

Interviewee: Jaimeet Gulati

Interviewer: Saima Toppa

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Transcribed by: Saima Toppa

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### Background:

Jaimeet Gulati was born in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in February 1989. His parents migrated to the United Arab Emirates in the 1980s for business opportunities. UAE offers plentiful short-term work opportunities but offers no pathway to citizenship for non-Emiratis. Consequently, Jaimeet's goals were always to come to the United States for education and permanent residency. In 2006, Jaimeet migrated to the USA to pursue a bachelor of science in Rice University in electrical engineering, graduating *summa cum laude* in 2010. Originally under a F-1 student visa, he now has a H1-B visa as an educated professional. As a systems analyst working for EDP Renewables North America LLC (formerly Horizon Wind Energy) for two years in renewable energy, he makes \$60-80,000 a year and is satisfied with his employment earnings. Furthermore, he is planning on pursuing a MBA after several more years of work, subscribing to the belief that hard work and talent are always recognized in the United States.

His primary motivations for coming to Houston are because of Rice's recognition as a major research institution and its status as a premier educational institution in engineering. Though he has resided in Dubai for 17 years of his life, he retains Indian national status (from parents) but hopes to obtain permanent residency in the United States in approximately six or seven years. Since UAE is part of the "Other" geographic bloc for purposes of US naturalization, Jaimeet has effectively cut his migration time by three or four years. The interview highlights the selective nature of the US migration process and how immigrants can use stepwise migration to intermediate countries to accrue financial capital and preferential status to eventually migrate to their preferred destinations in the United States.

### Setting:

The interview centers on the areas of labor and capital to develop a working history of migration. In the context of childhood experiences, family life, and the naturalization process, we can discern the push and pull factors that enable migration as well as the adjustment of immigrants once in Houston.

The interview was conducted in Saima Toppa's apartment in the Medical Center District in Houston. The interview required an hour and a half. Jaimeet Gulati recounted several stories of his childhood and upbringing, giving us a very succinct outline of his experiences in both UAE and here in Houston. He provided us with great historical information regarding his motivations to pursue an education and employment in the United States.

**Key:**

Saima Toppa (**ST**)

Jaimeet Gulati (**JG**)

**ST:** Hi.

**JG:** Hello.

**ST:** My name is Saima Toppa. I am a student at Rice University. Thanks so much for taking the opportunity to participate in the Houston Asian American Archive. I'd like to ask you some questions about your migration to the United States. The purpose of the Houston Asian American Archive is to preserve and document the migration histories of Asian Americans. The interview will begin with questions related to labor and capital (the working environment) and then it will follow up with questions that touch upon personal relations, family structure, and a myriad of other cultural, intellectual, and spiritual concerns of the Asian American immigrant community. I hope you are as excited as I am to engage in this project! (laughs)

**JG:** Pretty excited.

**ST:** Okay. The interview will take about an hour, maybe an hour and a half. Here is a copy of the consent form. [Hands consent form] I ask that you take a few minutes to read the form carefully. Again, your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Your contributions will be very important for us to understand the Asian American immigrant community in Houston better.

Do you have any questions?

**JG:** Not right now.

**ST:** Do you mind if I audio tape the interview in order to have an accurate record of the interview?

**JG:** That's fine.

**ST:** Ok.

**JG:** Do you have a pen?

**ST:** Yes.

[Paper shuffling]

**ST:** Are you ready to begin?

**JG:** What's the date today?

**ST:** The 23rd.

**JG:** Do I have to write my name here as well?

**ST:** Yes. Oh yeah, that's fine. That's it. I'd like to start by asking you questions about your family's immigration background. What is your full name?

**JG:** Jaimeet. J-A-I-M-E-E-T. Gulati is my last name. G-U-L-A-T-I.

**ST:** Thank you. Where were you born?

**JG:** Dubai. United Arab Emirates.

**ST:** In what year?

**JG:** 89. 1989.

**ST:** What was your birthday?

**JG:** February 13th.

**ST:** Where's your family from?

**JG:** Originally from India. And Punjab in India. But they did move to Dubai about...almost about 27 - 28 years ago. Yeah, about that much.

**ST:** What was your family's original motivation from moving from India to Dubai?

**JG:** Um, I think it was more of my dad's decision more than anything. He...uh ...well, he has..he was involved in a family business in India first. And then he kind of decided to have his split up from the family business and kind of start something on his own. He always wanted to kind of

have his own business. Um, he had his own ambitions. He wanted to start off something on his own. And Dubai, at that time, was a land for like good opportunities, good business, and stuff, so he moved from India to Dubai in 1982, I want to say. No, yeah, wow, that is about 29 - 30 years ago. So, my mom was still in India then. They got married in India so they my mom was still back in India so they went there, found a job first, then called my mom over, and later, established his own business. So, it was mostly for opportunities, more than anything.

**ST:** Do you know how long your parents were separated before your mom joined your father in Dubai?

**JG:** Mm, less than a year, but I'm not too sure about the exact number of months. But I'm sure it was probably eight to nine months, I would say.

**ST:** Mm, so it didn't impact their relationship or anything?

**JG:** No, I don't think so at all. Um, I mean, they were three years into a marriage then but...um...no, I don't think it really impacted. Because I mean, Dubai and India are pretty close together, so I'm pretty sure my dad would've visited back and forth. I don't know the details but no, I don't think so. But I think it was all smooth enough.

**ST:** Um, how did your parents meet?

**JG:** [laughs] Um, my parents actually had an arranged marriage. [laughs] It's actually pretty common...uh...in India. 'Cause, it's pretty traditional culture. Well, they kind of met at a wedding and then both the parents talked and my dad and mom met like I think just for a day or two and then they got married. Just for a day? I think so.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** Yeah.

**ST:** So they were complete strangers?

**JG:** Yeah, I would say that. Pretty much. But I guess for Indian families, it's more of a parent's say than the child's. My mom was pretty young. I think she was 20 at the time, so...

**ST:** And your dad? How old was he?

**JG:** Twenty...I think he was twenty-eight. About eight years [of] difference.

**ST:** Okay, quite an age difference.

**JG:** Yeah, a lot.

**ST:** Can you describe your childhood in Dubai? What was it like?

**JG:** Um. [Laughs] I have pretty horrible memory. But um, I thought it was pretty interesting. We had--I had a whole bunch of friends from different nationalities. Dubai is actually full of South Asians and Europeans so I had a bunch of European friends. I had a close friend who was actually from Australia. He was--I don't know--he and I just gelled a lot, I think. That's the only person, I think--that's the only friend I remember from primary school or something. I have not been in touch with him ever since. But I remember having a lot of friends from different nationalities. And that was not only in primary school. That was through middle school and high school and what not. But that's just the mix of people in Dubai. So, it was actually a lot of fun because you always got to know what other people did...um...and how they...because a lot...Dubai is such a new country..I think it got independence in 1971 or 1972... so it's a pretty new country...so a lot of the people there are first-generation, I would say. So, they keep to their culture. They're not - they don't change their ways. Um, so it was very interesting, um, there was a private school, so there were a lot of people there as well. So there's like people of different nationalities and different people so it's pretty interesting childhood. So, yeah, no, that's what I just remember. Very, very diverse.

**ST:** How was it like to-um- maintain your culture and traditions in Dubai? I know you

mentioned that there's a large South Asian community, but what of like religious traditions, being that Dubai is such a Muslim context?

**JG:** Um, I would actually say Dubai is pretty liberal to a certain extent. But I would be cautious when I say that because even when I because it's multicultural and liberal but still an Islamic country by law so yes, it is possible to practice your culture, but that's different from practicing your religion because culturally you can have these events, you can celebrate different holidays or whatever, but uh, I guess having a temple or place of worship for any religion is actually pretty hard to maintain because by Islamic law, I think mosques are the only place of worship that are legally allowed in the country so it's always hard in terms of having a place of worship but I think I just grew up with that, so I always just accepted that, so I never really thought that, "Hey, why do we not have a place of worship, blah blah." We did have one, but it always like an industrial kind of area, kind of in the outskirts of the city, where it was just like, you know, meeting place for people of my religion. And I'm a Sikh, so there are not a whole lot of Sikh people in Dubai, but still, like plenty enough to have a place of worship. But yeah, it's always been hard to practice religion as such but since the number of South Asians was always a lot, we used to always celebrate events and have like festivals. Um, in fact, there are a lot of shops. There are a lot of clubs (and clubs being like just social clubs that are run by Indians and are for Indians) so they have a lot of community centers but like places of worship were like the one thing that which I actually realized a lot more when I came here because I saw that pretty big change where Dubai was pretty restrictive in places of worship but in America, it's completely the opposite. It's, uh, freedom of religion for everyone which is actually something I really value a lot in this country. So, that was surely, a change for me.

**ST:** So, you say this with the premise that the temple can be a place where people maintain their

values and traditions?

**JG:** Mm.

**ST:** In Dubai, do you think your community lost some of those traditions because of those laws in place?

**JG:** Um...

**ST:** Do they think there was a result or a correlation between the two?

**JG:** I don't know--I. That's a good question. I don't think I ever saw any lack of values or something not that I can think of. In fact, when I go back to India, since I'm originally Indian, I go to India. I feel a part of them. I don't feel any difference. I never felt like I was culturally behind or that I wasn't at the same level. Just. Maybe just because the number of South Asians was just and Indians is just so many. In fact, I think, if I have the statistic down, I think it's 60%. Dubai is at least...

**ST:** 60% Indian?

**JG:** I would say...

**ST:** Or South Asian?

**JG:** I would say South Asian, not Indian. [Laughs] Including Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan...all those. I would say it's 50-60% South Asian. Um, 20%, it would be European and it's mostly British out of that. Um, 7% Arab, I would think. So, even though, it is an Arab country, it's in the Middle East, it's an Islamic country, it's primarily run...I wouldn't say run but like...it primarily consists of like...a very foreign population and like a majority of them are a population that is South Asian. So you can talk to people in your language. Even the fact that store owners...even the government officials ... sometimes you know, even when you go to any sort of... um... legal like you go to the police station and you go to any government agency and

whatever, you always see even the Arabs talking in Hindi to you.

**ST:** [laughs]

**JG:** Because they are used to it...they need to know that language or Hindi or Urdu or whatever to...they actually need to know that language to have a conversation with people that may or may not know English or Arabic so um, it's very, very interesting to see that. So I don't know I don't think culturally I've ever been lacking or missed out on anything because as I said, we were pretty free to practice our culture. Nobody looked at you weird, nobody thought you were...I never thought I was out of place. There's always so many South Asians around you, so it's never really hard to practice your culture so yes, but religion-wise, there's actually a pretty big...Believe it or not, this is one difference I saw. Here in America, I think, places of worship are sometimes treated as community centers as well. In Dubai, they're actually pretty distinct. It's either a community center or it's a place of worship. So, a place of worship...it's actually meant for worship. You go there, for spiritual and people holy enough.. People here will go to temple to...like my place of worship, gurdwara...they'll go there as a community center a lot of times. So, here, I think it has like a multidimensional kind of...

**ST:** Purpose!

**JG:** Purpose...but in Dubai, I think it's a little more...I don't know.. I think it's a little more divided in terms of this is a community center. We have something like called the "India Club," where people will like go for events. People will go for like hanging out with the community people. Um, like Indians have so many festivals and celebrations but like a religious person will go there only for religious reasons. So, like there's a really distinct difference and I never really thought a place of worship affecting my culture or the lack of place of worship affecting my culture.



**ST:** Interesting.

**JG:** So it's interesting.

**ST:** Okay, forwarding to migration to the US, can you tell me how long you've lived in the US?

**JG:** Um, about six years now, I think.

**ST:** Six years.

**JG:** Yeah.

**ST:** When did you immigrate?

**JG:** Um, 2006. [Hesitant] Yeah, May, no, August 2006.

**ST:** Mm, and what was the purpose of your migration?

**JG:** Um, I came here to get my, uh, college education. So, I had all my schooling, up to my high school in Dubai. And get my boards. And I actually went to a British school, so I gave, what they call, my A-levels. Which is kind of equivalent to what AP's are essentially in the American system. Um, yeah, so I came here for college and I've been working for two years now. So, now, it's been a total of six years I've been here approximately. It's gonna be two years in the summer. But yeah, um, I came here primarily just for college education. Because college education in Dubai is obviously not even close to being as close to what it is in North America or in general.

**ST:** So you went to a British school?

**JG:** Mm.

**ST:** So what deterred you from enrolling in a British university rather than an American university?

**JG:** Um, I thought of that too. Exactly that, in fact. Um, I would that because of primarily two reasons. One would be, first of all, UK education is actually a lot more expensive than American

education.

**ST:** Really? [Shrill]

**JG:** Yeah, that's...when I did my research that was very interesting. Because the living expenses in the UK are actually higher than the living expenses in the US. Um, so it turns out, even if the fee structure is similar, it turns out it is higher. So the overall cost is higher. And the education for like science-related or engineering-related courses or degrees is still not comparable to America. Might be second in the world. I don't know. But it seems that people who wanted to be doctors or get into medicine, generally went to the UK or India. India has, it's really big on medicine as well. What they do is the equivalent of a MD is called a MBBS in India. But people either go to India or UK for doing the medicine or economics. Econ. But I knew always that I wanted to be something in engineering or natural sciences and I did not feel that there was any place other than the US or Canada to come to just because of the level of education. I felt like this was pretty much the highest-the best level of education I can get in engineering in the world. That's why I actually applied to the USA and Canada when I applied, just because, I wanted to keep my options open...

**ST:** Ah, what university did you attend in America?

**JG:** Uh, I attended Rice University in Houston, Texas. So that was a pretty big decision too. But I think it was primarily the reason I attended Rice University was...Well, I applied to about ten schools when I applied to college, I think including Canada. But uh, I primarily came to Rice for its research program for one. It's pretty big. It's a big research institution and um, also because my sister also came here before me.

**ST:** Interesting.

**JG:** To Rice, itself actually. So, she is two years elder to me and she came to the United States

two years before I did. And even when, yeah this is actually a big thing too, when I actually came to the US for the first time was when I came to drop my sister here. And that was the first time my sister or me or my family was actually coming to the US.

**ST:** So this was in 2004?

**JG:** 2004, yeah. Yeah, so when I came here for the first time, I was very, very impressed with the level of...Just look at the university itself! I sat in a couple of classrooms with my sister and I was just very, very impressed by it. So, I um, took Rice to be my top-level school that I aim--- this is the kind of school that I aim to, that I want to be in in two years. And so, I like the country in general, I like the people when I came here. I didn't get to interact with them too much but I was here less than a week. But I still liked--I don't know--I thought it's a nice place to be in. Um, people look like they're a lot more tolerant. People look, at Rice especially, that's the only real exposure I had to people was at Rice. They looked really really nice. Really hospitable, really courteous. Now, if I think about it, maybe it's only certain parts of the US. Or maybe because it's a closed campus. Just really nice people, so it was just something that totally like impressed me and attracted me so that was why I always wanted to be at Rice. And it turns out I actually did go there, so yeah..

**ST:** Amazing. So, was Rice your number one choice?

**JG:** It wasn't [laughs] actually.

**ST:** It wasn't? [Laughs]

**JG:** No. I mean, Rice is pretty high up there. But I have this problem of being too ambitious sometimes. Rice, believe it or not, even though, I knew I wanted to come here, when I came here, my sister told me, "oh, you know, when you apply to Rice, you have this alumni relation so it can really help you so oh yeah, you'll get into Rice for sure." So, uh, I had good credentials,

but um, I think I kind of took Rice to be a back-up sometimes

**ST:** [laughs]

**JG:** “Yeah, yeah, my sister’s already here so I’ll get into Rice for sure.” But now that I think about it, it’s not...

**ST:** It’s not guaranteed.

**JG:** No, it’s not guaranteed. Alumni relation or student relation is not too much of a big deal. They like it, but they still look at your credentials. Your credentials play a big part. They still might want to give you a little bit of a preference maybe but it doesn’t help you a lot. So, I probably was not very wise to take it as a back-up, but that’s why I got too ambitious, “yeah, I’m going to get into Rice for sure!” let’s apply to MIT, to Caltech, to Harvard, to Berkeley, so I applied to a whole bunch of like Stanford ..a whole bunch of places and like I got rejected.

**ST:** Sorry! [Laughs]

**JG:** Ah, from like everywhere. Ah, it’s all right. But I think I got into Rice, I got into Georgia tech, I got into Michigan Ann Arbor, um...Purdue, Illinois-Urbana Champagne. Um, but Stanford, MIT, CalTech, Berkeley, straight up rejections. Umm, got accepted to two schools...two of the top schools in Canada as well. But then I had to eventually narrow it down and decide...and I decided Rice was the better option.

**ST:** So, did you have a preference for America rather than Canada at any point?

**JG:** I did.

**ST:** And what was the reason for the preference?

**JG:** I always preferred America to Canada. One thing was the weather. [laughs]

**JG:** Very big deal. ‘Cause Dubai is desert-land. It stays warm pretty much all the time. So it’s 110-120 degrees in summer so I was always used to warm weather and Canada was ... yeah...

It's crazy cold.

**ST:** I know, right.

**JG:** [laughs] I would just not want to be in a place that snows so much that I would go crazy from staying in the cold weather. But besides the cold weather, Canada is always secondary to me in that, "Hey, if I don't get into an American university, I can go to a Canadian one." Yeah, education was my main factor.

**ST:** Are Canadian schools perceived easier to get into?

**JG:** Yes. Well, not the top two, I would say. One is the University of Waterloo for engineering. High up there. And the other one is the University of Toronto which is high up there as well. But University of Waterloo is hard to get in. University of Toronto is public so I don't think it's too hard to get in. But I would still say it does not rank as high as any of the other schools I applied to in the US. In fact, compared to Rice, I think Rice still takes the lead. Waterloo and Rice, I had my last, even when I like...I saw a dilemma between Waterloo and Rice, but then I chose Rice just because of the fact...Waterloo, I even got scholarships from Waterloo as well but I chose to deny it and come to Rice without any scholarships. Just because, purely because US versus Canada. My only reason was that I wanted to be in the United States rather than Canada.

**ST:** Do you think the United States has a certain cache in its name? And do you think, like, you know, immigrants often desire to immigrate to the US more so than any other country because that American dream is so coveted? Do you think that holds true?

**JG:** It depends on the immigrant. I think, yes, it does hold true for the majority of them, especially the young immigrants I would say. Uh, they would prefer if they could afford it. Because Canada, I would say, is generally a little cheaper than the US.

**ST:** Cost of living-wise?

**JG:** Cost of living and tuition-wise. I think there was a \$10,000 difference per year between the top Canadian university and the top university like Rice, which I think is like #12 in the nation right now. So, um, cost of living, cost of school, one thing if you take that out of the equation and put them both on the same plane, um, I think the American dream is still a pretty big thing. I think, nobody...I can't see myself dreaming to live in Canada whilst in Dubai. I would dream to live in the US or dream to study in the US rather than dream to study in Canada. Um, what I've seen, in general, is that youngsters or young folks who go to college generally want to come to the United States but it's much harder to get into the United States so sometimes people just end up going to Canada.

**ST:** As a second choice?

**JG:** As a second choice or a lack of options. Um, on the other hand, people who are older, age-wise, or they're looking for jobs or business opportunities, it's actually harder to come to the US than Canada. Canada is very free in immigration. It's much easier to migrate to Canada than it is in the US. And that still holds true regardless of the economy or anything of that sort. Um, because Canada is always open to migration. America is not very open to migration and the reason being is I think going in circles but basically not many people want to migrate to Canada. A lot of people want to migrate to the US. And so America has to restrict its immigration.

Whereas in Canada...

**ST:** There's more demand for America?

**JG:** Oh yeah, and Canada has lesser demand so they're very open in their immigration. Well, they used to be a lot more open. Now they're being a little more restrictive. But yeah, I think it also really depends on the age factor as well.

**ST:** Mm, so under what legal status did you immigrate?

**JG:** To the US?

**ST:** Yeah.

**JG:** Um, F-1. That was my visa status. Uh, that's the student visa, um.

**ST:** Was it difficult to procure?

**JG:** Um, yes, I would say. I had remembered being really freaked out because I had heard. Because this was after 9/11, so...

**ST:** Ok, yeah.

**JG:** I think that always played in, for especially, anyone from the Middle East. No matter if you were Indian or not. It was always hard for Middle Easterners to...I mean, after 9/11, it became even harder. And for my sister, it was even harder than me.

**ST:** Wow! Really?

Yeah. Uh, because the closer it was to 9/11, the more stringent they were about there.

**ST:** And gender didn't make a difference either?

**JG:** Um, I bet it would. I imagine. Yeah, it could. I've not heard anything about that. Um, but I remember it being a little bit eased up in 2006 than in 2004 because when my sister came here, she had to give here interview in 2003, I think. And that was just, what. Two, three years after 9/11?

**ST:** Yeah, two years after.

**JG:** So that was really, really, really, close to the actual incident. So it was hard based on that. But the interview process takes what. Like 6 months to get an interview or something like that, if I'm correct. And I remember lining up outside of the American Consulate to even get even to get an appointment schedule for the day. I think we lined up at 5:30 AM in the morning.

**ST:** Oh my God.

**JG:** And this is standing outside of the Consulate. And um, I think my turn came finally after that. So we stood in line for at least six hours before we even got inside the Consulate. And this is in like desert heat. So, it was pretty crazy.

**ST:** Was that process discouraging?

**JG:** No because. Well, more frightening than discouraging, I would say. Because we had heard all these stories about it: “Oh you stand in those lines and you get rejected. And if you get rejected, then, you have to apply again. But to apply again, you need another 4-5 months waiting period because there’s so many people applying for visas that you don’t have a date until after 4-5 months. It was not discouraging because you only apply for your visa after you’ve gotten an acceptance from a university. So you pretty much made up your mind that you’re gonna go to the US. And at that point in time, you know you’re gonna have to go through the interview process. And you just hope to God that you get it.

**ST:** So, is there a good chance, though, that even if you get accepted to a university abroad, that you can still be denied...

**JG:** Yeah, very big chance.

**ST:** And what would be the rationale for being denied?

**JG:** Um, there are a few things they look at. One is how stable is your background. If you can afford to like pay for the education? Because when, if you think about it, it’s actually, um, I completely agree with them too. If you’re international, you’re earning...for example, I’m from Dubai, so you’re earning in dirhams. Um, and you’re spending in dollars here. So, you end up, dollars to dirhams each is like 3.65 dirhams to 1 dollar. So, you’re essentially spending triple the amount of money in dirhams to come here in fees you’re paying. So you need to show that you can sustain. You need to show in cash that you can pay up front. If you can’t show that, you are



not. So you take your bank statements with you, your history of like...of just like all the countries you've been to...and also they...like extensive background check. Funny story actually. Um, when my sister was applying for her visa, all of us applied together. My entire family applied together to the United States.

**ST:** But she applied for a student visa?

**JG:** And everyone else applied for a tourist visa.

**ST:** So, her was F-1?

**JG:** And mine was B-1/B-2. Um, she got her visa. So you have to take your transcripts, good credentials and everything, university matters. You have to take your bank statements and everything. If you've got a business, it's generally easier because they know business people are more stable than people with jobs. So, it worked out for her, but that day, so you know that day whether you get accepted or not. So, I got accepted, my dad got accepted, my mom didn't.

**ST:** Wow. Why?

**JG:** Turns out my mom's name matched with someone else's in the criminal record. Actually, name and birthday, believe it or not.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** Actually, name and birth date matched with someone in the United States. I don't know-- who was a criminal, who had a criminal record. And so, they had to take her fingerprints and send it to the FBI in whatever, New York. The fingerprints had to go all the way to the United States and then come back to Dubai. And that was another 2-3 month process. And obviously, we didn't have 2-3 months until my sister had to come here. This was like the summer of. So, she starts in August. And the interview was like in July or June or something like that. Basically, my mom did not get her visa in time.

**ST:** Um, to see your sister off?

**JG:** To see my sister off. So, basically, my mom did not get a visa to come to the United States. She could not see my sister. So, that was actually very, very hard. We've never been in the United States. Um, guess, what, which made it even worse, a week before my sister was supposed to travel, my dad and I were supposed to go...My dad actually slipped off the stairs and had his leg fractured.

**ST:** Oh my God.

**JG:** So my dad could not travel on a seventeen...eighteen hour flight with a fractured leg. That's just not advisable. You can't do that with a fractured leg. That's just like, you know, ruining yourself. Uh, so my dad couldn't travel as well. Turns out I had to go with my sister alone to here. To Houston. To drop her off. And that was when I was fifteen. Um, so it was a really, really crazy time. Because my parents had not seen this country. This city. Nothing. Not the university. Just heard about stuff. Pretty, pretty hard obviously. Very, very hard time. But we were determined that no, my sister had to go and study in a nice place. And so, we did it. And my dad had a friend come here from Atlanta, Georgia and he came down here to Houston and helped us out a little bit. So, it worked out that way but it was a crazy time because my parents' visa stuff didn't work out.

**ST:** That's so unfortunate.

**JG:** Yep.

**ST:** So, what was your first impression of the United States? Of Houston when you got here?

**JG:** [laughs] It was. I remember when the plane...When I was flying to the US, I was actually pretty excited. Um, I was excited I was 16. I was like, "Oh yeah, I'm going to the United States." So, I was pretty pumped up about it. 'Cause when you're away from the United States, you're

not here, you always picture the US being like this really fancy place with uh with everything looking like Vegas or looking like New York. Because that's what you see in the movies. You see Chicago, you see New York, you see Vegas. You say, "Oh, this is an amazing country." And then you come to Houston.

**ST:** [laughs]

**JG:** [laughs] I remember when my plane was landing. I had a window seat. I was looking out the window and I was like, "Oh my God. This is so flat and barren." Just brown and black, that's all it is. I was actually a little let down. When we left the airport, I was like, "This is not what I expected it to be." And so, until we actually got into Houston's center, now I actually understand. Houston's so huge. The airport's so large. Once you start entering the city, it starts getting better. You have downtown, it's actually really nice. Rice is such a pretty campus. Like it's just... My first impression was like, "Oh my God, this is a place that's gonna be so boring. What's going on here?" But the people when I came to Rice, you know, I felt like, "No, this place is actually gonna be a lot more interesting... a lot more accepting, a lot more courteous people." I don't know, I think my impression changed just in the first day itself. Certainly, my first impression I got just place-wise was just, "Oh my God." Because in Dubai, everything... it's just... Dubai is such a small city, honestly. I would say Dubai is like the size of [scoffs]... the size of the 610 loop of Houston.

**ST:** Seriously? It's that small?

**JG:** Maybe Beltway. That's it. That's the entire city of Dubai. It's really, really small.

**ST:** So, it's very dense?

**JG:** Very, very dense. Like where we lived...

**ST:** It's like New York in density!

**JG:** Yeah, exactly, so...like downtown is like five minutes away. It's just everything's so close together. The beach is right there. Like, one hour away, you have the sand mountains and everything. Like so, everything's just really, really close together, so...big difference, that way.

**ST:** What is your first impression of like American culture?

**JG:** Um, well, I would say I was exposed to it a little bit because we would always been watching movies and like, you know, we knew about the culture and such. There are a lot of European people in Dubai, so...my friends were European so we always knew about just the Western culture in general. I did feel though that nothing was too out of proportion that people tell it to be. Like people living in the Middle East or in Asia in general make it seem, "Oh, the West is completely different!" like they're more liberal, you know. Uh, and being in India, we tend to be a little more conservative in our culture. But I did not – at any point of time – I did not felt like something...

**ST:** You felt like it was too hyped up?

**JG:** I feel like it's hyped up a lot to be honest. In fact, I think sometimes there's a very negative connotation to the West. Like, "Oh, the West." "Oh, people are Westernizing."

**ST:** As if there's moral judgment?

**JG:** Yeah. I honestly feel like people...there's no reason to. There are positive and negative things in every culture and I never really felt like there were more negatives in American culture. Um, Indian culture is probably a lot more negative than we realize or Indians realize. I, actually, have learned so much coming here that it's been such a great experience. I feel like at home here now. There was not much adaptation required here. A little bit, yes. But that was only in my first year. After that, it was a lot better.

**ST:** So, you regard America as your home?

**JG:** I do. Um, I really do. More so than Dubai, believe it or not. Even though, I've lived in Dubai for like 18 years of my life but when I go back to Dubai now, it's like a vacation place for me now. I go back for less than a month in an entire year. I'm here for eleven months of the year. This place, so I have my own place now, I have my own car. So it's like home is here. Home is where your friends are, where you work, where you live the majority of your time. So, this is my home and I'm completely fine with that. I think---

**ST:** What about India? How do you regard India in terms of like, the sense of home?

**JG:** I never really regarded India as home. Even though, Dubai is so close to India, I've only been to India like three to four times in my life. That's because all my relatives are in India. Each and every one of my relatives is in India. Because my dad was the only one who essentially moved out—uh, tried to venture out in terms of opportunities. But um, I, when I go to India, I can identify myself in terms of culture with the people because that's the culture I've been brought up in as well. But in terms of lifestyle, it's always been very, very different. In terms of lifestyle, I can identify myself with here than in India. With the modern lifestyle. Because the Dubai lifestyle is pretty modern. Pretty advanced, you know, technologically. Not very conservative, believe it or not. Um, India, on the other hand, is completely the opposite. People are, you know, more interested in other people's business. You know, it's a completely different story. Um, very different. Very, very different. And I've seen...you know, I think it would be easier for people to move from a very multicultural place like Dubai to America than a culturally-closed place like India to America.

**ST:** Yeah, because there's such stark differences.

**JG:** Very stark differences. So...yeah.

**ST:** So you didn't experience culture shock?

**JG:** Um, no, I would not say culture shock. But I would say probably language...not language...but like accent was a pretty big deal too when I came here. I went to a British accent so my accent was primarily...I never really had an Indian accent but I was always had a little bit of a British accent in me because Dubai people don't really...well, if I'm Indian, that's what I speak.

**ST:** British English?

**JG:** Yeah. British English with British spellings. A lot of my professors were British and tutors inside school were British so we ended up speaking like British people. Like you know, we tended to pronounce words like British. So you know, language and accent was probably the biggest thing I face. Culture-wise, I never really had any, nothing that stood out. Small things, yes. But nothing that really stood out like, "Oh my God, what's going on here?"

**ST:** Did you ever face any hostility or discrimination...when you came to the US?

**JG:** Um, no discrimination, no. But I would say sometimes I felt a little bit left out. Especially because Rice is a little bit...it's a private school. Sometimes I felt like, in my first year, in my first semester specifically, I tended to even if I was part of a group, I would not be able to be part of the conversation or what's going on. Maybe because a lot of a lot of times the conversation was very political. Like what's going on. Like politics ...like you know, the presidents. Like I still don't know very much about that. Like the rules are, what the regulations are, how the government functions, I'm not... I don't have much information on that. I've tried to get up to pace with it but when the topic of American politics comes up. When sports comes up I always – and that's generally what table conversations you have over lunch or dinner – I was completely lost. I did not know anything about baseball, I did not know anything about football, I didn't know what Super Bowl was, I didn't know Republicans versus...I did not know anything. So it

was very, very interesting because I was trying to learn so much in the first semester that a lot of times I would find myself just staying quiet in a group just because I didn't know what to say. I would just be sitting there, smiling, and trying to figure out what people are talking about. And maybe that's why people thought I was not trying to socialize that much but I felt like sometimes I was a little ostracized or not part of the in-group so it was hard for me to gel with people or find a good group of people. So that way it was always hard and I never really had common things to talk about. And when I came, people actually did not know very much about where I came from. When I said Dubai, people wouldn't know where Dubai was. Now it might be a little different because Dubai in the past five or six years.

**ST:** It's been blown up.

**JG:** Yeah, it's been crazy with the real estate. Like the world's largest building, the world's largest mall, like man-made islands and what not. But when I came in, it was actually at its minimum. Like you know, people didn't know about it that much. And I felt—this was probably the biggest thing I felt coming in—that people were a little bit unaware about countries outside of the United States. They know about Europe. But everything in Asia was kind of like a black hole. So, when I said Dubai, they did not know what I was talking about. I remember, my sister told me this, when she said, "I'm from Dubai," someone had heard about Dubai being in the Middle East, someone asked her, "Oh, do you ride camels?" And this was after...

**ST:** I can definitely visualize that.

**JG:** Yeah, so I've never gotten asked that. But my sister did. That's something that struck me as..

**ST:** So ignorant.

**JG:** Because Dubai is probably the world's fastest growing city. Most technologically-advanced city. It's just like crazy. Like there's more technology in Dubai than that is in America. Like

things come first in Dubai than in America. Like it's way ahead so that was something that was really surprising to me. Um, so I felt like sometimes I was just lost for words in terms of some of the reactions that I got but that obviously changed as I started to adapt to the American culture, the way of life.

**ST:** Um, when you came here, did you find it difficult to apply to jobs?

**JG:** Yes.

**ST:** Based on your immigration status?

**JG:** A lot, actually.

**ST:** Yeah.

**JG:** Very big deal. Uh, um, especially, because I was looking for jobs two years ago. When the recession hit. It was the worst time.

**ST:** You felt that?

**JG:** I did. More so than the recession, I was more limited by the fact especially in Houston, I was interested in the energy business and the energy side of business—and I work for a renewable energy company now, which is great—

**ST:** What?

**JG:** Renewable energy.

**ST:** Renewable energy, okay.

**JG:** It's a wind energy company. And I wasn't particularly interested in renewable energy and such before. But I was just interested in the energy sector and what I found pretty much every oil—every oil and gas company—was closed to international students. They did not accept international students.

**ST:** Really?



**JG:** Yeah. Um, if they did, it was PhD level or higher.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** Just because, to hire an international student, they have to sponsor his or her visa. That's an extra cost to the company. Um, then, they will eventually apply for his Green Card, which is an extra cost to the company. So, a lot of the times, the companies usually end up having rules from their HR departments, "Let's not worry about it. Let's not get the internationals." Because they have to hire a lawyer—an immigration lawyer—to take care of foreign people so they tend not to delve into this sector and be like, "You know, we have plenty of choice in our citizens so let's not worry about them. So, job was very, very hard. When I went to Career Fairs at Rice, every company that, you know, "Oh, you look very qualified for this job blah blah." They would call me later on and generally it's like a checklist they go through like: "Are you a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident?" and I'd be like, "No." They'd be like, "Oh, I'm sorry. We don't accept it." This happened like to me at least five or six times from major companies when they called me when I was applying. The interview would go great but then it would just stall at the fact that I was just not an American citizen so that opportunity was just not available to me. Which is something, I respect, the country has to serve the citizens before it could serve the people..the non-residents. I agree. But I also feel that if we've invested...if international students have invested in the country in terms we leave another country to come here...we essentially paying you like...you're bringing in currency, you're bringing in money to the country as well. Foreign influence in a country is always great. If we have invested in a country as well, we pay the taxes as well, we're paying everything. Um, sometimes, I feel like it's better to keep those students in those countries. Not only for our benefit— obviously people want to stay in the United States—but for the United States' benefit as well. Because you get a whole...Only, I say this because, the

people who come to the United States to university have or are either smart enough to be here or um have a skill set that would actually help the United States itself if they actually try to retain those people in this country. If you look at India or China, this actually still happens a lot. Just because a lot people from India and China specifically come here but they also want to go back to their place just because they associate with their Indian or Chinese culture a lot more. So they want to go back. People from places like Dubai generally tend to stay here because they're used to the multicultural society and it's a lot more easier for them to adapt. Um, I mean, if you think about it, people come from India and China, they get the best education in the world in a place like the United States and they go back to India and China and open up their own businesses by using the skill set they obtained in this country. Which kind of works...

**ST:** So it's a loss for America?

**JG:** It's a loss for America because you're using the skills acquired in this country, learned from the people in this country, the best of the professors in this country and the best institutions in this country and you're going and applying in a country that's essentially competing in the economy. India and China are obviously the emerging economies and the majority of people coming to the US are Indian and Chinese. So, sometimes, I think it works against the United States if they don't keep the skilled people in here. Unskilled people, I agree. But I think skilled people, should be given a little more opportunities to be retained here. Um, so they could get a chance to prove themselves. Especially if they are here to earn a living and pay taxes and be legal.

**ST:** If you don't mind me asking, what is your current legal status?

**JG:** Um, it's a H1-B.

**ST:** H1-B.

**JG:** That's the work status. I'm on a work visa. So my company sponsors me.

**ST:** When did you obtain this visa status?

**JG:** I would say September 2010.

**ST:** Was it difficult to obtain? What was the process like?

**JG:** For me, not. But I would say mine was an exception.

**ST:** Why?

**JG:** It's complicated. But long story short, so this is how it goes generally. H1-B visas, work visas, are...there's a cap on the number of work visas given out...to um...immigrants or international folks every year. Sixty-five thousand is the cap that is given out. Sixty-five thousand for everyone, for the entire world. Which is nothing if you really think about it. Sixty-five thousand is nothing. Um, out of that, you're divided up in two categories. One is that of people with bachelor degrees and one is one with people with Master's Degrees. Um, the bachelor's degrees are the 40,000 people...the bachelor's degrees. The Master's degrees are the 20,000—any of the 40,000 and the 20,000 exclusively for masters degree. Master's degree and more. So people with Master's Degree and advanced degrees have it easier to get a work visa than people with just a bachelor's. I'm just a bachelor's. Now for me, and generally, this cap opens up on April 1<sup>st</sup> every year and in the past, I would say 10 years, this cap has filled up in the first 24 hours. Before it hits April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Because the number of people applying is insane. The number of people who want to work in the United States is just overwhelming. And it turns out, every year, they have at least 200,000 people applying, even though there are only 65,000 spots and what ended up happening is a lottery of those 200,000 people, only 65,000 get the jobs. Even though, all 200,000 people have job offers lined up. And you can only apply for a work visa if you have a job offer in your hand. So you need to have an acceptance letter, a job letter in

order...

**ST:** By April 1?

**JG:** By April 1. In order to apply for that work visa. If you don't have an offer, you are not eligible to apply. So all these 200,000 people have jobs offers in their hands, but they want to continue working here, so they apply for this visa. But they are in this country, because there's a 1-year extension you get with a student visa to get a job if you don't get a job, you're out of the country straight-up. So, my student visa expired the day of my graduation at Rice. But because, I had a job offer lined up, I had a one-year extension in which to apply for a work visa. If I don't get a work visa, then I'm out of here. Um, so, out of those 200,000 people, they generally have a lottery and 65,000 people get the work visa. The rest of people have to apply again next year—which is generally not possible because you only have one year so they have to go back to their country. And it's really hard coming back and finding a job again. So, they essentially go back. So it's always been a lottery. But because when I applied, it was a recession year, there were not many jobs there were not many people applying – international people, just because they knew there were not many opportunities left or very, very little opportunities. There were actually more opportunities in India and elsewhere but they couldn't earn more or make an easier living. So believe it or not, in the history of the United States and giving H1-B visas, 2010, the visa given in 2010 lasted over a year rather than being done in a day.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** So they were still visas left when the April calendar came for the next year.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** Because no one was applying. No one wanted to come here. There were no jobs.

**ST:** Oh my God, the recession was that bad.

**JG:** Recession was horrible. And this was especially because there was a cap on the number of visas being given out by bank institutions because whatever happened. Banks could not hire. Actually, still cannot hire. I think the cap ends in 2012. Ended recently. Until 2012, they could not hire international students. Just because there was a hiring freeze. And they wanted American citizens to be hired just because of the unemployment rate was so high. So, I think it was the Unemployment Act from the government which put a freeze on the H1-Bs given out. Basically, financial institutions could not give out H1-Bs. Were not allowed to. And obviously, a lot of Indians, a lot of Chinese people end up in banks because they're finance-related but they could not hire so that's why a lot of visas were not used. I had it easier. So, I didn't have to go through a lottery. I just had available spots to get. So, it worked out easier for me than it generally is.

**ST:** So, now that you're H1-B does that provide a clear pathway to citizenship? At least to having legal residency in terms of a Green Card?

**JG:** Clear path, yes. But [sighs] long path.

**ST:** Long path? Like how long would it take you?

**JG:** For me, probably 6-7 years. 6-7 years, I would say before I have a Green Card. Before I'm naturalized as a U.S. resident. I have not yet started the process yet to be honest.

**ST:** Do you know---Are you informed of the process?

**JG:** I am informed of the process. And I probably will be applying sometime soon. But generally, the amount it takes—the amount of years in waiting time for a Green Card is a lot just because of the sheer number of people applying for a Green Card. Um, and it varies from countries of origin. Indian, and Chinese, and Mexican people and Dubai in America have different categories. So, like, India, for example. It's divided. It's kind of like a matrix. India, China, and Mexico and then divide it up by level of education—so bachelor's advanced degree

and then people who are just outstanding researchers or something like PhD level or postdocs or higher. Um, people who are from India or China right now and people who are bachelors, they are now processing applications from like 2002.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** So there's a 10 year waiting period from 2002 and 2012. So if I apply right now and I was an Indian coming fm India, it would take me at least 10 years to get a Green Card.

**ST:** Wow, what a disadvantage.

**JG:** I know. Because a lot of the immigrants are actually from India and China and they are very, very well-educated and they are skilled. But for me, it's 6-7 years, even though I'm a bachelors, because it depends on the country of birth rather than ...or country of like of country of nationality. And me, I've been born in Dubai. And it kind of works to my favor, because I come in the "Other" countries category, quote on quote. I'm not India, China, or Mexican nationality, even though my passport is Indian. But my country of birth is not India. So I'm under the "other" countries category.

**ST:** Wait, so you have an Indian passport?

**JG:** I have an Indian passport.

**ST:** And uh..

**JG:** And born in Dubai. \*laughs\*

**ST:** But um, do you have an UAE...Do you have citizenship?

**JG:** I don't have citizenship in the UAE.

**ST:** Oh, wow.

**JG:** It's pretty crazy. And this is actually, for people coming from Dubai...you bring up a pretty good point...going to USA or Canada or Australia from Dubai because UAE, Dubai, whatever,

or any other Middle Eastern country does not let you naturalize.

**ST:** Why?

**JG:** As a resident. \*laughs\* Yeah, my parents have been there 27 or something years. That's an unbelievable amount of time to be in a country and not have any sort of social security or permanent status. Uh, why? Hmm, the only reason I've ever heard or that I know is that if they start giving out permanent status to everyone in Dubai or in the Middle East (which a lot of the Middle East is very, very heavily foreign-influenced, except countries like Saudi which is primarily Arab but countries like Dubai which are like 80% , or more than 80% expatriate, like foreign people, um, if they start handing out permanent residency to a lot of these folks then that country will lose its image or lose its value as an Arab country. They still want to have that..

**ST:** \*laughs\* Have that distinct Arab identity

**JG:** They still want to have that distinct Arab identity, that identity as an Arab country, they still want to serve their Arab citizens, so the only way you can naturalize as or you can be a Dubai or UAE citizen is if you're either married to a UAE Arab or you're just born to a UAE Arab. So, no matter, how long you live in the country, you always have a residency visa. Now that being said, about I think 10 years ago, UAE passed a law that –and laws over there are just passed whenever they like it, there's no--- it's not a democracy. It's ruled by a sheikh, or a king or whatever you want to say. They passed a law that every child who stays in the country more than 18 years –that means the day you turn 18 and older, you lose the residency visa status in the country. So, when I became 18—I was 17 when I came here—but uh the moment I turned 18, they canceled my residency visa in Dubai. The only way I can get another residency visa in Dubai was either if I'm working there or if I'm studying there. So someone had to sponsor me to get a visa, so even though I studied at Rice University, even though I'm born in the country, I've stayed there all my

life and went to school there, they canceled my residency visa straight up!

**ST:** How discriminatory!

**JG:** I know.

**ST:** Have there been any protests? Any signs of reform? Like...

**JG:** No.

**ST:** Aren't people so discontented?

**JG:** People are discontented. And especially all the South Asians were like... what are we gonna do with all our daughters...

**ST:** So disenfranchised.

**JG:** Because fine, like guys can find their own way. They can go to school, they can go to university here. Girls can do that too. But they don't want.. What if the girls don't want to study anymore? What if they want to stay at home? What do you do? You know, you want to be a housewife, a homemaker, like, then, what do you do? Are you just gonna... You can be illegal in the country. Or you have to get out of the country. You have to do something. So, people revolted in that sense, like what are we going to do with our daughters.

**ST:** Yeah, like mothers.

**JG:** Mothers, so it was just something that was crazy. Um, and a lot of the times, you'll see people in Dubai, a lot of Indian wives are actually homemakers. And so, it gets really hard for that. So, they tweaked the law, saying they'll make an exception for girls. But guys, still have to the same. And that's how it's been. And now every time I go back home, I've been born in that country, I've done my schooling there, I—I—I when I go back there, I look at it like my "home." Even though I find this place like my home, but when you go there, you're like, "Okay, this is where I was brought up. This is where my parents are. This is where my family is." I still have to



get a residence visa every time. I have to stand in line just like any other visitor at the airport, get my ID scanned, get my visa, cut my visa, get my passport stamped. It's just

**ST:** Ridiculous.

**JG:** It's just like I'm like any other tourist in the country. I get a tourist visa every time I go there. So, pretty insane and that's actually a pretty big incentive for people to move out of Dubai. So, people go to Dubai generally for a few years and then just get out of there because they're like, "You don't want to retire in the country."

**ST:** There are no benefits.

**JG:** There's no sense of security.

**ST:** Does UAE offer governmental benefits to its citizen?

**JG:** Yeah, pretty amazing benefits.

**ST:** Really?

**JG:** Yeah, free health care. Completely free health care. There are no taxes.

**ST:** Wow

**JG:** In Dubai, which is a pretty big deal. I remember when I came here, I was shocked by taxes. I saw the sticker price and when I came to check out at the counter, I was like, "Why

**ST:** What are these ... \*laughs\*

**JG:** Why is my bill higher than I calculated myself? \*laughs\* And I remember just staring at it, "What...what? Taxes? What?"

**JG:** What is this?

**ST:** What is this word?

**JG:** There's no sales tax, no income tax, no land tax. So whatever you earn there, it's yours. It's your money. Straight up. So you can make good money in that country. But you can't possibly

retire in that country unless you have a whole lot of savings. And no one has a whole lot of savings, you know. And Dubai has come so expensive to stay in now. That's it just like living in New York City. It's just super, super expensive. Um, so you cannot have savings. So, people eventually end up moving out of the country. And that's why they look for a place like Canada which is more easier on the immigrants – easier for the immigrants to accept and provide the immigrants with a lot of benefits later – than a place like America where it's harder to immigrate but once you're here and once you're working and naturalized, you at least have a sense of security in the end. Because you paid your taxes, you have social security, you have 401Ks. So it works out in the end. So people want to move to countries where you will have a sense of security once you reach retiring age and not stay in a country like Dubai.

**ST:** Interesting. So, do you keep up with news and culture – political culture and pop culture – in Dubai and India?

**JG:** Mm, yeah, I still do. I was uh pretty big on cricket. Cricket was the sport that I used to love playing. Back when I was in Dubai, I was actually really big on it. I was actually part of the “Dubai Cricket team.” The national cricket team.

**ST:** The national!

**JG:** The national cricket team. Under 18 when I was there. Under 18 National Cricket team. I went to Kenya to play. I was really big on cricket.

**ST:** Wow.

**JG:** When I came here, it was all gone. Because no one knows what cricket is.

**ST:** Wow, that's sad.

**JG:** The closest thing to it is baseball, which actually originated from cricket. But nobody knows about cricket, so it's mostly an English sport. A lot of countries around the world play it –

Australia, South Africa, England, all the South Asian countries. But uh, none of that here.

Honestly, I still keep up with news in Dubai. I still read the newspaper of Dubai sometimes on weekends. Just to be in touch, um.

**ST:** Out of curiosity, the national language of Dubai...what is it?

**JG:** It's English and Arabic.

**ST:** OK.

**JG:** So everything is written in Arabic and English.

**ST:** So, you don't need to know...are you handicapped if you don't know Arabic?

**JG:** Not at all. In fact, I would say the majority of the people there don't know Arabic.

**ST:** Even the Arab citizens?

**JG:** No, Arab citizens probably. They do.

**ST:** \*laughs\*

**JG:** But that's just because they learn it at home or they speak it at home. But they also talk in English because everyone is foreign there so...

**ST:** And in the educational institutions, it's all English?

**JG:** It's all English. Except some of the government schools, which are Arabic-medium. Everything taught in Arabic. But yeah...

**ST:** So, do you envision your migration to the US as temporary or permanent?

**JG:** Um, in the past...Past being, when I was in college, I used to see it as temporary 'cause I never envisioned myself...I wanted to...but I never saw myself staying here or getting a job...and um...once I got a job though, once I've been working for a couple of years now...I would be completely comfortable with staying here. Um, provided I get a chance too...so now that I'm here, I'm ready...I identify with this culture, its lifestyle to the point that if I stay here, I

would be completely comfortable.

**ST:** Why didn't you think you could stay here permanently?

**JG:** Not because....

**ST:** ...In college?

**JG:** Just because of the fact I was never enthusiastic or I did just not know if I would ever get through the lottery system or if I'll ever get a job.

**ST:** So, you were discouraged by the low prospect or low chances.

**JG:** Discouraged. Mm. \*nods\*

**ST:** The selectivity?

**JG:** I just didn't know. Exactly. The fact that I just did not ever think I would get a chance or the opportunity.

**ST:** So, do you think it was luck? Like what do you think?

**JG:** Yeah, I do. And I've had this conversation with my friends as well. Uh, actually, when I was in high school, I had a group of like five people. Out of those five, three close friends ...four of them went to Canada...slash...US. One of them went to the UK for medicine. The other ones went to Canada. Three of them came to the United States. When they came to the United States, there were a lot...one of them at Michigan couldn't find a job. One of them went to Carnegie Mellon...um, he has a job now. But a lot of the folks...sometimes when they come to the United States, they know the prospects are pretty low. So, it just turns out that the one who actually went to Michigan did not find a job, had to move away, and now he's in Singapore, I think. So it happens to a lot of people. But you come here and you eventually have to leave just because you don't have a job. Want it or not, you just have to leave because you can't stay in the country. Um, but I'm fortunate enough, I'd say, to be here, to have a job, and I'm completely fine with it.

I actually enjoy it a lot. So, that's...been a good time.

**ST:** Ok, so, I'm interested in knowing what sorts of community groups you're involved with. Are you part of any community groups and do you get together with any Indians on a regular basis?

**JG:** Um, like I said before, I think community groups in the United States tend to be a lot of places of worship as well. So, I tend to visit my place of worship weekly or bi-weekly basis..

**ST:** And this serves a double-purpose.

**JG:** It serves a double purpose. So, you hang around new people. We meet new people a lot of the times as well. While I was at Rice, I was part of the South Asian Society. Um, just had a lot of Indian friends. Just probably, when I think about it now, it was probably because it's easier to do that. It's easier to hang around with people who understand your culture, who you can be...uh...ah...who you can talk like you used to talk before. You know, you can just identify sometimes. You can talk in your national language sometimes. Um, so it was just easier to celebrate or part of their traditions or celebrate some festivals together. Now after six years or so, I don't feel the need to be with people of culture. I still like to be with them but I don't feel a need to be with them. Just because I've come a long way to um to adapt to the lifestyle of being in the USA so I can hang around Americans or any other people and be completely comfortable...so right now, I'm not actively involved in any cultural institution except my previous friends and place of worship.

**ST:** Um, were there on cultural holidays to get together with fellow Indians?

**JG:** Yeah, I actually do. Even if I don't actually get together sometimes because of work and you have to go to work. And you don't get the major Indian holidays off, obviously.

**ST:** So you do go...

**JG:** I do work on those days as well. I make sure to do my little bit of festivities. Like we have this festival, like Diwali, you may or may have not heard about it but

**ST:** No I have

**JG:** Like Indians light little diyas, or lamps

**ST:** Yes.

**JG:** I will do that before I go to work. Just because it's been a tradition of family. And I like to be part of it. Just to be involved and celebrate a little bit on my own. I'd light a little of candles or something then go to work. I'll blow them out. I'll blow them in like five minutes. But I'll do it. Just because I want to. There's another festival that Indians celebrate called Holi when you go out and I don't know like we throw colored powder on each other. It's a way of breaking free. And I don't know, I do that too. I'll go and do that. And you know, I never actually used to do that, believe it or not, when I was back in Dubai. I never used to celebrate that festival because I was like, "I don't want to throw nasty powder colored on people!" I was like, "That's kind of weird." But I do here though.

**ST:** What changed?

**JG:** Just the fact that I didn't have so many other festivals to celebrate. I felt like, "Oh whatever, It's still a part of my culture. I now have a reason to celebrate it because it's my chance to break free and be the person I used to be. So it's just to get back with my roots get back with the people I've hung around before and identified with people. I'm still at root Indian by culture by heart by whatever you want to say. So it helps me just kind of go back. So sometimes I feel like I should celebrate a lot more stuff than I used to stuff in Dubai because I took it for granted back then.

**ST:** Do you follow news about India in television or the newspaper?

**JG:** India, pretty much not at all.

**ST:** What about Dubai?

**JG:** Dubai, yes. I always read the Dubai newspaper weekly. For sure. I go online and read all the news.

**ST:** Um, so you were actually a national of India? Has it ever occurred to you perhaps settle there?

**JG:** [laughs] For my parents, yes. For me, no. Um, if I ever think about settling anywhere it's either going back to Dubai and settling there for a little bit or probably going to a country like Canada or Australia if US doesn't work out. Right now, I'm hoping US would work out.

Because just because I've been here for so long. If that doesn't work out, my next option would be countries like Canada and Australia or the UK for that matter. But no, I never think about India as an option.

**ST:** What's your disinclination?

**JG:** Um, just the lifestyle difference, I would say. Just a very, very different life out there. Culturally, I identify with them. Lifestyle-wise, I really cannot. Just because...the opportunities...yeah but. Lifestyle-wise, the way people interact is a little more sophisticated here and Dubai. In India, it's very, very competitive; it's a very communal atmosphere. Here and Dubai actually, it's a very individualistic society. No one cares about what the other person's doing. How the other person is functioning. What they're doing in their lives. You can live your own life here.

**ST:** Very individualistic.

**JG:** Very individualistic aspect. You can live your own life here without having to worry what other people are thinking about you. In India, you can't do that. Everything is in a community.

Everything is about, “Hey, what is that other person doing?”

**ST:** Um, educationally- or work-wise, do you think the opportunities in India are equivalent to those here? Do you think economically at least you could’ve had a successful life?

**JG:** Mm, economically, yes, actually. Probably better. From what I’ve heard. I don’t know much about India to personally (because I haven’t been there very much) but even at work a bunch of Indian colleagues have actually come from India and they talk about it and they say sometimes, “You know, I could actually be earning more with the skills that I have in India rather than USA.” Even if you convert it to the equivalent in US dollars, they could probably earn much more. And in India, it’s much easier to like you could live way better like you could have much better work timings you could have a much bigger home you know. But a lot of people come here because they think can grow a lot more here. You start off low here yes. It’s been two years I’ve been in the corporate world. But you start off at a lower level. But there’s no limit to the opportunities here, I’ve seen. It’s purely talent-based. They don’t look at where you’re coming from, how you talk, how you...they...all they care about is your talent, how you...the way you function. And I think that says a lot about the country, the people. It’s all about the talent. It’s about if you can do the work. It doesn’t matter if you can speak the language in the way they speak the language. It’s if you can bring them the skill set, they will make sure you’re hired. So...

**ST:** What was your parents’ rationale for moving from India to Dubai?

**JG:** Um, again primarily for opportunities. Back then, primarily for Indian people, America was not that big...it was not what they thought about. The culture was so different. India has come a long way on quote unquote Westernizing. The culture has become so liberal in the past 20-25 years than it was before. I don’t think people could see themselves moving to a country like the



US before. You know back when my dad moved, or when my parents moved, Dubai was a land full of opportunities because it was a newly formed country where people it was...there was no downtown when my dad moved there. It was completely built. There was only tower in the city. And now you see what it is. So, it's just a land where people knew there would be opportunities there. The rationale was opportunity-based. Um, and make a better living.

**ST:** Well, what are your parents occupations in India and what are their occupations in Dubai?

**JG:** Um, my mom was a homemaker in India too. When she got married, my dad was in his family's textile business. Um, my dad moved to Dubai. He actually started off extremely low. My dad started off as a storekeeper. And a grocery store keeper is just nothing. It's how many goods are going into the store. Putting in frozen food stuff basically. You have these massive food stores. Massive food stores are what you call them, yeah. So he keeps count of how many are going in and how many are going out. It's a pretty manual job which takes pretty much no skills. Anybody could do that, right. So he actually went down several levels from having a business to being a storekeeper. But it was something he knew he had to start off doing to eventually reach a point in a country. And that's how I see myself. If I go back, I'm done. I don't have a storekeeper job. I have a professional job right now. But I see myself growing and see myself getting better at my job right now to eventually reach a corporate position or having my own business. And I think that's what he expected when he moved to a new country or city like Dubai. He went up the ladder fast. He – I forgot what he came in between – but he became something to do with sales and then he became GM in the company and then he eventually due to unfortunate circumstances the company had to close down and then he made his own business and he still has that business. And my mom was a Masters in Econ by education so she was an accountant in a company in Dubai. And then she was a teacher so she did bachelors of education

– her third degree – while in Dubai. She was the high school teacher and then she just retired and came over to the business. So both my parents are business owners right now.

**ST:** Um, so what's your official job title in the United States?

**JG:** I'm a performance engineer. So I would say, I work in a wind energy company so what I essentially do is we have a whole bunch of wind turbines. We're the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest wind energy company in the world. So, we have three gig watts of wind energy – of wind turbines – that we put across the United States. And my job along with other members of my team is to keep those wind turbines running and efficiently as possible to increase the revenue we get from them. We're on and off in availability to produce as much as we can. If troubleshooting fails, making sure that they're producing as optimally as they can.

**ST:** Is this your first job?

**JG:** This is my first job.

**ST:** Ok. If you don't mind me asking, what is the pay scale of your job? If you don't want to say, you can specify a range.

**JG:** I would say it's between 60 to 80. It's between that.

**ST:** OK. Is that a satisfying pay range for your first job to be?

**JG:** Um, I think so. I think it's pretty satisfying. Especially because I'm single right now. It's a pretty good salary range for a single person to have. I---have my rent going. I have a car. I can live a good life. Fair enough, for two people, it might be... Actually, even for two people, it's perfectly fine to have that salary as well. But obviously, I see myself growing and getting better in the future and in the future whenever I do get better, it will work out eventually. But for the first job, that's not a bad start at all.

**ST:** Do you have a dream salary?

**JG:** [laughs] Six figures.

**ST:** Six figures?

**JG:** Just like everybody else. Anything six figures is ideal.

**ST:** And do you anticipate going back to school? Is that part of your future plans?

**JG:** Yeah, I would say. Because I'm only bachelors, I would not go back to school just for Masters in pure science. I would go back for a MBA. I would say.

**ST:** A MBA?

**JG:** That's probably gonna be the point when I reach a managerial position and I need the MBA to go along with it.

**ST:** Um...how do you self-identify? In terms of your identity? What do you call yourself?

**JG:** I call myself Indian. Like when people say "Oh where you from?" I always say I'm Indian but I'm born in Dubai.

**ST:** You try to qualify it?

**JG:** I qualify it. Because I cannot see myself... I do differentiate myself from other Indian people because culturally or just lifestyle wise I'm completely different.

**ST:** Because of your Dubai upbringing?

**JG:** Because of my Dubai upbringing? Because of its diversity and multicultural society. It's very different. But I still do consider myself Indian – just because of my thinking and that's how I've been brought up with my parents originally from India. But I do identify myself as always coming from Dubai.

**ST:** Do you consider yourself American?

**JG:** No, I don't. Even when I go back to Dubai, I'll say I work in the US. I don't ever say I'm from the US.

**ST:** Do you think that calling yourself American entails that you have citizenship?

**JG:** Probably. The day I have a Green Card here, I will call myself American. Citizenship doesn't mean much to me. If I have a Green Card, that's completely fine with me. Um, but yeah, I think that's when I'll think essentially naturalize as an American.

**ST:** Do you consider yourself Asian-American?

**JG:** Yeah, I could say that.

**ST:** Or just Asian?

**JG:** Yeah, that's what I was gonna say. I think Asian is more ... And I think the Asian context in America is a little different from what the Asian continent is. But yes, I would since ... South Asian is ... I would consider myself Asian, for sure ... or Asian-American, why not? I've been here for a while now, technically. Legally, I'm an American resident. Tax purposes and everything ...so...

**ST:** How

do you think other people consider you? How do they identify you?

**JG:**

Um, believe it or not, when I tell people I'm not from here—and this happens a lot of times at work---they're like, "No, you gotta be from here." 'Cause I think over the years, it's just been a long journey – the lifestyle that I've learned – so people just sometimes do not necessarily feel that I am not from here. So, it just takes them a little bit to see, "Hey, no, he comes from a multicultural society. Oh, so it's easier for him to adapt. And he's been here for a long time and that's why he talks like us a little bit now too." Probably not enough, but still to the mark. And that sometimes makes me happy.

**ST:** So you currently live in Houston. Do you have any plans to move from Houston to perhaps another American city?

**JG:** Um, not for a while, I think. I think I'm happy with my current job. I would probably stay

here for at least four or five more years, I see it. Until I decide to go back to school again full-time for a MBA or so. Unless I go for part-time which is again a topic of debate for me. I'm not sure what I'm gonna do. Um, if I go to school, I might want to go elsewhere. And that's probably when I'll make the switch. For now, I'm completely fine with being in Houston. It took me awhile to get used to the city, yes. But now I like it.

**ST:** Okay, culturally, do you think of yourself as Americanized? Westernized?

**JG:** To a certain extent, yes. I think by roots and by...well, culturally, probably not. Lifestyle...I don't know, I make a pretty big difference between culture and lifestyle. The way I go around, the way we live, the way I talk...I consider myself American. The way I might behave in certain circumstances, the way my values and everything...are still pretty much Indian. SO it's kind of a mix right now. And I don't think it'll change. I actually don't want it to change, to be honest. I want it to stay the same. I want it to be a balance between the two.

**ST:** If you have children though, do you worry that they will be too Americanized? How do you see the transmission of values culturally or lifestyle-wise...?

**JG:** I sometimes do worry that I will not be able to pass on my values to them. But at the same time, I do know that the person I get married to will be similar to me. Either an immigrant or a person who has been brought up here with similarly strong cultural values. Um, to the point that we can both pass it on to our children. I would not want my children to not know anything about the Indian culture. I would want them to pretty deeply rooted in Indian culture as well. So yeah, I do worry about it. But ideally, they would still be deeply rooted.

**ST:** Um, so in terms of marriage, would you keep it exclusive to an Indian?

**JG:** Yes. I always do see myself only getting married to an Indian person. Never have I thought of venturing out. Call me closed, call me whatever – but it's a personal preference, I guess. I just

identify myself better with...yeah... an Indian person, for sure.

**ST:** Do you think it's easy to move up in the US in your experiences?

**JG:** I think so. More so than in India or Dubai. You might start off at a much higher salary or whatever, but moving up the ladder, is I wouldn't say it's easier. But it's more favorable if you're willing to do the work. Um, it's...even though people here are really individualistic, if you do work right, if you make sure that you put in the hours, put in the effort, it doesn't go unnoticed. If they feel you are talented enough to have leadership qualities to lead a team, they will make you manager. I think I have more opportunities here than I ever imagined having anywhere else to go up the ladder. So yes, I think economically this country does support its workers to the point that they can have any job.

**ST:** Do you think people have equal access to the opportunities to migrate here?

**JG:** No, they don't. It's definitely not. The top migration categories---India and China---are very, very, restrictive. Just because of the mere cap on the visas and Green Cards handed out. Which is always necessary. The country doesn't want to be too giving in terms of immigration as well. But I think there needs to be a screening process in place where people with good enough skills need to be let into the country. To at least prove themselves and not purely rejected on the basis of not being included in the cap. Or re-making the cap through a lottery system. I sometimes feel like it's purely based on luck, not on talent. Once you do get a job here, it is based on talent. But getting to the job is pretty much based on luck.

**ST:** Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me.

**JG:** It was great.

**ST:** \*laughs\* Well, to thank you for your time, I'd like to extend an invitation to the Houston Asian American Archive dinner on the evening of July 21.

**JG:** OK!

**ST:** Keep your dates open.

**JG:** I'll look at my calendar. \*laughs\*

**ST:** [laughs] Would you like to attend?

**JG:** Probably, yeah.

**ST:** Ok, I should have everything I need. But would it be all right to contact you again if I have another question?

**JG:** Yeah, for sure. Um, if you want my email address or phone number, just let me know. Yeah, for sure.

**ST:** Okay, thanks!