacks the extremities: the hands, the feet, the nose, anything that extends, the lips. It was infected, it was just pus-y and bad. He looked at it and very quickly covered it because it just couldn't handle the sight and ran home. Once he got home, the guilt took over. And he thought, "How could I do that to another human being? He's lying there in pain and I just walk out and come to my comfort."

So he went back and he went into the medical profession and asked them about how and why. There were a lot of lepers around. And unlike the United States, they don't confine themselves in the colonies or confine themselves to certain places. Um, just to let you know, there are big colonies in the United States. Yes. Not too many people know about it. But there are people, as—what movie was that? In one of the movies, I think. Was it Ten Commandments? Where he, his mother and sister were, I think, contracted, and they're put in, they hide in dark caves because they don't want to be seen. So there are leper colonies here in the United States.

To come back to it, he went into the medical profession because it bothered him. And they said, well, we do not have any data on leprosy because leprosy only attacks human beings. It does not attack animals. So all the testing and all the research is done only on animals. So we don't have that information. And when he did ask them if it was contagious or infectious, they couldn't tell. So he wanted to study it. And he said, "Alright, I'll give you my body to be the guinea pig. You can work on me." So just to find out if it was infectious, most people were so afraid of it. They don't want to come near a person who has leprosy because, I don't know if you've ever seen a person, a leprosy patient. It's not only painful, but for a lack of a better word, it's repulsive when they're infected because it's oozing. So he, just to find out, because he was trying to convince people that it wasn't

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

infectious or contagious because the people who live with them, the family, does not catch it. So what he did is, he extracted the pus and injected it in himself. And he tried to prove, and told them that, "Hey, I didn't get it."

So it did study medicine after that--just for that because he wanted to work with these people. He then, anyway, he did go back and bring that leper and cleaned him and brought him back to health. This was the start of his working with leprosy patients. And then he dedicated his life to them. He was successful, a lawyer, of a very good family. When he went into this, he initially thought that he was not going to get married because who would want to, unless the person also dedicates their life. He had met this lady, this young girl at a wedding. He saw her. Who was from a very good family. Yet, she went, when she saw the help, who was cleaning dishes. The dishwasher who was working hard and was being overwhelmed with dishes. She, as a guest, went in her all finery and jewelry, went and started to help her. And he was very impressed by that. He thought, oh this is the one person who could possibly live [with him]. So he did ask her if she would marry him. But the family was against it: his family, her family, both. Anyway, she also knew what he was doing, decided to go against her family, and marry him.

And they both then decided to work on this. Since both their families had kind of disowned them, they had nothing. They had to start from scratch. Anyway, they both worked very hard, living in huts to start out. And you know, the land, that land owner. He was a land reformer. People who initially, you know, people who had a lot of land and were just living on, the land owners were living off the poor farmer. He was trying to get back the land to the farmers. He then gave them a lot of land that was barren, totally, all rocky. Which Baba happily took it--anything. And then has now a colony of reformed lepers, of leprosy patients. Now they have an area the size of, about the size of Mercer Island now. And they have houses there, hospitals, pediatric hospitals, schools, colleges on that area and it is the rehabbed lepers. Even though they are rehabbed, you see the stubs on their fingers, the toes, and their noses are sort of deformed. But, they are happy. They are given vocational training. They manufacture a lot of things. They're self-sufficient.

And Baba's...Baba had two sons--has two sons. They both studied medicine [and] married medical doctors. The four of them have dedicated their lives to this--leprosy. And their children, in turn, have also gone into

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

the medical field. And they, in turn, are working. So, its three generations working in the same outfit and it's grown. And the last time I was in India, about a year and a half ago, we visited that place. Oh, that was the highlight of my trip. It is amazing what they've done to them. The rehabbed leprosy patients: they, the self-esteem they have now because of the training they've gotten, they work. They provide for themselves. They dress up very well. They may not be expensive clothes, but they will be matching, sari and a matching blouse, and the jewelry, costume jewelry. Very well combed and dressed and look really good. And they're self-sufficient. They have turned that land into farms. They grow everything. And they have their own water system. Everything is theirs. And I was very, very impressed. And they have huge, big, outfits supporting them. They have their doctors, dedicated medical people. And we have been, PPI has been supporting them for very many years.

AB: Wow. So did your whole family get to go visit?

SW: No, just my husband and myself. It was very, very nice. It was just wonderful. And I'll give you the example of the third generation: Baba's granddaughter. She was our guide. She was showing us around the place. When she finished her high school on campus, she went to med school. After college, she went to med school in the city. "Oh," she says, "The first year was just wonderful. So much materialism. So much glamour and good clothes and whatever you want." Which, she thought she was being deprived of, not being there. "The first year was just wonderful. Enjoyed it. The second year was okay." But after that, she felt life was shallow. There wasn't that much depth as [what] she was getting out of being at Anandvan, as they call it. The city of joy. Or garden of joy is what it's called. So she decided to come back. She came back.

AB: It sounds like an amazing project.

SW: Yes. And they make, now these leprosy patients, they make greeting cards, silkscreen greeting cards, a lot of them. And they send them to us here and we sold them for them. But just to give you an example, they make carpets, they make towels. All these leprosy people. They sew, they make cushions, they make tools. They use and re-use things. Nothing is wasted--even plastic. They shred plastic to the point of it being like wool. They mix it with wool and after the plastic is shred, it's used as stuffing for

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

mattresses and pillows and cushions. It's just...it was just amazing to see all this.

Because not only is it, not only is it that they're, um, curing them. But they're self-sufficient, they're self-esteem. It is huge. To me, it is huge--to build somebody's self-esteem. They sew. They tailor. They make, um, they make shoes out of waste tires. And the weeds. You know that grow, and they are dry and the stalks, they use to make cards, greeting cards. Everything is just re-used. There's nothing that's wasted. They'd get, oh beautiful things, which I should have probably brought here. You know the x-rays? In hospitals that are used? That are done and thrown away? And what they've done is they make cards [out] of them. Because you don't see anything unless you, you put it against the light. They've printed cards, they've printed desk calendars. There are beautiful gift bags. They have shopping bags that are made out of those. Red, black, blue. And they're very sturdy. And they look...they're much more sturdy than paper. I was just impressed with everything that was done there.

Even the, they also worked with deaf and mute children. That was, um, painful. Um, at the same time, it's so good that they are being taken care of. They were really were. They were orphans. I was in tears many a time there because I went as a guest. And those children were, the ones who were deaf were told by sign language that they've come from far. And the other children, the blind kids, were also told. They were, those children did know how to, how to, um, how to interact with a person that's probably come from far. Do I want to or not? And they were, at one place where we went, they were having their evening bhajans [prayers]. After that, we started to talk to them. And one little kid, who was very courageous, outgoing. She took the courage and came over and shook my hand. After that, you know, as she shook my hand, one hand I shook the hand, the other I put on her back. Those children, one-by-one, they all came. You could see the hunger. The need of just a touch. I did not know how, because just by touching them, you got the vibrations that there was a lot of that they were missing out. Um, so in just a very, very short time there, I was touched by a lot. Not, physically, [but] emotionally. And I was very impressed with what was being done and what is done. And how just a little bit goes very far.

AB: What part of India is this in?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: Nagpur.

AB: It's in Nagpur.

SW: It's about a two hour drive from Nagpur's airport.

AB: Wow. So next time you go, I'm sure you'll try and go back?

SW: Oh yeah. The route from the airport to Anandvan—oh it was beautiful. There's fields and fields of sunflowers. It was just beautiful, because that's one of the things that would grow. And sunflower oil and sunflower seeds are a the main thing there. If you've never seen a sunflower field for miles, it beats a tulip field in Holland. [Laughs]

AB: So how often do you get back to India?

SW: I used to go every year when Charu was little, when our children were little. But once they got to high school, it got not so often.

AB: So did the girls enjoy it when you would go back?

SW: Oh yes. Yes. As you know, you're from the same culture. There's a lot of warmth, a lot of the warmth in the families of people there. And that was, that's hard to leave. You know, when a person, when a non-Indian goes back there, they find it overwhelming, I think. That people can be so giving. I'll give you an example. My sister was wearing an outfit which Anshu said to masi [maternal aunt], "You know, masi, this is really nice." And my sister said, "Oh well, this is yours. I'll keep it for you." She said, "No, that's not what I want. You keep it." And when she left, she left it. She was here. My sister was visiting. And she left it in her closet. Next time, Anshu, when she met masi, she says, "Masi. You know, in the culture where I grew up, when somebody says, you know this is nice. I keep it for myself. I don't give it. All the more I want to keep it for me. I don't give it away." So that's a difference. [She said], "So if you like it, you should keep it for you, not for me. And obviously, this was a special one that you brought to wear when you were traveling here." So that's a difference there.

AB: Have you noticed many changes in the Indian culture when you go back on your trips?

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

SW: Oh yes. Yes. The traditions are not that traditional or conservative. People are much more open. When I was growing up, your outfits were mainly Indian. Now, hardly anyone wears the Indian clothes. Easier pants and blouses, even though the tops are very Indian. Which is very nice, I do like them. And I think I do prefer those tops.

AB: Do you think that the changes have been for the better? For the worse?

SW: Mostly for the better. The negative is that we're losing our culture. And whatever we're losing on our culture, we're losing our language too. Because the young [people] are talking to each other a lot in English because that is probably the language that connects.

AB: So when you think about immigrants who have arrived more recently, how do think their experience compares with the one that you experienced in the [19]70's?

SW: A lot easier for them because there's a lot of people of familiar faces. People that look like them. Food is easier. The culture is a lot more known here. There is a lot of entertainment. That is, the transition is not harsh. It's not India or U.S., but there's a lot of gray here, which wasn't when we came here. And there is a lot of support. When we came, there was not much of a support system. So you depended, if you wanted your own cultural support, you depended very much on the handful that were here before.

AB: Speaking of support, um, I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about the work that you do with [Hindi and Punjabi] translation?

SW: It all started, I think it started when, it was with Fred Hutchinson I think. It was some family from India had come with their daughter whose cancer was terminal. But you know, as a parent, you want to try anything and everything. Your hope is, even if it is point one percent, you don't let that hope go. So they had come from India. And as you know, Fred Hutch asks you to put down a huge amount of money before they'll even start. And you, to begin with, you've put in a lot. Either your savings or you're very wealthy and you have it. Yet, the amount is exorbitant. And they come here. It is, the daughter was, who was a married girl, with a child, a very small child. Unfortunately, her husband said, "Well, she's not going to make it. She's terminal, she's no use to me, the end." So he was out of the

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

picture. The parents wanted to take care of her. The parents came, the daughter [who] was the patient, and donor brother came. So at least four adults. And they came here, when, during those days, there weren't all that many Indian people here.

So, they came here. Everything was new. They were put from one culture to another--totally different. Don't know the place. Had never been to this place. Everything is different. Everything is new. The language. They may know English, but the American English is different from the Indian English that they're used to. If they would speak and say something, the communication wasn't there. So I was called upon by, whether it was because of PPI or because of the Indian organizations or whatever. They tried and they contacted me to see if I could assist them, which I did. And I started from there. [It was] quite painful. Because you do know it is very, very hard.

Anyway that patient didn't survive. And the last day was very hard. And here they'd come with all hope. All hope, even if it's point one percent, it is hope. And they're hoping to go back, taking her back. But then they were to go back with out her. So the support, even during the period that she was, um, alive, was needed. And then, and they were going to cremate here. And that was to be done. And then we needed somebody to do the religious rites. We got somebody to. That became, I took it upon myself to get them that because they were not going to be able to do anything. And then in the evening after that is done, the cremation is done, you want an end to it, to do the finale. And then I had a group of my friends come over to my house and we did a bhajan, which is just a religious thing to feel that there something was done. So that was done. And then the next morning, I put them on the airplane. They were gone.

And from then on, whenever there was a patient from India that came, we did help them out. And whenever they needed, of course if there was a language barrier. I started assisting with languages. And from then from then on, it was the word of mouth. Hospitals, I was interpreting. Courts. There's crime unfortunately too. That and also I did, and then my children, when they started to go to school full-time, I would get out and do some interpreting. The nice thing about that is that I'm not bound to any time. Not bound to a schedule. I can do it if I want to. If I can't, I won't do it. Or, if the appointment can be changed, they would change the appointment to suit my availability. So I've been busy doing that. I do a lot of files also in

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

the courts. Federal courts and civil courts, and whatever courts and hospitals and whatever, depositions and whatever's needed.

AB: That's a lot of time.

SW: Yes, and with the population increasing, there is a lot more need.

AB: So I just have a few last questions. And the first is, you've now been in this country for over thirty years. Do you see yourself retiring here or do you think that you might go back to India in the future?

SW: Uh, good question. It's almost a hundred percent no. My life is my children here. I have, you know, your extended family, yes it is important. But when you core, your nucleus is here, um, I don't see myself going there to live. I may go for maybe an extended period, meaning multiple months. But no, not set up house there. I cannot. And you know my friends, they may be a few. But then you don't have that continuity. You don't have, even though I am--I grew up there. But, a lot has changed in thirty years. Even a lot has changed in thirty years here. So I don't see myself going back.

AB: So, um, if you were to look back on your life, is there anything that you would do differently? Are there any decisions that you might make over again?

SW: Oh yes, I would have stood my foot and maybe gone into medicine. Because that still is my passion. And as they say in our religion, or way of life, if there's something unfulfilled you are certainly going to come back to this earth. And I do know, I am coming back. And I am going to serve as a, in the medical profession, before I can be liberated. See, when you're, if any of your wishes are unfulfilled, you will come back to fulfill it. And I think I will, for one. Secondly, maybe when I look back, yes, I think I was a little more strict with my children. Um, yeah, I think I would be a little less conservative with my children. Even though I think I have given them the freedom to do what they want. And I do think that they, in hindsight, I think they are better judges. And I would say that to the upcoming, growing families. You know, your children, if they're...I'm sure you can, every individual is different. But I think, they are the ones who have to fight both cultures. They want to please you. They don't want to displease you, for sure, as a parent. And at the same time, they have to live their life there too. So, I would let them make a lot of

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

decisions. Make the decision, but at the same time, hold the reins. I think with teenagers, sometimes the heart rules over the head and they don't use their head. But I would say both my children have a great head on their shoulders. I really am very, very proud of them, [of] what they're doing. And money's not everything. For them, money, yeah it's nice to have, but what takes priority is being able to serve your own humankind. And I think they've taken that from their father a lot.

AB: And you too.

SW: Well, I did, when I was in college in Pilani, I did. You know, since I wasn't going home in the [vacation], that was another reason that I did not go home to my aunt as often as, you know, they would've liked me to. Pilani's a village. I mean, outskirts of a campus. The campus is huge. Its miles [wide]. But beyond the walls of the campus, there are villages. And I did, I used to go to the villages and help those people in the little bit of the way that I could. Yeah. That is that.

AB: So finally, today how would you describe yourself if somebody were to ask you? Would you say that you are South Asian, Indian, a Northwesterner, a Seattleite?

SW: I am born an Indian for sure. I look Indian. I follow the religion, the culture. And I think the culture there has a lot to offer. It's a very, very rich culture. Having lived in a lot of countries, even though I was a child at the time, but I do think that there's a lot of depth in the Hindu religion, and the culture, and the traditions, which has gone not well understood. But it has depth to the likeliness of none other, if I may say. That's an ignorant way of saying it. But, as much as I know, it is.

AB: So you would say that you're an Indian?

SW: I am an Indian. Yes. But I would fail to say that I'm not an American because I have accepted the citizenship of this country. And I do think that the United States has a lot to offer. But it's a very young country. And it's very easy to build on something that is nothing, that there is, where you build from scratch.

That's what America is all about. Building from [scratch]. I went to Montana and I drove around that place. I was all by myself at the time, and

**University of Washington
Special Collections Division
FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

I saw this vast country. There's nothing for miles and miles. There's nothing. And I tried to think of the Native American who was the lord of this whole vast land. I was trying to imagine living in that time when there was nothing. And the land, the water, and everything was mine. We didn't have to say that I own only a half acre of this land. But of course, the immigrants have built it up and it has a lot to offer. It's very rich and not to say that there's not much here. But, the culture, there's a lot to be learned from immigrants. In every aspect of the word, every aspect of life even. And I'm proud to have been born there.

END OF INTERVIEW OF SANTOSH WAHI NOVEMBER 20, 2007