

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Sesh Bala

Interviewers: Taylor Ginter, Priscilla Li

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Transcribed by: Taylor Ginter, Priscilla Li

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Background: Sesh Bala was the president of Daya from 2016-2017, an organization based in Houston, Texas focused on helping South Asian women, children, and families who are victims of domestic abuse. He had previously been interviewed by HAAA about his life story, which included a career at Shell that gave him the corporate background instrumental to helping Daya move forward during its beginning stages. In this interview, he shares his involvement with Daya, his unique position as the first male member of their board, and the challenges Daya faced.

Setting: The interview was conducted at Mr. Bala's home in Sugar Land, Texas and lasted about an hour. His wife, Prahba, joined for a few minutes to supplement his experience with Daya.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

SB: Sesh Bala

TG: Taylor Ginter

PL: Priscilla Li

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

TG: Alright, hello, my name is Taylor Ginter. We're here on April 23, interviewing for the Houston Asian American Archive.

PL: I'm Priscilla Li.

SB: Hello, I'm um Sesh Bala. And happy to be interviewed by Rice University students.

TG: Great! Thank you so much. So this interview is somewhat of a follow-up from Mr. Bala's last interview. Uh last interview we focused on his life and his moving—ending up in Houston. Um this interview is going to be focused on Daya. We'll catch up a little bit with Mr. Bala and then focus in on his involvement with Daya.

SB: Okay. Terrific [overlapping].

TG: Yeah! So what have you been doing since we last interviewed you?

SB: Oh um—okay, I mean I've been volunteering for Daya and been volunteering for a few other organizations as well. And then my wife and I, we do some travelling—sightseeing, and we have a

grandson that we spend some time with. So we do a lot of things so like we are fairly busy. [TG: Very nice.] We keep a full calendar [laughs].

TG: So are you retired?

SB: I'm retired—I've been retired a while actually. Uh from Shell Oil Company. And uh so it's been almost 14 years now, 15 years now since I retired, so.

TG: Nice! And how long have you lived here in Sugar Land?

SB: Uh in Sugar Land? Since 1992. So it's uh 26 years here in this house.

TG: In the same house?

SB: In the same house, yeah.

TG: Very nice. Um okay so when did you first get involved with Daya?

SB: Okay. Um actually I was on the board of an organization called Indo-American Charity Foundation and that uh raises money in the Indian community and donates to various charities. Okay, and uh they provided the seed money for Daya. So I happened to be on the board and at the time to give the seed money to Daya. And so when I came off of the IACF, Indo-American Charity Foundation board, one of the board members of Daya approached me and asked if I would come on their board. Okay, um it was all women, 100% run by women, it's a women's organization and there had never been a male board member before. Uh so first they took me in as an advisory board member because they wanted to get comfortable with a, with a, with a man being on the board, I guess. Um the person who asked me is a good friend—family friend. We had known her for quite a while. And so she was very comfortable asking us and so on. And uh so I said okay, so I became advisory board member for a few months and uh—Daya was a very, very small organization. It's still a very small organization that was uh essentially in its infancy. Uh and I have a lot of corporate background and organizational background and that kind of stuff and uh so I thought maybe I could help them out. And so I joined Daya advisory board first and then the board later on. And it was 2004-2005 timeframe. So it's been a while since. And I've been on their board ever since. Okay, so I'm still on their board. And uh - so that's how I got involved. At the time, when I joined, it was more with uh uh a desire to help kind of a fledgling you know organization. And it's doing very well, very well now. Um um at that time it was not the cause, and then later on I became interested in the cause—so I came for the organization and stayed for the cause, if you will. Yeah. Yeah. And so that's how I got involved with Daya.

TG: So you said you came for the organization—was it supporting a South Asian organization or what drew you to the organization besides it being fledgling?

SB: Um it was—just to give you a background on Daya- it helps victims of domestic violence in the South Asian communities. Okay, just to bring back briefly—back in 1995 there was a uh big incident in Houston. Uh uh you know a family—a husband, wife, three children. They were living in a neighborhood here and nobody thought anything wrong was happening there. And one day suddenly this woman uh killed her three kids, killed her husband, um set their house on fire and killed herself, okay. And uh so gradually it came to light that there has been domestic abuse in that family and that the woman had been abused and she didn't want to go through and she didn't want her children to be exposed to this kind of stuff and so she took very drastic action and uh community realized there is a problem in our community and somebody needs to help, okay. So there is a doctor's—Indian doctor's club here, and then the wives of a few of those doctors, they said “hey let's do something, let's start an organization.” And they started

Daya. Uh “Daya” means compassion. Okay. And uh so they essentially had a volunteer hotline kind of stuff in their homes, and, and the moment they started they started getting a lot of calls from people in the community and they were really surprised by that but then they said, “hey this is time for us to get this going.” And they started—provided counseling. It so happened that one of the women was a trained counselor so that helped a lot. And uh so that’s how it got started and so they found the organization in 1996. Okay, and it was a really tiny organization, really not—but they were getting calls and they were helping the community and that’s how it started. The clients they help are south Asians. So they are from uh—they have backgrounds um in India, Pakistan uh, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Afghanistan. So those are typically the South Asian countries. And there are immigrants from all of those countries living in the greater Houston area. The focus was also greater Houston area, okay. Um as it turns out, um there are 25 such organizations in America, in various cities. In uh New York, in uh Chicago, in San Francisco, in Berkeley, L.A., uh th-ther’s one in Dallas, there’s one in Atlanta, so there are—and we have a very loose connection with them and they all do very similar work. Some are big, some are small. Uh we have now become one of the top three or four in that—in terms of number of clients we serve, and the ability to raise funds, our ability to provide services, you know we have kind of grown. Um but uh we we we we—make reference to other organizations. W-we don’t turn down anybody. In fact, we get calls from not just south Asian, but we get from mainstream community from white people, African Americans, Hispanics, uh and then w-we try to help them on the phone to some extent but mostly we reference them to other organizations who are better equipped to help them.

Our claim to fame is uh to provide culture specific, uh language specific help. That is the main reason why we are in existence. Uh I think we speak some 12 or 13 different languages. Um even though a caller may speak English, we probably feel very comfortable speaking in her own uh language. And so we will find somebody—we now have staff uh who among them they speak many of these languages, they are very comfortable speaking to them in Hindi, or Urdu, or Malayalam, or Tamil or any of those kind of languages. Okay, uh so that’s the background on Daya. Um I think early on you know we were helping just a few people a year, but now last year—2017, we helped I think something like 380 women, okay, in this area. I shouldn’t say women—men, there are men victims also, okay. But it’s a small percentage, 5, maybe sometimes 10%, it’s more like 5%. Um and one very unique--[opening garage door sounds] that’s my wife [laughs] coming back from somewhere. Uh one very unique situation that happens with uh Daya is called “in-law abuse.” Okay, um so uh uh father-in-law, or usually mother-in-law gets involved in the wedding—interferes with the marriage, and she starts uh having her own terms and her own way of dealing with the daughter-in-law. And that’s a very unique kind of thing that happens. Sometimes it may even be using a phone from India and calling and saying, “why are you not doing this why are you not doing that.” So that kind of thing can happen. So that’s kind of a unique situation that uh mainstream community may or may not understand that sort of thing so they provide the culture specific help and how, how to get out of the situation an-and so on. Um, so we provide counseling, case management, um uh legal help, almost all of them require some kind of legal help. So we hav- so we have a legal clinic. There are many lawyers who um uh um are—provide free counseling, for legal advice for at least once, so if they charge, Daya sometimes provides uh legal fees. So we raise funds for all of that. And then we do things like English as a second language if the client needs it, uh we provide job placement service, and you know how uh to take into job interviews, and resume writings, and kind of variety of help that uh we provide. We provide limited financial help uh for housing, um and for, you know, buying household things we provide funds. Um and we um also collect household things like bedding and sheets and pots and pans and we help them, we help them relocate and so we do a variety of things.

So to give you an idea, when I joined, our budget was like \$25,000 a year, really, really nothing, okay. Our budget this year is like \$800,000 a year [TG: Wow.] so it has really grown, really grown. We had no staff, it was all volunteers, uh now we have seven full-time staff and uh an executive director. So—and we have a nice office where clients come for help. Uh a lot of work is done on the phone. We also accompany clients to the court if they need it, and help with translations. Uh it may be for child custody,

uh it may be to get a restraining order, it may be for divorce, um so it's a variety of things like that. So we provide transportation, so we have lots of volunteers and we provide all of this w-work uh—help uh completely confidential. Um just to protect the safety of the client. Um even—there is a staff, there is a board, and there is an advisory board. Um and the board members in our—board members they may not necessarily know the name of the client but we do discuss cases in order to approve monies and so on. Uh but we keep that very, very confidential so the clients feel very comfortable talking to our, our counselors. So we have trained counselors, masters degree level, they are certified and all that kind. So they go through social work, psychological training, and all that, so, so we've kind of grown. Did I answer your question? [laughs]

TG: No yeah that's great you said a lot that's good. Um so is—are the services free to clients?

SB: Yes, absolutely free. 100% free. That's why we raise funds. We raise funds to support them. Um we cannot, cannot provide everything they ask for, so they have to—you know for example, rent. Home rent, we maybe provide for a couple of months and then they have to be on their own, so that's, yeah.

TG: So you've mentioned a lot of different services Daya provides, is there like one type of client that comes in? Like do you see patterns in the types of clients that come in and the timeline of how they go through in getting help by Daya?

SB: Yeah that's a good question. It's uh—the type of help varies all over the spectrum. It may be just one, one simple phone call. Uh somebody may say uh um, “how do we get food stamps?” It may be something on that order or, um “is there a way I can get my visa extended?” Okay, and uh it may be—usually it's all in the context of domestic violence. They'll say, “I'm a victim of domestic violence I need help. Um what are my options?” So they may just uh have a half hour conversation and you may never hear back from them. Okay, uh and all the way to the other end of the spectrum—somebody stays with us for like years, okay. Um and we help them throughout that period, you know. Um staying in the—getting out of the abusive situation, moving to another place, it may, may take months. And so th-they stay through with Daya for the entire—um in terms of clients um, again that varies um um, it goes all over the place. Um it may be a highly educated individual, or it may be somebody with no education. Somebody may be actually uh can have a wife of a doctor, for example, okay, or it could be the wife of a gas station attendant, you know it could - it varies all over the place. And you know and and also there is no— uh religion may be very different. It may be a Hindu, it may be a Muslim, it may be a Christian. Um it-it varies all over the place. Typically, it's like a 40, 45-year-old woman um, of course married, and there are a few, one or two children maybe more, and and basically has been putting up with an abusive situation for a long time. Okay, uh and then either uh on her own or somebody says, “why are you doing this?” some friend says, “why don't you call Daya? And they can help you, get you out of the situation, or provide you some counseling.” So that at least you know what your options are. So that's the kind of thing that happens. Yeah.

TG: How does Daya work with the entire family? When a woman comes in, asks for help—

SB: Yeah...um it's focused on the individual [**TG:** Okay.]. So that is the main thing and of course there are children—uh some clients uh they bring their children also. And we keep the children occupied and uh we try to assess if th-the child has been injured also in some way, affected by that, in which case we work with uh child protective services, and you know and things like that. But otherwise, we uh we encourage the victim to call. In fact we start the case only when the victim calls, we don't do it on the basis of somebody else calling. We do get calls from all over the world, we get calls from U.K. we get calls from Pakistan, we get calls from India, Canada, and usually, usually it'll be something like “oh my friend's daughter she lives in Houston and and she is being abused, can you help?” “Sure, we can help but ask her to call us.” And so - and that's how we start the situation.

TG: So Daya is known internationally?

SB: Yeah I don't even know how they find out.

TG: Yeah.

SB and TG: [laughs]

SB: They uh search the Google or I don't know. They search Google and find out about domestic violence. Uh we are otherwise locally in the 211 line if you pick up—you know about the 211 service? Okay, just like 911 and 411, there is a service called 211, I think many cities have that. So you can call them and ask them any kind of question, you know “where do I get my driver's license renewed?” and they tell you how to do that. And so they- if you call there and say, um “there is a domestic uh uhviolence situation, who do I call?” they will say Houston Area Women's Center or they may say call Daya. Okay, so depending on the situation of the South Asian client, they may encourage them to call Daya. So, so they are known. [laughs]

TG: [to PL] Did you have a question?

PL: Um...no, you go ahead.

TG: Okay. Um, so you just also mentioned the Houston Area Women's Center? What type of collaboration do you have with them?

SB: Um we have very good working relationship with many organizations. Um, the Houston Area Women's Center of course is a—is much bigger and caters to a very broad segment of the population. Um and...uh we have had training from them. Um they have—they they do a session called uh Crisis Intervention on how to do phone, phone counseling and all that. Um o-otherwise, if they come across a South Asian client, sometimes they refer the client to us. And if we have a client who we think would be better served by Houston Area Women's Center we refer to them. And we also work with Fort Bend County Women's Center, Montgomery County W-Women's Center, and so we have a working relationship with all of them. Um we also have working relationships with the police department. Um uh HPD knows who Daya is. Okay, um and we also work with sheriff's department and organization. So uh sometimes they refer clients to us. And if they come across a situation where they think somebody needs help, yeah.

TG: And earlier you also mentioned other organizations in the country. Were those—did you mean those organizations are for domestic abuse within the South Asian community?

SB: Yes. Yes.

TG: Okay. So what makes Daya unique compared to those other organizations?

SB: Um w-we are very similar, we are very similar. Maybe, um we may offer a broader spectrum of services so that's probably it. Um we even ran a transitional home for a while, so we owned a physical property where um uh somebody can go stay for a few months, okay. We operated one for 7 years, okay. The way the thing works is from an abusive situation somebody goes to a shelter, um uh Houston Area Women's Center runs a shelter. Shelter is a very unique kind of thing, it's got to be very secure, nobody should know where it is except people who have a need to know. Uh and uh they provide everything, they provide housing and and food—everything. Uh whereas a transitional home is a situation where the

woman has already come out of the abusive situation and is trying to rebuild her life, okay, and so she needs a place where she can stay, and maybe look for a job, maybe get some job training, so that kind of stuff. So w-we never had a shelter—shelter is—running a shelter is very difficult, of course you need some unique skills and money and all that. Um so we rely on other shelters if we have to. Sometimes we rent hotel rooms or we try to place in, in a relative's place and things like that. Um but our transitional home was very successful, uh but it was in one place so, so some—it was in the Houston area so somebody from Clear Lake may not want to move there and live there. So even though we uh—some of our best success stories come from the transitional home, um the occupancy was dropping and so we decided to close the transitional home and uh so we now resort to other ways to provide housing for them. Uh we work with the City of Houston, um they have a thing called the rapid rehousing. And so we work with them to provide housing f-for the people. So uh so there—exists co (?) thing between these organizations but fundamentally they all try to do similar things. The phone line is probably common for all of them.

TG: So when you're talking about housing is that—for example when a woman wants to move out of her current house and live by herself? Or what is the situation there?

SB: Yeah that's right. Um you know it it comes when she wants to end the relationship with her abuser okay and there is a divorce, or they are separated and at that point uh she wants to move, maybe with her kid, and sometimes you know there, th-th-there is a custody battle, and she may have only visitation right or she may be able to keep only weekdays or something like that. So she moves to—an uh essentially is going to start her life anew, just start over again. And, and many of the women call us uh not very early on, when it is, when it is kind of late, okay, that's very typically. When, when they—Because all along they tried to say, “okay maybe this will get resolved and it will go away and uh maybe we'll be back together and it will be a nice, harmonious marriage.” Um but it never happens. And so at that point, maybe several years that go by we know women who put up with this situation like for maybe 20 years, 25 years. And then they call, okay. So uh so by the time they are already ready to leave, okay, they may even have grown children, okay. Um and uh so they just leave. And th-they get their own apartments and get jobs and so on.

TG: How is domestic abuse different within the Indian American community as opposed to an American community?

SB: There are a lot of similarities. I think world over it's the same kind of thing. The uh the unique difference, of course as I mentioned, it is the in-law abuse kind of thing in the South Asian communities. That's just part of the culture, you know it's uh joint families um and it just goes with that, with that tradition. And so when a woman marries and goes in the house, sh-she is not just the guy's wife, but she becomes part of the family and so she is ex-expected to uh to uh b-be very highly respectful of the in-laws and it could be even a sister-in-law or a brother-in-law it doesn't really have to be father-in-law, mother-in-law. An older sister-in-law that she has to be with. So there is some of that k-kind of thing. So those you have to understand. And uh, uh so that's part of the cultural differences th-that exist. But otherwise, domestic violence, sexual assault, they are about the same in every, every community uh world over. Some may be more, some may be less, but by and large they are the same.

TG: Do you think the in-law phenomenon you were talking about exists in other minority cultures too?

SB: Um...

TG: It might be hard for you to say.

SB: It maybe, maybe the Middle East? It may be there. Um um...it may be in other Asian cultures, it's possible, okay. Uh but then in India, Pakistan, all of that i-it's very pronounced.

TG: So then, finally, is there a difference between domestic abuse within the Indian American community and the Indian community? Like back in India.

SB: Oh! Um... uh yeah there are some differences. One of the things that happens uniquely [laughs] is a visa related thing. Um there is a, you know there is a um, um, um...a worker visa you know (?) like highly educated they get a worker visa they come and work three years, six years like that. The spouse also accompanies but the spouse does not have uh—cannot take up employment, okay. It used to be that she could not even get a driver's license and she couldn't open a bank account, so they had—there were some of those kind of restrictions. Now some of those have been weakened and loosened up. And in fact somebody, an organization like Daya um uh helped in that process, by writing to uh congressmen and saying, “hey look, the spouses—she's also, she may also be educated and she can take up employment. And she, she needs some freedom.” So the guys were exploiting that, okay. They would take away the woman's passport and and say things like uh “you can't leave the house, you can't leave the apartment. You are to be here. Um if you go outside you'll get arrested.” You know things like that. They are trying to scare her into doing whatever he wanted her to do, okay, work, cook all the time and clean and uh he would give a budget and say he can get grocery but you have to maintain within that and if it doesn't work they will be abusive. So there is some of that, and also some of the guys, they already had a girlfriend here, okay, and then they go to India and get married and come back. So there is some of that kind of thing happens. So that aspect of it is unique. Um here—uh uh they don't really—not a whole lot of the joint family here because in situations like this. But in India there may be a joint family so the husband, wife, and the parents may all live together.

TG: Oh, okay.

SB: Yeah, so those are some of the differences. Yeah.

TG: Is there any effort to bring Daya, or an organization like Daya, back to Asia?

SB: Um...in India, in India there are organizations like Daya, in most big cities there are uh um organizations that do similar kind of work. In fact, uh uh we met the president of a Daya-like organization from a city where I come from—Chennai. She came to the US for a visit and we hosted her for a day for our discussions and comparing notes. Um the uh domestic violence, sexual assault, rape kind of thing. It's a b-big topic in India. Uh and uh there are social service organizations, they're called NGOs: non-governmental organizations. Which is same as non-profit in the US. And uh they are there—very active you know um community leaders working there. Uh I think they are doing a lot of g-good work and help victims of domestic violence, yeah. And my wife Prahba. [Hellos exchanged]. Priscilla and Taylor.

TG: Nice to meet you.

PB: Nice meeting you. You're both at Rice?

PL: Yes.

TG: Mmhmm.

PB: Great.

TG: You're welcome to sit and listen if you want. [laughs]

SB: Yeah they have an audio recording and a video recording going on. [laughs]

TG: So focusing in a bit more on your involvement with Daya. Um I know you said you came into the organization because of your, like, skills, like your background, but you didn't really know much about domestic abuse or about the issue. Did you have any misconceptions coming in?

Starting at 31:00: what Priscilla typed up:

SB: Uh yes, I was not sure how - how I would be accepted. Okay? Um and I wasn't even sure whether I-I can be of much help, okay. When it comes to the content of what it really does, sure I can help with the planning, strategic planning. I-I've done a spectrum of work with them uh I can go into that a little bit later. But uh uh I knew that some things that are common to nonprofits I can help with. But Daya is unique - the thing about domestic violence, I wasn't sure I can contribute much in that area. Okay. And I was sure I could not because that's not okay - but I did go through a training. I did the - take the Houston Area Women's Center 40 hour training on crisis intervention and how to answer phone calls. Um and I wasn't sure if whether any woman would confide with me if I picked up the phone. Okay? [**TG and SB:** [laughs]] Uh as it turns out, uh there are women who are willing to talk to me. As I've uh—I've come across a situation uh um but uh that was my uh concern. Uh I wasn't sure whether - I had been on the boards of other non-profits prior to that. And uh so I wasn't sure whether I-I would be a good fit. But as it turned out, it worked out great. Um th-there are all these boards - they are all wonderful. I was the first male board member. There was another guy who joined a few years later. Uh and I was the first male president of Daya. Uh the last two years, 2016 and '17. Um but but I-I-I would say it was a great privilege and honor to uh to work with these women. They're all just wonderful - very dedicated, very passionate, hard working. Um uh true um intention to help um. So two of the founders are still on the board. Okay. So they provide a lot of uh continuity and support and strength. Um b-but there've been other board members who come and go. There is a term limit. Um so there is a board set of by-laws. I helped for example with a little bit of by-laws writing, um cleaning it up, helped with strategic planning. Uh [**PB:** [inaudible]] I helped with grant writing.

PB: He came up with a way of uh measuring.

SB: Yes.

PB: A measurable idea. [**SB:** We start with-] I think one of the uh - his significant, in my opinion, contributions, from coming from a corporate background into a nonprofit like Daya, I think uh he established a uh an organizational structure and also devised measures - means of measuring the uh uh effectiveness, and just even measuring the work being done, through coming up with the idea of suggesting uh for Daya to keep the phone logs. And then uh, you know, [**SB:** Yeah] coming up with the-

SB: Yeah. How many clients you help, and uh getting their demographic information about them, into their religion, okay. Um so the way-the way that helped is uh in uh in getting the right kind of counselors. Okay so this is kind of taking it one level down like into the subculture kind of thing. Um and also helped in our writing for grants. You know when you write for grant applications you have to put in, you know, what kind of a clientele do you have, what [**PB:** Come up with numbers--] demographics. So, so maybe the first the presentation that I may have put together, the PowerPoint. It's like that. So when I, when I joined, I asked them what's your budget. They said, "I don't know." Okay. So it was like that. They-so I said, "Do you have insurance?". They said, "Why do we need insurance?". You know, like that. I'm exaggerating but uh I - it was like that. So I helped-

PB: Also you have built a process into--into you know, the project-

SB: Yeah. Like a little project management, discipline, [PB: Project management. Project.] planning. So get some of it took a while, but it gradually got there. So that was uh my my- but after that I fitted in nicely there. I uh um uh I've done things like move furniture. [**SB and TG:** [laughs]] And it so happened I had a pick-up truck at the time and I even helped a client move her furniture. Okay. Uh but otherwise I would help with those kinds of things. I sold tickets, and I've uh I've done everything. You know from soup to--(?). Um uh at the high level, maybe big things like strategic planning. Uh and that helped a lot we kind of uh um um gave an--a roadmap of where we're headed uh and found out from staff, and and board members and we also invited some community people to participate to find out what are the right things to do and many of the things - services that we gradually added were all because of strategic planning that we did, you know. So that's it.

TG: So you started off on the board, you said. [**SB:** Yeah.] Were you on the board until you became president? Two years ago?

SB: Yes, yes. You, you, you stay on the board as a president. You become a board president. There is board and there is a thing called an executive board. And so it's a subset of the board. And it's usually the president, uh president-elect, secretary, and treasurer. There are the four, four people who are called the executive board. Uh they have slightly more financial authority and so on, you make the call, and you talk to the staff - the staff interact with the, with the executive board more regularly than with the rest of the board. Um at some point I got to tell you we were essentially a board run organization. So it was a hands-on board, uh very, very small boards are like that, okay? Uh and ideally, nonprofit organization should be run by an executive director, who is a paid employee um and they help paid staff. And then they take care of everything, okay. And then they only interact with the board, okay they, they essentially hire the executive director and maybe some senior staff. The rest they take care of themselves. You come up with policies, procedures, guidelines. Um but otherwise, you let the ED run the show. So we have made that transition and uh just in the last two years, um you know essentially, it has become uh an ED run organization. So that's uh that's generally considered a major step for any non-profit.

TG: So that was one of your big goals then?

SB: One of our one of our goals. Um in the strategic plans. And I helped with that process. I hired an outside consultant uh who helped reorganize and it just so happened that we managed to get a fantastic ED. In fact, she came from Rice University [**TG:** Oh wow.]

TG and SB: [laughs]

SB: She was a ED of um an institute inside uh inside Rice. And she wanted to do something different. And we're very fortunate to get her. And she's still there and doing a great job. We're really happy with her.

TG: What's her name?

SB: Rachna Khare. Rachna Khare. And there's an organization called 360, 360 degrees.

TG: At Rice?

PL: Oh yes.

SB: At Rice. She was the ED of that.

PL: Oh okay.

SB: Yeah.

TG: So what is your current involvement with Daya?

SB: Um I'm still on the board. Uh I'm, I'm called the immediate past president. Um and I still help with the uh staff, whatever they ask me to do. Um uh...and I attend board meetings regularly, every month. In fact they are now going through another revision of by-laws and so I'm helping with that. Um and uh I help with the - there are now committees and I'm on an audit committee which takes care of fundraising as well. And uh I'm also on a personnel committee so two committees um I serve on. And our committees meet. And the committees consist of board members. And uh ED also sits in on the meetings. And so we deal with uh uh planning for staffing, uh we also - what do you call, planning for space. Uh office space. Um but most importantly, we um worry about fundraising and where we're going to get our money from. We were uh hundred percent supported by the community, okay. Until a few years ago. So we used to run a gala. And we get the monies from there. Uh but now we get uh un monies from private foundations and also from uh government grant. Uh we started with a federal government grant. We learned quite a bit on how to write a federal grant, how to administer a federal grant, uh you have to - there's a lot of reporting, paperwork involved and we had to learn all that. And so we did all that. So three or four board members got together and did that. And now we have a, we now have a state government grant. Uh Criminal Justice Department, CJD. They provide us a grant. So roughly uh roughly a--roughly a third of our money comes from the community, okay, the gala. And another third comes from the state government grant. And another third comes from private foundation grants. So that's that's how we uh um. Some of the other uh organizations like like, they're like Daya and elsewhere, many of them get only state government grants or federal grants and they don't get - they get small amount of community support. But uh we get uh we get pretty good community support. Our most recent gala which was uh last month, oh we had 650 people attend. We were so surprised. Last year, it was like 330 people. [**TG:** Wow.] And so it was a - essentially doubled in size. Uh we didn't get double the amount of money. [**All:** [laughs]] But good to see so many people attend. It's also a kind of an outreach event. Um we do a lot of outreach activities. We hold uh we uh we hold seminars, education um uh sessions um we show movies on the subject. Um we also hold uh booths and fairs, community fairs, so that kind of an outreach. And we think of gala as a big outreach event, you know. Where we get a chance to tell this many people about our um our achievements. So.

TG: So who were you trying to reach out to?

SB: Um it likely donor community, okay. And and also we want them to be able to tell others that, "Hey-- there is an organization called Daya, if somebody needs help, call them." Okay. I think our biggest challenge is that we are not reaching out to all possible places. Um we tried to go to Hindu temples, we try to go to mosques. We try to go to Sikh gurdwaras. We try to go to churches, you know. Um where where South Asians go, okay. We are not always very successful in penetrating those so we we keep trying that, okay. Uh so a temple might say, "Oh no we don't have that problem in our congregation." You know, "if we have a problem, we'll solve it ourselves. Thank you very much." You know, like that. So that is our biggest challenge. Our biggest challenge is to be able to reach out to all the people, so then they know, if they need help, they can call. So we have taken out ads in movie theaters, and we have taken out ads in newspapers. And radio programs, and so on. So that remains our challenge. So we we have an outreach director, full-full time staff. So she uh she reaches out to various organizations like, like the ones I mentioned, to stay in touch.

TG: Oh so just to be clear, you mentioned religion a few times. Is Daya related--or is Daya like identified as a specific religion?

SB: No. Not at all.

TG: Okay.

SB: We help anybody. But uh we know that immediately they may need some specific help. So to know what is the religion of the client is-is useful. Yeah, in providing directed, targeted help. But otherwise we uh we keep statistics uh but just only to-to know how best we can help them. Yeah.

TG: So what are Daya's goals moving forward from now?

SB: Um ideally we want to have the problem go away at some point [laughs] Uh but we also know it's not practical, okay. Um in fact one of the uh private foundations. They said that they um gave us the money. They said the measure of your success, is that your organization doesn't exist anymore.

SB and TG: [laughs]

SB: Okay. Okay and so we would like for that to see happen. So we are growing but not for its own sake. We are growing because there is a demand. Um so, you know, going forward, we want to be sure that um uh in a in a reactive way that um we are able to help the uh the abused people, okay. All the, All the potential candidates know who were are, and they come seek and help okay. In a proactive way, we want to provide the education so that the domestic abuse goes away, r-r-reduced by--through education and awareness and those kind of things. So those continue to remain our goals, our long-term goals. And uh and we want to be around to help--that's mostly--Um I don't think we want to grow too big. Uh I think our-- but we continue to grow a little bit every time, every year.

TG: So what timeframe does Daya plan for? Like do y'all have five year, ten-year plans. Or anything specific like that?

SB: Um in our uh w-we've been around for 22 years and we have had uh three strategic, now four strategic planning sessions. And usually they have a time horizon of about three years. So we like to put together those plans for three years. So that's uh that's our planning horizon. Yeah.

TG: And you also mentioned term limits for people involved.

SB: Yeah.

TG: So how much longer [SB: It is uh-] can you be-

SB: Um it's a - it is a two year term and anybody can have three consecutive two year terms. But if uh 75% of the board wants you to stay uh um you can stay if you want to. So I've been there a long time. I've served. I should--I should step off the board. [SB and TG: [laughs]] But uh th-they won't let me. [laughs] Okay. Uh but I do plan to come off the board with this term. I've been there long and so we - we are being successful at recruiting new, new people. Uh we don't have another male board member yet. We have another one come - he served for 6 years, and then he left. And he became an advisory board member. So we will continue to recruit uh and have a more diverse board uh.

TG: (to PL) Do you have any questions?

PL: Oh I just was curious about the education outreach part of it. Are you trying to like educate um women who are under domestic abuse to like identify it? Or like also like men?

SB: Also the abuser [**PL:** The abuser.] yeah, yeah, yeah. We want to target them. It'd be very hard to get them into an educational seminar. We have tried that sort of stuff and uh we, we may have a movies and uh website oh by the way we are on social media a lot. W-we have a Facebook page and Instagram. And uh we use all that. Um so um it's just continuous trying in education. Sometimes we have uh seminars on subjects which are slightly outside of domestic abuse so that they can attract people to come in like financial planning, you know that sort of stuff. Yeah.

TG: What are the biggest obstacles Daya has gone through?

SB: Um...in in in our ability to grow and all that, it has been okay. Uh getting qualified staff is sometimes a problem. Um we now offer competitive salaries. And earlier on, we could not. So uh you know somebody would join and within a few months, find another job and leave, you know, because the pay was good. Um we do have some staff turnover because you know they work three years and they say okay they want to go onto something else and so. We have had one staff person who has been there for ten years. We celebrated her 10th anniversary just recently. And I would have never expected anybody to work for Daya for ten years. [**SB and TG:** [laughs]] Because you know--there is really not a whole lot to, to uh no advancement opportunities. You can become ED okay, but there is only one ED. And you can be a director, and that's what she is now for uh Legal Affairs. And so uh but she's really happy doing what she's doing and she's a wonderful person. Uh very knowledgeable, she gives talks um in fact she's done a few talks at Rice. Um uh so we've had that kind of stuff. Uh um one, one thing I thought might be there is an abuser might try to crash into the office and uh our office location is kind of confidential. Of course, the clients know where it is and others who have a need to know where it is. So in the lobby for example, we don't put the name. So they have to know what the office number. I thought there may be some issues with uh that kind of stuff but uh over the years, it never happened. Very very minimal things but uh um we really haven't had any other major hurdles, you know. We've never had financial problems. Uh with what we had we could support. And uh and we, we had good reserves to keep going if there is a rainy day or something like that. We have funds to expand our new programs. Um recruiting more male board members may be an issue. We'd like to have two or three or more on the board.

TG: Um what perspective have you been able to offer being one of the few men?

SB: Um...that's a good question. [**SB and TG:** [laughs]] I don't know uh maybe just, just being me and working with them. Um and listening um uh I used to worry um if um if uh I-I tried to have an opinion or I wanted something done the way I wanted it done, whether it would come across, "hey here comes this guy telling me what to do" or will I be treated as an equal, equal board member." Uh I mean I think I was an equal board member and I think that worked out okay. Um I don't know maybe I—uh by doing things that others can't do like move furniture for example. You know it's like - so maybe I, I um uh...I helped in some unique ways that way. Okay. Um when um when we help negotiate for lease or you know go talk to us oh sometimes it's helpful if there is a guy there. You know so it's that kind of thing that was maybe kind of useful. Uh I did try to see whether we could have a unique uh seminar aimed at men. Um and I thought that would be a uh away to bring in- but they all convinced me that - they just - guys just won't show up. And we're wasting our time. And we got to do it some other way. So, so, yeah, I hope that answers my question to some extent.

TG: Yeah, yeah. (To PL) Do you have another question?

PL: Not right now.

TG: That's okay. We don't want to take up too much of your time.

PL: Yeah.

SB: No, okay, okay.

TG: Um so just kind of wondering what else you're involved with right now, besides Daya?

SB: Oh um my wife um has an organization called the Classical Arts Society. It's in the more arts arena, it's not in the social services. Um it presents classical music, Indian classical music um she brings artists from India and presents them here. She's been doing it for 40 years.

TG: Four-zero?

SB: Four-zero.

TG and PL: Wow.

SB: [laughs] Uh informally first 15 years, and then she formed the organization 25 years ago. And she has a board. There are two - two other women who started it and then now there is a full board of people. And I help her in that in in whatever she wants me to do, okay. Um we host artists at our house you know, when they when they visit. And uh we hold um performances in various auditorium-- two or three times a year. It's not a continuous - there is one major event in January ea-each year. And there is a spring music festival and a fall music festival. And so it requires a lot of planning. Um she has to raise funds for it, they has to seek donations and all that. So I help her with all that, paperwork, background, behind the scenes kind of work. Um I'm also involved in another organization called Samskriti which is the same kind of thing for dance. Um and so we - b-both my wife and I are on the board of that organization. And well there's the Mahatma Gandhi Library um they uh um they organize an annual event around um Gandhi's birthday, which is October 2nd. And uh there is a 5K walk that I organize. I've been doing it for 11 years. [TG: Mm.] So and uh the others I get involved with the Meenakshi Temple - it's a Hindu temple in Pearland uh that has been around for 40 years also. Um and uh uh I was on their board for four years and then I was on their advisory board for a couple of years. And they call me off and on and say do this project, that project. I ran their long term planning sessions for three years, three times, thr-three different times. I ran their election a couple of times, you know. So they call me for--mostly simply they ask me to uh um assemble their 40 year history and uh so that book got released in December and so that took a lot of time. So I had to get articles and talk to people and put together - and working on the second edition of it already [TG: Wow.] Meenakshi Temple. Yeah. Um and the other thing I get involved in with is the museum. We have been patrons of the Museum of Fine Arts, for a long time. And so we attend the events. My wife is on their Asian Art sub committee and so I attend the events with her on that. And my wife and I are docents of Asia Society so we give tours there. We've not been really active this year. Uh but until last year, we were- so we, so we as I mentioned earlier, we keep a busy calendar. [TG: Mm-hm.] And uh and we meet our grandson at least once a week [TG: [laughs]]. They live in town. They -- our son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. So he come over or we go visit him once a week. So that keeps us busy.

TG: How old is he?

SB: He's four years old.

TG: Mmm.

SB: Yeah, yeah.

TG: That's fun. Wow so it sounds like you're really involved in the Asian community in Houston.

SB: Yes, yeah, yeah. We do a -- I do another thing. There's an organization called Houston Greeters. Have you heard of them?

TG: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

SB: So we were greeters for a while also. That's something that we did. Uh, so we used to give tours of the South Asian areas and the temple. Museum of Fine Arts, not Museum of Fine Arts, the Asia Society. Give tours there. So, so we get involved in four or five non-profits at any given time in various capacities. Either on the board, or as volunteers, or doing work. Things like that.

TG: So why do you like being so involved?

SB: Um I, I think uh you know, we go crazy otherwise.

All: [laughs]

SB: Uh I think volunteerism has been there in our family, our families. From my childhood days, at some point or another. My parents, my sister back in India uh they all got involved in volunteerism. So that's--so I kind of grew up in that atmosphere. Um and then I just continue that tradition. People call and ask for help and so that's another thing. Yeah. So uh every year we tell ourselves, "oh we need to cut down, we need to do more of this, more of another, we need to spend more time travelling, or just being in the home [TG: [laughs]], and clean up the house. And you know buy" - we don't - so sometimes we put all these aside and go work on projects for others so that's uh, that's fine. We're okay with that. [laughs]

TG: Yeah so besides travelling, what do you like to do to relax?

SB: Um uh well I use Google a lot, and search and read, okay. I like to read on iPad, or newspaper, you know keep up with the news. Um we do go to some of those cultural programs - music and all that. Um and uh movies and sports - you know we don't--we're not big movie-goers but around maybe some part of the year some two or three movies close to Oscar nomination time, yeah go see some of the movies. [TG: [laughs]] And we'll go see some of the movies. Um that's mostly. Oh by the way we walk. We walk very regularly. Um I've been on 15 half marathons so far in Houston.

TG and PL: Wow!

SB: I'm not a - I can't run but I can walk.

TG: Yeah.

SB: Okay. And uh so this year, 2018, was my 15th Houston half marathon, so I'm gonna keep that going for as long as I can. So that's another thing to do. And so we have a walk club. So we get together and and and walk either in a mall or in a park. But not everybody goes on the half marathon. A few of them do, yeah. Otherwise, we like to stay fit. And eat.

TG: [laughs] Walk so that you *can* eat.

SB: Yeah [laughs]

TG: That's great.

SB: And I enjoy Scotch. I have Scotch every once in awhile [**All:** [laughs]] Yes so that's uh that's kind of what we do. Yeah. When we travel uh we we make a trip to India every year. Uh and Prahba, Prahba spends maybe three months or so and I spend about a month, a month and a half and then we come back. So her mom is there. She is 98 years old.

TG: Wow.

SB: And so she and her two brothers they take turns being with mom in Chennai, that's where we come from. Tamil Nadu, Chennai, South India. And uh so that's our regularly. We do that regularly, we've been doing that for a few years now. And then we try to do other travel, a little bit here and there. Um 2016, we didn't go anywhere. Um very much. 2015 we made a trip to uh Greece. [**TG:** Mm.] And then just uh last month we made a trip to Italy. So we're just doing a little catch up on some of the trips and we are getting ready to go to Machu Picchu later this week.

TG: Oh wow!

SB: So leave on Friday and for 9 days, 10 days, I think.

TG: That's amazing.

SB: Yeah so that's uh.

TG: Great.

SB: Getting ready for it.

[brief side conversation about interviewers was edited out]

TG: Um is there anything else that we didn't cover that you'd like to add?

SB: Um no, not particularly. I think I've probably covered all of Daya and my personal involvement.

TG: Mmhm.

SB: Uh and uh let's see. It's doing well. Doing well. Doing what it is supposed to do. So quite happy with the outcome. Yeah.

TG: Great well thank you very much for your time [**SB:** Sure]

PL: Thank you so much.

SB: Thank you, thanks for uh doing this interview. [**SB and TG:** [laughs]]

[END: 1:02:07]