

Interviewee: SHAPUR PAVRI

Interviewers: LINDA HEEYOUNG PARK; MINI BHATTACHARYA

Date/Time of Interview: June 30, 2014, at 10:06 AM

Transcribed by: LINDA HEEYOUNG PARK; MINI BHATTACHARYA

Edited by: Xingyi Li (5/30/2017)

Audio Track Time: 1:01:05

**Background:**

Shapur Pavri was born in Bombay, India in 1942. His father was Chief Accountant for Greaves Cotton Company and his mother was a schoolteacher. He grew up in a Parsi community, attended St. Xavier's for school, and completed his SSE at age 14. He then went on to study at Sydenham College of Commerce as well as Siddharth College, developing a background in finance, accounting, tax and auditing. After working with Esso for a few years, he came to the U.S. in 1967 as part of an Experiment on International Living, went back to India for two years and returned in 1969, settling in Boston and enrolling at Northeastern University. He met his wife in India and they got married here; their son was born while they were briefly living in Philadelphia. The family then moved to Kansas City and later Richmond, Virginia, working with Mobil. After he came to Houston in 1978, he began working with Texaco, later Shell, and then retired after 28 years of working with the two companies. Mr. Pavri comes from a priestly family and stays involved with the Houston Zoroastrian community by conducting many of the religious ceremonies and events.

**Setting:**

The interview's primary focus was on labor and capital, specifically in Oil companies, and Mr. Mehta's experiences in different parts of America. The interview ran about an hour long. The interview took place at his house, which was located at 49 Briar Hollow Ln, Houston, TX 77027, United States. Throughout the interview, there were distracting noises because Mr. Pavri hit the table multiple times and a construction work was going on outside the apartment. Other than the noises, he was alone at his house and the interview was conducted without any interruption.

**Interviewers:**

Linda Heeyoung Park is an international student from Korea, majoring in Sociology and minoring in Poverty, Justice, and Human Capabilities at Rice University. She spends her sophomore summer interning for HAAA to compare Asian Americans and immigrants in the U.S. In addition to this goal, she also aims to learn more about social issues that Asian immigrants have had to face in Houston.

Mini Bhattacharya is a junior at Rice University. Originally from India, she has spent most of her life growing up in the Dallas Fort Worth area. She is studying Ecology & Evolutionary Biology with a minor in Business and is interested in public health/healthcare management.

**Key:**

LHP: Linda Heeyoung Park

MB: Mini Bhattacharya

SP: Shapur Pavri

—: Abrupt stop, false start

...: Speech trails off, pause

Italics: Emphasis

(?): Preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc) or interview notes

Transcript:

MB: Hi this is Mini Bhattacharya.

LHP: This is Linda Park.

MB: And today we are here with Mr. Shapur Pavri to interview him for the Houston Asian American Archive. Today is June 30 and the time is—

LHP: 10:06.

MB: 10:06. Alright, so just to start off with, can you tell us a little about your childhood and what it was like growing up?

SP: Yeah, I was uh, I was born in uh, Bombay, India in—on January 21, 1942. And uh, [pause] grew up uh, you know, in a—are you aware of Bombay? You are from Bombay?

MB: No I'm from Calcutta.

SP: Calcutta. I—I was in Calcutta too for about three years. Um, I'm from Bombay and uh, I grew up in a regular Parsi uh, community, Parsi home and all that. I was in uh—went to St. Xavier's school, and did my SSE and then I went to Sydenham College of Commerce and did my [inaudible word] Bachelor's in Commerce and then I did my chartered accountancy for four years with a company called [inaudible word] Engineering Company, and then at the same time, I did my LLB and Government Law at Siddharth College—LLB is Bachelor of Laws. So I did my chartered accountancy and I also—which is an ACA—and I also did my Cost and Works Accountancies, which is a ICWA, and after doing that, I joined Esso Standard Eastern, which was actually Exxon at the time. It used to be Stanwell, the flying red horse and uh, [clears throat] I joined them. I was one year in Bombay. I was a traveling auditor, I'm an accountant, an auditor, a tax guy, that is my background. And uh...after one year, I was in Calcutta for three years, from '65 to '68 and I traveled all over that area. I went to Nepal and Jamshedpur and all over the place doing the traveling audit. Um, I was there for three years then I came back to Bombay, I was there with—another one year with Esso. Then I migr—oh before that, I came to the States in uh, 1967 on a program called the Experiment in International Living, where you stay with an American family and get an idea of American life and go to university over here. So, [clears throat] I ca—there was a group of chartered accountants, which they sent. They have different groups that they send. My group was a group of chartered accountants, we were about nine of us. And uh, we came to Boston and we stayed with families in Boston. Actually the family I stayed with was not, uh, American. I mean they had—they had just migrated to the States in 1960, I came in '67. They're a British family.

Uh, Paul and Midge Davis and their two children, Ian and uh...Ian and Debbie. And I stayed with them to get an idea of American life and all that in the Boston area, and then u—I went to a university. Bowling Green State University in Ohio for a couple of weeks where you attend classes and all, and get an idea of uh, life in university level. And I got interested in coming back to the States. I was on an exchange student visa, which is uh...I think it's a J1 visa at the time, if I remember right, and you have to go back to your own country. You have—you got to leave America for two years. So I had to go back, so I went back in 1967 and then um, I—in 1968, I came back from Calcutta to Bombay. I met my wife, and uh...we got engaged. And she came here on a—she's got an assistantship at Purdue university, she was an actuary. She was a math major and actuary. So she came in '68, I couldn't come 'til '69 'cause I had to be out for two years. So I came in '69, uh on a F1 student visa. And we got married in Lansing, Michigan.

[00:05:04]

My wife uh—my mother was a teacher in school, so my mother knew her mother and we knew each other, and that's how things happen in India in those days at least, things have changed since then but uh, those were the days and uh—then we came here in '69, I came to Boston uh, at Northeastern University. The main reason I—I got admission to quite a few universities, Tulane and some of the others, but I came to Northeastern because they were on a—what's called a coop program. It's on quarter system, and you study for two quarters, 16 credits each, and then you work for one quarter, then you studied for one quarter, then you work for one quarter, and then you study for one quarter. It was 21-month 64-credit hour—64 credit hours is actually quarter hours. So, uh...and the reason I came is because I could work. In those days, you could work in the cafeteria or something, get \$1.50 or \$2 an hour. But because this was a co-op program, I could work in a—a accounting firm or something like that, and at that time make \$800 to \$1000 a month, which was you know—which was fantastic. And basically, that's the reason why I chose Northeastern University compared to some of the other universities I got admission to, because there they didn't have the program and I couldn't afford it. So, basically I came here on the exchange. And uh, [laughs] the first day I came here, uh you know, they send you a letter saying that when you come, come and see the dean and all that. Can you hear me?

MB: Mhm.

SP: Am I hitting this thing which is creating a problem?

MB: No, it's fine...yeah it's fine.

SP: I did that. [MB and LHP laugh] So, I came uh, and you know, I didn't know any better on the first day I came to Northeastern. I went to Northeastern University and the secretary says, 'Why do you want to see him?' I said, 'But I'm supposed to see him,' and I showed her the letter, and I could see by her smile that I had made an ass of myself. She went in and talked to him, there's a guy outside, he wants to see you and all that, so he said, 'Oh, send him in, send him in.' So we sat down and we talked, and he said, 'You should finish in one year and—you should be able to finish in one year.' I said, 'No I'm in the co-op program, it's 21 months.' He said, 'No, you're not in the co-op program.' [makes whooshing sound] All the color went out of my—what do you mean I'm not in the co-op program? I mean, I can't afford to go straight through,

um...and uh, you know, he says no, you're not—then he saw that, you know, I was really down, so he said, 'Okay, let's do one thing. Uh, you can sit with the co-op students and all of that, but we don't guarantee you a job.' I said fine, that's fine. I had worked with an American company for five years. So I said that's fine. This was in um—I came in September of '69—and did for two quarters were up to...March of '71. '69, March of '70. And uh, I interviewed in the second course—second quarter I interviewed with firms. With the Big Eight at that time, they were known as the Big Eight accounting firms. Arthur Young was one of them. I interviewed with them, they offered me a job right on the spot. So I was really happy and all that, and this happened on a [pause] Wednesday or Thursday, and that Friday, we had a foreign students' meeting and all that, and the dean was there and he ca—and they had called up and said, 'We have offered him a job and he has accepted.' In fact, there was a [inaudible word] and you were going to go around and look at other places, and I said, 'Look I don't have a car, I have to miss one days of school just to come here for the interview.' I can't go around for the interview and all that, and they offered me at that time something like \$850 or \$900, which was you know—I was ecstatic. And uh, then I found out later on that the reason why they did not put me in the co-op program because, this program started just one year earlier. And they had a Nigerian student and he was straight As, but he just couldn't find a job. I don't know what he was saying at interviews or whatever, but nobody would give him a job. So from there on, they decided that for foreign students, the co-op program was not available for foreign students.

[00:10:00]

But I didn't know that, I had read about the thing and I read the co-op and I got all excited, I can—I don't have to spend the money because I can't afford coming here and spending money on—of course at that time, it was \$40 a quarter hour. 64 quarters, but \$40 was a lot of money at that time. So that's the reason why—that's what I found out later on that because I was a foreign student, they said, you know, that they were afraid. But I was—I and another four or five others, we were a class of about 25 or 30, and only five of us found a job. The other 25 went straight through. A recession was on at that time, and I was lucky to find a job anywhere. Uh, so I finished that. And then I um...when I finished that, I interviewed with Mobil Corporation. All my life I've been with oil and gas companies. Forty years with oil and gas companies. All in accounting, auditing, tax, finance, uh tax and all that sort of—So then I joined Mobil, and then I was with Mobil for seven years. I started in Boston. There again I was in account—auditing, then moved from Boston to Philadelphia. Was there for a year, my son was born over there. Then I moved to Kansas City, I was in Kansas City for three years, then I moved to Richmond, Virginia. I was in Richmond Virginia for 2-3 years, and then I lost my job in Richmond, Virginia. So I decided to move to Houston because Houston was oil and gas, you know. So I moved to Houston and got a job right away with Texaco. And I was with Texaco for...rest of my life. 20 years I was with Texaco, and then Texaco and Shell had an alliance, so I went over to the alliance for three years, and then Shell took over because Texaco had to get out because of the problems they had with Getty and all that. So I came and went on to Shell there. They bridged it all, so when I retired from Shell at the age of 65, I—they counted it as 28 years. So...um, and for 40 years: five years with Esso, seven years with Mobil and 28 years with uh, Texaco/Shell. And uh, what else would you like to know?

MB: So I guess going back to your childhood a little bit more, can you tell us about, like your

family life? And your school life?

SP: Yeah, my family life...I was in Bombay and uh, this is Bombay of the '40s. I was born in 1942. So, I'm a Parsi, I don't know whether you know Parsis. So I mean, everybody knew who I was, and uh, my nose was a dead giveaway [laughs]. It was a dead giveaway because we all have long noses [LHP laughs], so everybody knew who I was. And we didn't have any—we had a good life. Uh...and I'm from a priestly family. In the Parsis, we have the laymen and the priestly families. My great-grandfather was the priest in the Surat, and after that, my grandfather didn't take over the priesthood, but we go through a ceremony at the age of 11 or so. It's called Navar, N-A-V-A-R. And uh, that brings us into the priesthood. So you can do certain ceremonies. I have done marriages, I have done Navjote, Navjote is like an initiation. I have done uh, ceremonies at funerals, I have done ceremonies for Jashans, which are—you know, you can do a Jashan for a housewarming or for different reasons you can do a Jashan, so you can do prayers for that. So I can do all those prayers, I never was a formal priest, and I had my—I get into my priestly clothes and do things, I still do it today. And uh, so in Bombay you know, I finished my—I went in a—first I went to a girls' school, Alexandra Girl's School. My mother was a teacher over there, so for the first two years I went there, kindergarten. I failed in kindergarten and uh, my sister-in-law, my wife's sister also failed in kindergarten. She was in the same class as I was.

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And uh, then I got two double promotions and I finished my SSE at the age of 14, which is pretty good, pretty young. And uh, then I went on to college and I was in the Scouts when I was in school. And when I was in the college, I was in the NCC National Cadet Corps, in the navy, in the naval wing. And uh, what else can I tell you about my—it was a happy childhood, and lot of friends, lot of activities, uh...Scouts and all that. Just [pause] did pretty well in school, I was always in the top, uh first or second in class. Um, and uh, I just—just been through, I don't know what else to tell you.

MB: Um, I had a question. So, you know, you were born in 1942.

SP: Right.

MB: And India became independent in 1947. So did that—like, India being a newly independent country—did that impact your daily life in anyway?

SP: Um, not really. I was five years old in 1947, so I mean, uh...had a lot of processions and parades and all that sort of thing, but basically for the common man in Bombay, it didn't have any major impact on any.

LHP: So who were your friends? Were they mostly Parsi or Hindu, did you have any—?

SP: Well, you mean in India?

LHP: Mhm.

SP: In India, well our friends were mostly our school—in the school in which I was. The Parsis are a very microscopic community. Very very very very microscopic. We are 150,000 in the whole world, so you can imagine, you know, we are .000000001% of the population. So of course, with the Parsis and all that, kids at my school and all that, and the other kids we had Christians, and we had Jews, and we had Muslims, and we had [unknown term] and we had um, all kinds of, and it wasn't—nobody—it didn't make any di—I had all kinds of friends, and it's not necessary that they're only Parsi friends or anything like that. So, it was uh...I don't know what else to tell you.

MB: Um, so what about languages? So, you spoke Gujarati?

SP: Languages, I speak Gujarati, which is—we originally from—settled in Gujarat when we came from Iran, we settled in Sanjan and then went to, all over the west coast. Bombay, [list of cities in India], and all those places we settled down over there. So I know Gujarati. I studied French in school for five years, we had French and two years in college. Of course, now I don't remember much of it [LP laughs]. When I go to France, I try to speak in French and they say, 'We can understand English,' they tell me right away so—[everyone laughs]. So they tell me. So, I don't know if any of you know French, do you know French? I don't know much more than a few sentences in French. But I know French, Gujarati, and then of course we had Hindi in school, because Hindi was the language so we had to do Hindi. So Hindi, Gujarati, English of course, we speak English at home most of the time, even Gujarati we break into English all the time. And uh, you must be a Gujarati, right?

MB: No I'm Bengali.

SP: Oh, you're a Bengali? Oh yeah, you said Calcutta. You're from Calcutta, Bengali. Yeah. So I spent three years in Calcutta, and I was working for Esso at that time and traveling all over. But uh, I still, I prefer Bombay to Calcutta [laughs].

MB: [laughs]

SP: But uh, and, so we had all kinds of friends, there was no special, only—of course, if it's a religious ceremony, then it'll be only Parsis. But if it was not a religious ceremony, in the Scouts and all that, and in the NCC and in college, you know, my friends were...

[00:20:13]

MB: What is the Scouts?

SP: Scouts? You don't know what Scouts is?

LHP: Like Boy Scouts?

SP: Boy Scouts, yeah. Yeah Boy Scouts.

MB: Oh okay, okay. So same type of thing.

SP: And then NCC is National Cadet Corps. There's an NCC in India at that time, if you remember. And there are different wings and I was in the naval wing. When you went into the NCC, you didn't have to do drill in college. So you saved over there, and then you had to go to Cochin, I went to Cochin and all that for a couple of weeks over there. So, what else would you like to know?

LHP: So, you gave us your timeline earlier, and we're just trying to go one by one.

SP: Yeah, yeah.

LHP: So let's move on to when you went to college. So where—which location was your college at?

SP: College was Sydenham College. I lived in Bombay, I lived in a place called Dhobitalao, which at that time would be similar to the Galleria or somewhere over here. It was basically in the center of the city. My school, I walked to school. My college also, I used to take the train, but it was only one stop. I could easily walk to college. Sydenham College, it was near Churchgate. I don't know, but if you don't know all these places, it doesn't mean anything to you. If you're from Bombay, maybe you could be more, you'd understand where I exactly I come from, and what the atmosphere was at that time. That was Central Bombay, and at that time, the population of Bombay was only a few million. Today it's over 20 million. So, it was—and life was easy. We didn't have any high-rises and skyscrapers and all that. We had bungalows. Bungalows, you know, it's called bungalows. And uh, so...we had horse-drawn carriages also, along with motorcars and all that. And uh, I had a bike when I was in Calcutta. And uh, so it was in the center of the city at that time, but now it's in South Bombay. The city has expanded so much. The population is—in my time, I think, I don't even think it was couple of million, one or two million. Today it's 19 million, and it's just, just huge. But anyway, does that answer your question?

LHP: So how did you choose your major and decide what you wanted to do?

SP: My father was a chartered accountant. He was the chief accountant at Greaves Cotton Company. So I naturally drifted into it, it wasn't a very conscious decision, it just—just drifted into it, you know. I didn't much care to be a doctor and all that, because you had to bi—dissect and bisect cockroaches and all that, and I didn't like to do that. So I didn't much care for that, and engineering, I just—my father was a chartered accountant, and I just naturally drifted into that. And it wasn't a conscious, knew I had to, which college should I go to, nothing. Sydenham College—there were three colleges at that time. There was Sydenham, there was Podar and there was Siddharth, and Sydenham was the best of the three. And I got admission right away, I had good grades, I passed my SSE, uh...I was in the top, at the first in the class so, I didn't have any problems getting into it, so I just naturally just drifted into it, no conscious decision.

LHP: So moving on to your first job, can you remind us again where it was?

SP: Yeah, it was with Esso Standard Eastern, Esso Standard. Over here you still see some uh, gas sta—petrol pumps and gas stations with Esso, E-S-S-O. Circle, circle. That is part of Exxon, actually it's part of Exxon. So I was with Esso, and previously, previous to that it was known as Flying Red Horse, [inaudible word]. Their symbol was a flying red horse.

[00:24:42]

So, I just um, I was—when I was in chartered—when I was doing my chartered accountancy, I was active in um, the Western Indian Chartered Accountants Association. I was secretary for one year, then I was the—I don't know whether it's called president or someone, that title—chairman, president, something like that. So I was lucky enough, I happened to be able to preside over certain functions which the student group had with the companies and all of that, and one [pause] meeting, there was a guy from Esso, and he heard me speak and all that, and then I went for an interview and he happened to be there. So, he offered me a job right on the spot. So, I was lucky that I didn't have to spend my time moving around to different companies. Esso was the big company, it was right in the heart of the city. It was not walking distance, but little bit more than walking—I mean, even I could walk from my house to the company. So, I just joined them and they offered me a job and I stayed with them 'til I migrated to the States. And uh, really, what else can I tell you?

MB: So what made you decide to come to the U.S.? You said you came as part of the program?

SP: I had the—really the—yeah, when I came on the experi—I had really no interest in coming to the States, you know. I was very happy in India, good life, we're a privileged group of people. And life was good, and I had no intention of going outside of Bombay. But then I came over here, and I saw the life over here. I saw Boston and Bowling Green State University and then toured all over, went to Montreal and New York and that area, and got interested in staying in America. But I had to come back so—in fact, the people I stayed with, I told you they were from Britain. They had come in 1960, and they took me to their lawyer, and he said, you know, 'I can arrange things.' I said, 'No I don't really want to do that, I have to go back, I'll go back.' But I could have even stayed back. [Inaudible words]

LHP: Uh, you said you had a happy life in Bombay. But what was better in the States that really attracted you?

SP: Well, I mean the uh, the opportunities over here are much more than the opportunities in Bombay. And in Bombay, it was a nice place, but this place was—Boston and Philade—I went to Boston, New York, Montreal, Bowling Green, Ohio and all these places, and it was open. I'm claustrophobic. There's no curtains on my thing, the only reason I'm over here is because I like—I have a home in—I used to have a home in Kingwood. I was in Kingwood for about 30 years. I don't—we just sold it a couple of months ago, the house in Kingwood. Then we moved—we moved here about seven or eight years ago. And uh, I'm claustrophobic so, the population was less. In Bombay it was getting—population was increasing, and uh, then they had, in '56, Bombay became part of Maharashtra and all that. And then we had some problems between certain Maharashtrians and Gujaratis and all that sort of thing, so. But you know, this



was more opportunities over here, it was uh...and the thing about it is that there was nothing to tie me, keep me at home in India. Because my father was gone, he didn't have a business or something. Which, I would have, if my father had a business, maybe I wouldn't move. My father was the chief accountant in Greaves Cotton, and I would have to find a job over there or something. I might as well find a job over here. So...

LHP: So 1967 is about the time when a lot of civil rights movements were held, and did you experience some of that? Especially because the Northeast is very big on equality.

SP: Right, but I was here for only two months. I was here for two months. I was here from about May 15 to July 15 or so. And at the time, I didn't go through any uh, you know, civil rights movements or something like that, so um, I really did not have any idea of, you know, any dealings with black folks and all that. So uh, my family was from Britain, and uh, we went around with them, to their friends and all that. They were all uh...so, I hardly spent any time with blacks when I was here for two months.

[00:30:20]

So, [inaudible words]—the only thing was that there was a concern I had when I came here, that I might be drafted in that time. That was a concern, but uh, nothing happened and so, um, I didn't really have any involvement with the movement and the work was happening in this—Vietnam was going on at that time. Was it Vietnam? Yeah, Vietnam was going on that time. That was the only fear that I would be drafted, that was my only fear, but it didn't happen and, so...but I didn't really have much connection with blacks or with uh, the you know, the tension between the two groups. I didn't belong to either, so I didn't feel any discrimination from either side, because...

MB: So when you finally settled here, um, what was it like adjusting to life in the United States?

SP: Uh—I had no problem adjusting to life in the United States. Uh—uh—I had absolutely—the only thing was like, uh, when I first came here in '67 [taps table] for the Experiment in International Living, I was concerned that the family I stayed with would probably be drinking coffee and I drink tea. [laughs] That was my major concern. But fortunately, they are from Britain and they had tea, so I had no problems at all. Uh—and the thing about it is, even in India, Parsis usually are—tend to be more westernized than other communities. Uh—I don't know if you [looks at MB] knew any Parsis in Calcutta or not, uh—but I stayed at a place called—uh I forget the name of the place—uh—um, I don't know I can't remember, it's—50 years now, 40 years.

LHP: So you didn't have any cultural shocks?

SP: Not really, not really. I just blended in, and... it was—I didn't have any [trails off]

LHP: So where was your first settlement here in the States again?

SP: Boston. Boston. I was there in Boston in '98 in the—uh—the Northeastern University. I had a co-op program, it's a quarterly system co-op program, 64 credits per quarter. Then I went to...uh from there I got a job, out of college straight, so I was—for one year I was in Boston a year, auditing all that sort of thing. Then I moved to Philadelphia, was there just for one year. My son was born over there, and we left. We just went there to pick him up, basically in Dec—in uh—December, January '72—he was born in December '72, we left in January '73 for Kansas City. We went to Kansas City, we were there for 3 years, '73, '74, and probably '75. And sometime in '75, we moved to Richmond, Virginia. All with—all with Mobil. All on promotion and all that sort of thing. Life was good. And I lost my job with uh—Mobil in '78, and then moved over here to Houston, because it was the place for oil. It was easy to get a job over here.

LHP: So if you don't mind, could you tell us how you lost your job?

SP: Well—I just had problem with my boss. And the—previous bosses—they won't support me. I move so often, you know, I moved so... I felt a little grieved that they wouldn't help me. Bosses in Boston, Philadelphia, and Kansas City... Um, so, I lost my job. I mean they gave severance and all that sort of thing. But uh—uh—I just couldn't belong with my boss, that's—that's why I lost my job.

[00:35:24]

LHP: So you travelled a lot of places here in America. You lived in Northeast, Midwest, and the South. So could you compare all three? Where do you like best?

SP: Yeah—yeah. The thing about Boston, uh, is beautiful 3 months of a year. From May through about September. After that, it's all dreary, and cold, and cloudy. Just depressing. Depressing for me. The three or four months of—from May through about September, beautiful. Boston is a beautiful place to stay. Of course, I went to Philadelphia, not because Philadelphia is a good place to stay, but I got a promotion, so... and uh, you just went. And uh...when my son was born, I didn't want my wife to work for few years when the kid was young and all that, so she didn't work for 4,5 years at that time. So there was no problem, I just came home one day and said, 'We're moving to Philadelphia', she said, 'fine'. We always had a promotion, so we were happy to move to Philadelphia. And at Philadelphia, we stayed for only a year. And then we moved to Kansas City, again at a promotion, very happy. Then again, I moved to Richmond, Virginia also on a promotion, so... uh.

MB: Are there any major differences between Kansas City and—

SP: Well, uh, the thing about it is, Boston was too cold for me, Philadelphia was also cold, Kansas City was a little bit better, Richmond, Virginia was still better, because it was more or less in the South. But Houston, Texas, you know, I like Houston, Texas. It is a little hot, but I'm from Bombay, you know, Houston climate over there, so it doesn't bother me at all. And everything is air conditioned over here. And in Bombay, when I left Bombay, there wasn't much of air conditioning there.

LHP: How about the people? Are their attitudes a lot different?

SP: I don't, I don't really think, the thing about it is—I moved in the world of large oil companies. And the atmosphere over there, it was not that much different. The guy who works in—because people would move so much over there, oil companies. And then I came here, and then I came to Houston, and then I decided I wasn't going to move. I moved four times with an oil company, and they wouldn't help me when I needed the help. So I decided I was going—so I stayed here in Houston, and in only a year or two, they offered me a job in New York. So I said, 'No, I don't want to go' and they said, 'Look it's going to limit your future, if you don't go to New York. Because you have to be known to the people over there in the head office. That's the only way, you can still come back.' And I said, 'No, no I don't want it.' I just didn't want to go. I was happy with it. 'It's going to limit your future'. I said, 'Fine, as long as I don't lose my job, and I didn't lose my job, kept it for 28 years. So basically, after a certain stage, you get—you know what's more important in life, and I move four times before because the oil company wanted to move me, and when I needed their help, they wouldn't help me. So I said, 'From here on, I'm not going to move every time they tell me and throw a few million dollars in my way.

LHP: What do you think of Houston as a retirement city?

SP: Ah—I would love to move to San Diego. My cousin is in San Diego. If I won the lottery tonight, I would be in San Diego tomorrow morning. [MB and LHP laugh] I came to, from San Diego, it's so expensive. It's so expensive. I just came from there. But I love San Diego. So if I win the lottery, I would settle down in San Diego. I mean, I may not settle down in San Diego, but I would still have a house there, or an apartment, or a condo on a beach and all that. So I love San Diego. I love that area. I also love Canada. Vancouver is a very nice place. I've been to Vancouver, I would like to very much. San Jose, one of my cousins is in San Jose, one of my cousins is in San Diego, I like the cousin in San Diego more than I like the cousin in San Jose. [all laugh] And, uh, the thing about it is that they have religious places in San Jose, they have a place in Vancouver, upon the mountain, in fact, if they would take me as a priest over there, I would move over there. But, uh, Houston is good enough. I go to San Diego at least once or twice a year.

[00:40:39]

LHP: What does San Diego have that Houston doesn't?

SP: Climate is—climate is much better. In San Diego, you don't need air conditioning, and you don't need heating. You can live without air conditioning or heating. In Houston, you can't live without it. You can live without heating, but you can't live without air conditioning. That's the difference between San Diego. And uh... beach and the shoreline and all that. I grew up in Bombay, Bombay is right down the sea and all that, so I used to go every evening—I used to go to Marine Drive, Promina—Marine Drive in Bombay. When I read your name [looks at MB], I thought you might be from Bombay, so then you would be able to appreciate—[MB, SP laugh]

MB: [laughs] Sorry.

SP: But Calcutta also is a nice place. But, uh, I prefer Bombay to Calcutta.

MB: So in Boston, and Richmond, and other places, how did you become involved in social circles?

SP: Social circles basically were all around my office and all that, in a sense that we had job, we had the club, uh, not—like a member—I go my retiring tax—Shell retiring club, there from [inaudible word] meetings. I go over there. And over here, there is so much movement, that the people you are with—so many other people I was—retired from and all that, they have settled down in different places outside of Houston and all that. So, when we have a large community—we have a—the main thing is that the community, the Parsis and all that, we have a central over here, we have about 600, 700 people and all that. And we have functions all the time. So I'm pretty active in that. And since I'm a priest and all that, they call me to do some religious ceremonies and all that, so I settle—but other than that, my only... the people I knew they're all moved away, or so... I used to be um, member of the Texaco [inaudible word] Club, I am a member of that, when I was at Texaco. And then when I came to Shell, we moved to Shell, and then I lost contact with all of the people from Texaco, so it's a basically all around work—working. Uh, I wasn't active in politics and anything like that.

MB: What was the Parsi community like in other places you have lived?

SP: They—they are very small. Very very small. In—uh, Boston, uh, of course—this is—I'm talking about Boston, I was there 1969, 1970. So I'm sure it changed quite about it. But at that time, there was hardly any—there was not any club or something like that, you accidentally meet, somebody, and, uh, in the Galleria—in a mall or somewhere, and you may contact, we can find out immediately whether that guy is a Parsi too. And, uh, I don't know... So there weren't many people there. Now, of course, the population much higher in Boston also, they have center and all that. They didn't have a center in 1969, 1970. Similarly, in Philadelphia also, then we moved to Kansas City. And Kansas City, we hardly knew a few Parsis. But the first month of—the first week I went there to look at the place and see where I can find a place, my wife was there. And my son was born at that time, he was one year or so. And there were sitting there—my wife was sitting in the—uh, at McDonald's or something—and a group came by, and she said, 'I know this guy from Bombay!' That's how we came to know them. They had stayed there first of all, so we knew few more people. But we still didn't know many. In Kansas City, you probably didn't know more than 40 or 50 Parsis. And, uh, Richmond, Virginia, we probably didn't know more than the same amount. They were small communities. Houston is—even when we came first to Houston—we came to Houston in '78, and, uh, it wasn't maybe couple of hundred. Not 700 or more, 800. So it has grown quite a bit. It's, uh, now there are more of the, uh, the directories and all that, and those days there are no directories. You just happen to meet somebody and all.

[00:45:30]

LHP: So do you enforce Zoroastrianism in your son?

SP: Yes, yes. He is a—he is also went through his—for his priesthood, you have to go back to India for the priesthood. And go through a ceremony over there, and stay there for three weeks to a month to do that particular ceremony. So he did the ceremony and all that. But, uh, it's—it's difficult to bring up children, because we—we grew up in a different world, and he's growing up in a different world, so. It's—but I don't know what's going to happen with our community. We are so... few. And, uh, [trails off]

LHP: So are you nationalized? Do you have American passport?

SP: Oh, yeah yeah. I got my passport—my wife got it pretty early, because she only needed—she was a teacher. So she needed early. My wife was actually—before that—she was teaching at Kingwood High School for—she taught at Kingwood High School for 19 years. Uh... I'm sorry, for 11 years. And then she worked as an—actuary for 19 years, and my son was in Kingwood High School, 11 Kingwood. We lived in Kingwood. You're familiar with Kingwood, aren't you? [MB and LHP shake heads] You're not familiar with Kingwood? You're not familiar with Kingwood? Mm. Okay. Uh, I lived there for 30 years, so. It is somewhere in 59 North. It's near Humble. It's near Humble. So, uh, where was I, what was I saying, yeah, so—forget what I was going to say... But, uh, and I just recently sold the house in Kingwood, because my son is settled in Philadelphia, he bought a big house over there. I was hoping that he come back to Houston, but I don't think he'll come back to Houston. His wife is from that area, and she doesn't like Houston, so.

MB: What does your son do?

SP: He's a lawyer. He doesn't—He's a SEC lawyer. Security Exchange Commission. He's a business law, you know, IPO's and new companies and things of that nature. He doesn't go to court or anything. And his wife is, uh, neurologist. She's a neurologist.

LHP: Is she also a Parsi?

SP: Yes she's a Parsi.

LHP: Did you insist that she had to be Parsi?

SP: Well I insisted, but these days... World is changed. Ahh—you can't even blame the young ones. They—we grew up more or less segregated. Schools were boys separate and girls separate in India, I'm talking about. And, uh, you know chances of mixing them down. For every one Zoroastrian boy or girl my son meets, he meets 999 non-Zoroastrians, equally, so, these days, it's not married in the community. So I don't know what's going to happen with the community.

LHP: How was the process to getting nationalized? Was it difficult? Because it seems like during student—when you were here as a student, you had a lot of problems with visa.

SP: Yeah, okay, well, to be validated, my wife was teaching at Kingwood. So she had to have a...so she got citizenship back at 1984. 1984. Sometime at 1980 or so. And, I, didn't need it.

See the thing is, when my parents were living in India, I frequently going back once a year and so on. And if you had American citizenship, it would be a problem because you have to get a Visa and this and that. When you have Indian citizenship, I could go at a moment's notice. And something's going to happen with—something bad goes or something like that, we could go right away. That was the only reason why—and the company didn't insist on my being—in all these major oil companies, they had so many people who were, who—coming from overseas and all that, and they didn't insist. So I never became citizen until 2001. I became citizen in 2001, because at that time, my parents had passed away. So there wasn't that urgency. Main reason was urgency in—you know, you hear some—something bad news, and you want to rush back to see your parents or something before. That's why I never took citizenship. I never took American citizenship all these years. I would have taken it much earlier if—my parents were there, so. I wanted to go at a moment's notice.

[00:50:52]

MB: Do you go back to India often now?

SP: Now, there's nobody—my sister is still there, uh, but my parents have passed away, so...I don't go back to India. I'm going back in January, because my wife's brother's son is getting married, so I'm going in January this year. My wife goes more often, because she has quite a few brothers and sisters over there. I just have one sister. And, uh, so... I don't go back to [trails off]

LHP: So where was your first settlement in Houston again?

SP: Boston.

LHP: [mumbles] Oh no, like, in Houston.

SP: Oh, I'm sorry, in Houston. Yeah, I stayed at Kingwood. I stayed in Kingwood for 30 years. I moved in 197-78. My wife followed a year later. She was teaching in Richmond, Virginia. So she couldn't come here. So she came after she finished, and she came in '79. So I found a place at Richmond, Virgi—I mean, Kingwood, Texas, which was more wooded and all that. Over here, on the southwest part of town, Sugarland and all that, it was hardly any small trees and all that. I was used to having—so I like Kingwood and all that. Kingwood, Conroe, they're both the same, looked at both places and selected Kingwood. And, uh, I used to commute, because I used to work downtown and then I used to work in Bellaire, so I settled down in Kingwood, Texas. And we've been there for 30 years. We just sold the house three months ago.

LHP: Why did you decide to move here instead of staying there?

SP: Ooh. I like the—once my—my son, I just have one son, once my son went away, it was just me and my wife. And staying so far away, you know, center is at—uh 59, and, uh, what's the—West Airport Boulevard. It's where we were. So from Kingwood to go over there took 45 minutes too. Over here I can go in 15 minutes. So the center is much closer. And, I mean, now it

was getting to the stage when moving and you know, I had people come to move and all that. We kept the house in so many years, and we had this for 8 years, we still get the house for 8 years, because we thought my son would come back, but he got a much bigger house over there. He's not going to come back. So we sold that off, moved over here. Now, at this age, you know, you don't want to be hassled with, you know, lawn mowing and leak and this and that. Over here, I have no—if there's any problems, just call the, you know, head of the member of the over here, they take care of everything, so I'm happy over here. This is smaller than the house we had, but it's all open and all that. And that's what I like about it.

MB: So the ceremonies and rituals that you do as a priest, where did you learn those?

SP: I learned it in India.

MB: From whom?

SP: From, uh, the priesthood of—the priest over there. You go to what it's known as Atash Behrams, I don't know if you are familiar in Calcutta. Calcutta has one, I don't think there's many. Bombay, if you lived, you definitely know what I'm talking about. Bombay, there's lots of, there are 7 Atash Behrams in India, and Agiaris, you have got 50 of them. So you learned over there. You had to stay over there, you had to follow certain rituals. You couldn't do this, you couldn't do that for that period. Did you think... so I learned it all in India. And when I went with my son to India, I was with him for a bit, for the month that we stayed there. My wife was still teaching over here. She couldn't...[trails off]

[00:55:10]

LHP: What jobs does being a priest entail again?

SP: Jobs—you do marriages, you do navjote. Navjote is like an initiation. Uh, you do jashans, which are jashans for happy occasions and sad occasions, you do prayers when somebody passes away, and then every year after that, you do priest to pray. Uh, in happy occasions you can have is for [inaudible two words] and for housewarming or happier—if somebody has some success, and wants to celebrate their—so we have jashans for happy occasions, and also for sad occasions. So, it's just—ceremonies, which we do.

LHP: So you are heavily involved in Zoroastrian center?

SP: Well, yeah—I don't know about heavily. But yeah, because, you know, the thing about it is, I have to be here, you know, we travel so much. Now that I'm retired, we go at least—with our son, we spend about—we go there about 3 or 4 times a year. About 3 weeks at a time or more. So 3 months here. Then I go to San Diego quite a bit. And then I go to, you know, we travel—we go to Europe. We just came back from Europe last week. We went to Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England for 3 weeks. So we travel, you know, we're both retired. In fact, my wife is going to Toronto. This morning, she left, because one of her relatives is in bad health, and she went there to help out. She's going to be there for a week or 10 days.

MB: How much family do you have in North America?

SP: Uh, how much family do I have... I have one sister, but she is in Bombay. I have a lot of cousins over here. One cousin is in San Diego, one in San Jose, one in Richmond, vir—near Richmond, Virginia. I've got other relatives in Austin, and some relatives in Dallas. Um, where else... we've got someone in east coast, uh, in Connecticut, we've got someone who lives in Connecticut. Um, and, uh, so...

LHP: Do you know—Can you briefly tell us why and how they ended up here in the States?

SP: Everybody came for a better life. You know, as a community, we are very Westernized, even over there. So... but, you know, people who stayed behind, are the people who were in business, whose families were in business. They could pass it on to their son and all that. Those who were employed, whether they lived in Bombay, or they lived in Boston or here, it didn't make much difference. So, lot of Parsis are moved over here, we probably have about five-six thousand Parsis over here, in the United States. Another five-six thousand in Canada. And, uh, I don't know how many in Bombay, eighty-ninety thousand? In Bombay. It's spread all over, in Australia, England there are quite few, five-six thousand.

MB: Okay, just to kind of close out, if you—what would you like to impart to the next generation about your immigrant experience?

SP: My immigrant experience? Uh... I'll tell them that, you know—I don't even need to tell people—kids these days. They are more Westernized, and more, uh, more acceptable to move and all that than people who are in my generation. And, uh, nowadays, you know, everybody is rather—even in India, they are willing to—willing to go to the states, and some are going to Dubai, some are going to, uh, England, Australia, New Zealand, um... so, my sister's children have moved to Dubai in December, Dubai from Bombay. They had come here for education. My nephew [coughs]...my sister's son went to college over here, forget which college it was. But then he moved back to Dubai, because he had his business and all that. His father was in need, very into business, so he moved back for his business and so. And, tell the children, go away the opportunities now, the world is one big place. I mean, it's not—it's so easy to move, and it's very mobile society. People move all the time, so. What am I going to tell them is—I don't really know what else to tell them.

[1:00:59]

LHP: Alright. Thank you for participating in this interview.

MB: Yeah, thank you.

SP: You're welcome.