

**Godan Nambudiripad**  
**Narrator**

**Polly Sonifer**  
**Interviewer**

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**PS:** This is Polly Sonifer, interviewing Godan Nambudiripad, on May 17, 2000. How are you doing tonight?

**GN:** Doing great.

**PS:** Good. Now, we're talking tonight about SILC, the School of India for Languages and Culture, and I'd like you to start out by telling me your name, your current age, and your Indian language heritage.

**GN:** My name is Godan Nambudiripad, I'm fifty-eight years old, and my language is Malayalam. My mother tongue is Malayalam.

**PS:** And what part of India are you from?

**GN:** I'm from the state of Kerala, which is on the west coast, down south.

**PS:** And when did you come to the United States, and how did you come to be here?

**GN:** Actually, I left India in 1967, I went to Canada, and I spent five years in Canada, came to Chicago, the United States, in '72. Then when I got a job with Pillsbury, I moved to the Minneapolis area in 1981.

**PS:** Okay. So what first brought you to leave India?

**GN:** I guess the fun of travel, probably, and specifically, I kind of wanted to get to do aeronautical design, and I got a job. I applied to many companies, and North America had the lead in aeronautical design at that time, so I thought this was the place to be able to do that.

**PS:** So you already had your college degree when you came?

**GN:** Yes, I did.

**PS:** You didn't come as a student?

**GN:** No, I was already employed back in India.

**PS:** And were you already married and all that stuff, in India?

**GN:** I got married right after I got my job here. I decided I'm going to come here and I would rather marry and then come. Instead of coming here and waiting many years, probably, to go back and get married.

**PS:** So you got married right before you came to Canada?

**GN:** Correct.

**PS:** All right. And how did that work?

**GN:** It was tough. Trying to start a new life, and new country, and all that. It was tough.

**PS:** You got through it.

**GN:** Yes, everybody gets through that, I guess. You have to, there isn't much choice. You cannot go back, right, in time?

**PS:** Yes. Even if you wish you could, you can't. So the School of India for Languages and Culture, how did you get involved with that?

**GN:** I was introduced to the school by one of my friends, Ranee Ramaswamy. At that time, I think it was 1983 or so, I was teaching at the Hindu Mandir, because I wanted to teach my children some of our heritage, and the first place that I found was Hindu Mandir, so I started there, teaching children about our heritage. Ranee was a neighbor and friend of mine, and she said she was teaching dance there and she thought I would like it, that place.

So I went with her once to SILC, and I liked what I saw, and the next year, I took my children and myself to SILC. That's kind of how I got into SILC.

**PS:** Do you remember what year that was?

**GN:** It would have been '83. Spring is when I probably went there, but '83-'84 school year is when I started in SILC.

**PS:** And when you say you started in SILC, what do you mean you started? You started taking your children there, and you went there?

**GN:** Yes. I went to teach and I took my children for them to learn.

**PS:** And what did you teach at SILC?

**GN:** I don't remember exactly what I taught that particular year. I must have taught the language, Malayalam, but I know that I got involved in other areas, like general knowledge. I remember even teaching cooking once, how to make dosha.

**PS:** Do you know how to cook that stuff?

**GN:** Oh, yes.

**PS:** Oh, okay. So you weren't pretending to teach something you didn't really know?

**GN:** No, I wouldn't do that.

**PS:** Some people do. So you became a teacher right away?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** Are you still involved with SILC?

**GN:** No, I am not.

**PS:** When did you stop being involved?

**GN:** I think the last year I was involved was in 1990 or so.

**PS:** So it was from 1984 to 1990, so about six years that you were involved.

**GN:** Yes. Probably 1983, you know, second half of '83, '83 school year, through end of '90, middle of '90, spring of '90.

**PS:** And what are all the different things that you did while you were there? Just a broad stroke.

**GN:** Well, first I was a teacher, in many different subjects, but I got very much interested in it and I did a lot of organizational type of things. I organized some meetings and strategy planning and then I became the president, and two years I was president, and the third year I was a member of the board, so I was three years in the administration part of it.

**PS:** Did you continue teaching during that time, as well?

**GN:** Yes. I taught during that time and afterwards. During that part, I did bring a few other teachers and got started cooking. Also, yoga and tabala. I got other teachers involved and got started teaching those subjects, on my initiative. So I was very much involved in that side, and

then I was also involved in the Festival of Nations, where SILC took part, and I did the cultural booth quite a few years. Then towards the end I also was a student, learning Sanskrit at the same time as I was teaching, also.

**PS:** So you've done it all.

**GN:** Yes, I think I've done it all.

**PS:** And what was it that first got you excited about being involved with SILC?

**GN:** I think there are a lot of things that excite you. It's probably not just one thing. The main thing was, I wanted to bring my children to a place where they're comfortable and they can learn their background and their culture. That probably was number one in my thinking.

The other thing was the quality and the motivation of the people there. I was very much impressed by that. That was the other factor. And, you know, to me, even though I'm from India, and I have worked in other parts of India, I never worked with people from all different parts of India.

So this was a great eye-opener to me, being able to work with people from different parts of India. That reminds me of the Jawaharlal Nehru's history of India. The name was *Discovery of India*. He didn't say it's a history of India; it was his discovery of India. So I guess SILC was my discovery of India in other words.

**PS:** So you had to go away from India in order to discover it.

**GN:** Yes. Yes, you get a different perspective when you're outside than when you're inside.

**PS:** So did you have some certain expectations or hopes about how it would be, being involved with SILC, when you started?

**GN:** I don't know that I had any particular ones. It definitely was to educate my children. I don't know whether I had any other intentions at that time, but the other part of it is, the expectation is, that you would like to give back to the society something, and I thought I could do that, too. So those are probably the main expectations when I went.

**PS:** And were those realized?

**GN:** Yes, of course. You know, not only those, but much more than that. And the other part was that I became the president the second or third year there, even though at that time, there was a kind of thing in their charter that you become a president only after you became one of the board members, and had done something, but I was an exception there, so that gave me some

confidence in seeing that people had confidence in me, so it probably helped me, personally, to recognize that I have something that I didn't recognize, but other people recognized.

**PS:** So someone saw your leadership skills?

**GN:** Right. So that was kind of a great thing for me, in my development as a person. And then, I never thought I then would learn Sanskrit or get involved with Festival of Nations, and making cultural booths, and then this also led me into India Association, right after that, because some of the people who were in SILC were very much active, so that opened up another avenue for me, both contribution to the community as well as development of my own person.

**PS:** So you weren't involved with the India Association prior to SILC?

**GN:** I didn't even know about India Association.

**PS:** So what are some ways that SILC changed the way you think about yourself as being Indian or being American, or maybe even both?

**GN:** That's a hard question. I don't know whether I did change. It helped my understanding of Indians, as I mentioned. It did help me in developing my leadership skills and my confidence. Those were the two things I think, specifically.

**PS:** You talked a little earlier about when you were outside of India, that you could think of encountering people from other parts of India in a different way. Did it change the way you thought about yourself as an Indian person living in America?

**GN:** I don't know that it changed the way I look at myself as a different person, living in America, that way. The kind of aspect to that, I don't know if it's a direct answer to the question, but when you do something like this and here is a new Indian community. New in the sense that most of the people in the community had come in the sixties and seventies, and they were raising their children, so it kind of made me think about, hey, this is almost like the pioneers, who moved from the east to the other parts of the country, or even the Pilgrim fathers who came to this country and set up a system here that brought the culture of those countries—specifically, Europe, and more specifically, English, and they set up the system and they tried to make it a perfect system, as perfect as they can.

So I thought, "Gee, I'm probably involved with the Indian community, doing almost the same thing," because the Indian community, for an Indian community, America is as foreign as it was probably for the Pilgrim fathers, probably in a different way. So I felt an excitement there, in creating something. So yes, in that way.

**PS:** And the next section of questions is specifically about your role as a teacher. So if you could tell me specifically what subjects did you teach. I know you've touched on them already.

**GN:** That's probably a harder one to answer, because I think I was more involved in a—when I think about SILC, I think about my involvement in the administrative part of it, the organizational part of it, much more than I think about what I did as a teacher. So some of it, what I would say, would probably be teaching itself, and some of it is curriculum development and other things.

**PS:** Yes, and that's all part of this, too.

**GN:** Yes, so, you know, one is the actual delivery of the subject; the other one is development of subject. So a couple of things that come to my mind is, teaching at SILC was extremely hard. You know, take language. For one thing, any textbook or whatever you can take. Well, textbooks which are written for students back in India, for example, whose mother tongue is in the tongue that you are going to teach, and so there wasn't anything—you know, it's very difficult to use that. So we had to devise methods in how you teach the subject.

**PS:** And how did you do that?

**GN:** I don't know that I did a good job, but it was a collaborative act. We tried first to use the textbooks. That was okay, as much as you are trying to teach the alphabets, but then you start words, and the words you find in those textbooks were quite foreign to the people here. So we had to kind of start developing our own book almost, or use parts of the book to do that. Then we said, "Well, yes, it is fine to have words and alphabet, but more important is the language, so how do you teach language?" So you made up a lot of things as you went. It was a collaborative effort of many people to do it.

**PS:** It would be my guess that in Malayalam, which is in a hot climate, there's no word for "snow blower."

**GN:** Yes, right. And the funny thing is that for "ice" or "fog" or "snow" there's only one word. Something that connects with cold, and that's it.

**PS:** Right. And that's it, because they don't have a word.

**GN:** No.

**PS:** So when you started teaching this, was the emphasis on spoken Malayalam, or written Malayalam, or reading Malayalam, or all of them at once?

**GN:** We tried to have all of those, and even songs and things like that, because songs are easy to learn by heart and it's easy for people to learn the pronunciation. So you use the whole language by singing.

**PS:** And the students that you had, did they tend to be kids who had Malayalam-speaking parents, or not necessarily?

**GN:** Not necessarily, and I think, in one case, there was a parent who didn't speak Malayalam either, you know, the wife of a person, a Malayali, who had married a white American woman, so there was a kind of mixed bag of students there.

**PS:** I would imagine then there were lots of skill levels because some of the little children who spoke Malayalam with their parents were at a different level of skill than this white American woman who married a Malayalam speaker.

**GN:** Yes and no. At that time, the Malayali population was very small here, so even the students, young ones, didn't have as much exposure to spoken Malayalam as, for example, today. But what we did is we put people in different classes, based on their skill levels in the language, so that's how we tried to meet that.

**PS:** So it didn't matter what age they were, it was their skill level.

**GN:** Skill level.

**PS:** You may have a seven-year-old with a seventeen-year-old.

**GN:** Right.

**PS:** Challenging teaching situation.

**GN:** But then along with that, let me add one part of it. When we found that there wasn't adequate material for teaching Malayalam, for example, then we kind of embarked on a curriculum development, so I was very much involved, and assigned curriculum of different subjects to different people, and we kind of put all those things together.

**PS:** And how did you do that? What was the process?

**GN:** Well, the process was, we kind of said, okay, if you want to take some children, say, from six years old or whatever, and take them through five or six years of school, what are the things that you want to teach them about India and about Indian culture? And then you broke it down to general knowledge, language, literature, things like that. And arts. And then, in turn, assigned different things to different people.

**PS:** But how did you actually develop the curriculum? How did you decide what was going to most effectively teach Malayalam or Sanskrit or cooking?

**GN:** I don't know that we did that. It was more like a checklist kind of thing than a real textbook that can be used in a classroom. Here are the subjects you can do, and then we used things that you collected into some kind of a notebook, if you would. So it's kind of a teacher's guide—teachers can use as their resource material, but it's probably not developed to the level that it can be directly used.

**PS:** So teachers had resources, but it was still up to them to figure out, on any given day, what they were going to teach.

**GN:** Correct.

**PS:** What was the most challenging aspect, for you, of teaching? You make your living as an engineer, right?

**GN:** Yes. But in Canada, I had taught at a community college for three years, so I was exposed to teaching before I started at SILC. But at SILC, specifically, the challenge was, first of all, the material. Secondly, something like language, how do you teach, effectively, in a classroom and then they go back, and after a week they might have forgotten what you taught, and come back and probably, this being a voluntary thing, not everybody put as much effort into it. So that was tough.

**PS:** Did you give homework?

**GN:** Yes. There was homework and all that, but how many of them did that? That depends on the interest level.

**PS:** Sure. And their natural skill level.

**GN:** Yes. That, too.

**PS:** What was the most rewarding thing about teaching at SILC?

**GN:** I think, you know, there are two aspects to it. One is the teaching part of it itself, which is, you know, you see the children are interested in it. Even the people who have a hard time learning who come back to it, so it's nice to be working with somebody who wants something. That was a rewarding thing.

The other thing is the social life there. Like I said in the beginning, there was a highly motivated and very nice bunch of people from different parts of India, so that was outside teaching, but it was a kind of interesting thing there.

And then, the other part of it is, trying to—you know, we were always developing curriculum, and you learn a lot by teaching. I developed the curriculum, for example, on Indian architecture.

I don't think they ever used it, but I learned a lot about Indian architecture doing that. And then, even on literature, somebody dug up some material from some book, which showed the alphabet in Malayalam is very closely related to the alphabet in Sanskrit. I knew the Sanskrit alphabet and Malayalam, but I didn't know the connection there, so then I found out that many of the Indian languages have the same, somewhat similar or common alphabet to start with.

**PS:** Because they were all based in Sanskrit?

**GN:** No. I think Sanskrit probably was the first written language, then South Indian languages, which are completely different, but some of them use alphabets which are very similar. Just like the Latin script is used for English as well as French.

**PS:** Right. Even though there are a few differences.

**GN:** Quite a few differences, though.

**PS:** Very interesting. So on an average week, how much time would you spend working on SILC-related things? I imagine it varied from year to year.

**GN:** Yes. Definitely, the Saturday was about three and a half hours or so, teaching, and then travel and all that would be probably five hours easy there. So it would be five hours from that. And getting prepared for class, probably an hour or so, and then while I was in the administration, it probably took many evenings, more often, so probably, I would say an hour, average, in many of the months. When you get involved in something like the Festival of Nations and the booth, then that is many hours there. So that was a substantial amount of time, spare time.

**PS:** So what motivated you to spend your spare time in that way?

**GN:** I was having fun. If it were boring, I think I would have probably said no, enough is enough, let's go. I think the people and the students and all of that, and my own learning.

**PS:** You said that you didn't know about the other cultural groups, or the other associations of Indian people, prior to getting involved in SILC, because you'd only been here in Minnesota for what, a couple of years?

**GN:** Yes. I probably knew some of the South Indian groups. I knew the Hindu Mandir, but I probably knew that all the other language groups had associations, I knew that, because normally, that's what people have. But I wasn't working with any of them, except probably with the music society.

**PS:** So getting involved with SILC opened up your awareness to lots of other cultural groups and language groups and other people. Did you find that you became friends with people, so you did social things outside of the SILC activities?

**GN:** Oh, yes. And I'm still doing that with people outside my language group, which I probably would not have done in India, been in some of those areas. Even in Chicago, and I was there for eight years, I mainly moved with the Malayali group. I had very little contact with people who spoke other languages.

**PS:** And how was it that that developed that way?

**GN:** I think Minneapolis, the whole Indian population was not that large, and so instead of having each language group their own different organizations, it was much more easy for people to get together from different language groups. I guess the size of the city, it was easy to go from one end to the other, and back, I guess.

**PS:** So do you think that that's happened in other Indian communities, in other parts of the country, or not so much?

**GN:** I think in terms of temples, probably that has happened, but in organizations like SILC, there's much less of that. Yes, I think there are some other schools also, in some other parts of the United States, similar in nature. But I think this is a little bit more unique than other places, you know, the SILC school.

**PS:** That idea of mixing with people from the other language groups, if you'd stayed in India and stayed in Kerala, especially, you would have just stayed surrounded by Malayali speakers, right?

**GN:** Yes. In Kerala, yes, I would probably—Kerala is an area where—really, few outsiders come to Kerala because there aren't that many industries or anything like that. Most of the people in Kerala go outside, and so even after, in my case, after I graduated from engineering college, I went outside India. I worked in Bombay and I worked in Bengal, but in both cases, my immediate friends were all Malayalis.

**PS:** So even when you lived in India, in other parts of India, you would isolate yourself with other Malayalis?

**GN:** That's somewhat typical in India, even though you will meet at one place, you will probably meet them, and if some people are interested in music or some special things, there may be more interaction, but generally, it's more close to one's language group.

**PS:** And how is it that it goes that way? What is it about that?

**GN:** I don't know. Well, I guess, somebody said the definition of friendship is common knowledge, and so if you look at common knowledge, a person from one language group knows more about each other or each other's culture than outside. So that may be the reason, I guess.

**PS:** So simply both being engineers, or both liking a certain kind of music, or a certain kind of art form, or a certain kind of literature—

**GN:** That comes next.

**PS:** Okay, so it's the language that's the basic thing.

**GN:** Yes, because the language also implies that you're from a particular area, so you know the politics, the history, the social things known to that area, much more.

**PS:** How did you see SILC school change during the years of your involvement?

**GN:** The big part was that the number of students really increased dramatically over the first few years that I was with SILC. I think there were something like forty or fifty to start with, and close to a hundred, or in that range—I don't know the exact numbers, but in three, four years, so it was a big increase in numbers. So that was a big change.

Then because of our strategy planning and all the work we did, we added more curriculum, things like teaching of cooking, tabala, yoga, those kind of things. And then I think we became more efficient in teaching and explored many things and saw what fits and what works and what doesn't work and what students want. That's one part of it. The other one was that, initially, the first few years, the children were many ages and with many older kids. After five or six years, all the older boys and girls had graduated, so there was kind of more even distribution from young to old.

At the same time, the number of students was increasing very dramatically. I don't know the exact numbers, but when I started, it probably was more like forty or fifty students and within a couple, two or three years, it was growing into seventies and eighties and almost a hundred, or in that range.

Then if I look at five-, six-year range, the other thing that I saw that, initially, there were a lot of older children as well as younger ones, because some of the older children had never been to a school like this. But then towards the end, when all the older children have graduated, so it was kind of a range from younger children starting out, starting at the lower classes, and then the higher ages in the higher classes, so there was more even distribution of students, I guess.

The other thing that you saw that SILC was becoming better organized. The delivery was better. Because the number increased, we couldn't be in the place where we started, so we moved the school in that time frame to another place.

**PS:** What place did it move from to where?

**GN:** The first place was a common hall at a married students' apartments or residences of the University [of Minnesota]. And then from there we went to a school building, actual school building in the general area. And then within a year or so after that, we went to the current location, which is Como Park Senior High School. So we kind of moved around.

**PS:** And why did you move from the one school to Como Park Senior High School?

**GN:** The one to the other? Como Park school, I think, had other programs for the Asian community or something. I am not sure about that. By that time, I was not involved in the administration.

**PS:** When you think about SILC in the future, as a teacher—I know you're not teaching right now—but when you envision what SILC will be in the future, in terms of what it teaches, or offers the students, what's your vision for that?

**GN:** I don't know what they are going to do, and what the community wants to do. There are many things happening. One of the things, I think, declining of students for a few years. Now, for example, there are very few students learning Gujarati, but the population is very high. Same thing with some other language groups. So I don't know whether each language group is developing their own teaching venues or whatever, I don't know.

Then there is some teaching going on at the Hindu Mandir and Geeta Ashram. Those are two schools offering sessions. So those take up some of the teaching. So I'm not sure exactly where SILC's position is going to be, but if you were to ask me what it should be, it's that I feel still that it's one, nondenominational, nonreligious place where everybody can come and feel comfortable and learn different aspects of India and its culture.

Also, there's a potential that as the population ages or whatever and interests change, this could be a way for teaching some adult education. Because I wish I had learned Sanskrit a little bit more. Maybe there are other people who want to learn other—adults who want to learn some aspects of Indian culture.

**PS:** So you see it having more of a role in teaching adults than it currently does?

**GN:** Yes. But I don't know. Children will still be the primary focus, but I think it has potential though for education for adults.

**PS:** If you had it to do all over again, would you change anything?

**GN:** No. I think my experience was just fun and that I could contribute a lot and my children could learn a lot, so everything went pretty well. You know, what I could wish for. Except maybe, you know, things like I said, I wish I could have learned Sanskrit a little bit more or yoga or some other things.

**PS:** The next section of questions is a question for you as a student, which is, I think you're fairly unique there, because most of the students at the school were young people, right?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** How many adults, would you say, took classes?

**GN:** There were only three or four of us. It was very select.

**PS:** Very select. So the subject that you studied was?

**GN:** Sanskrit. The language, Samskritam, I guess, is how we say it.

**PS:** And who was teaching that?

**GN:** Parag Desai was the teacher.

**PS:** Tell me about what that was like for you, as an adult, to be learning Sanskrit in a classroom? I'm assuming that the other students in the classroom were young people?

**GN:** In that class, there was only adults.

**PS:** So the children were not very interested in learning Sanskrit?

**GN:** No.

**PS:** But describe the classroom for me. How did you study? Who else was there?

**GN:** First of all, it was only three or four people. I don't remember all the people, but Subrahmanian, another Subrahmanian was there Mani Subrahmanian, I think was his name, too, he was there. I think there was Rajan Patel, or somebody. That's all I can remember now. Maybe there was somebody else.

**PS:** And what was class like? How did you study Sanskrit?

**GN:** Well, it was taught the classical way you start learning. The grammar was the first part that you were learning, because the words are very familiar with our words and alphabet, so I didn't

have to study alphabet. Because that's the same alphabet as Hindi, which I had studied, and everybody else had studied. So I was learning Sanskrit, which was pretty hard.

**PS:** What was hard about it?

**GN:** You know, at this age, you suddenly find out that a lot of the things that are learned in Sanskrit grammar are by rote, and you're not good anymore at learning by rote. When you were young you could read and read and learn things by heart, and it comes back to you when you needed it, but when you're older, learning by rote is much harder.

**PS:** So is that how the teacher was teaching it, was by rote?

**GN:** Yes, and that's probably the only way you can teach Sanskrit grammar, because in some cases, there isn't that much rhyme or reason. That's how they were taught, and how it's taught in India. And their books, it shows that, and so we were using those kind of books, and going through that.

**PS:** How long did you study Sanskrit in that way?

**GN:** I think it was one year or two years. I can't remember now.

**PS:** And how much of it stuck?

**GN:** Very little now. But I think, a few parts I can probably bring up pretty fast. It wouldn't take much time to—it wouldn't take probably more than a month if I wanted to brush up to the level that I had left.

**PS:** What motivated you to study Sanskrit, as an adult?

**GN:** A lot of Indian literature, the ancient Indian literature, is all in Sanskrit, and some of the poetry I know by heart, but I don't know the meaning to it. So I said, "Okay, let me try." And then some of the mantras and all those kind of things are in Sanskrit, also, so I could use it to understand that a little bit more.

**PS:** And did you accomplish that?

**GN:** Not enough. One year of one hour a week for thirty weeks or whatever, isn't enough to do it, you know, to make a big dent in that.

**PS:** So you didn't exactly accomplish your goal of being able to understand poetry?

**GN:** No.

**PS:** So you didn't quite get what you wanted?

**GN:** No.

**PS:** Did you get a refund?

**GN:** Yes. I don't pay any fees and I didn't get a refund.

**PS:** Okay. You got back everything you paid for, right?

**GN:** Yes. I guess that's one way to say it.

**PS:** And then at a certain point, the class stopped. Tell me about why the class stopped.

**GN:** I think the teacher was not available for whatever reason, some personal reason, so the class stopped.

**PS:** If it had been available to continue, do you think you would have continued?

**GN:** I think so. Well, provided two things. One is, the teacher's available and putting in some effort, so you feel that you're getting some place.

**PS:** Which was the thing that you didn't quite get, right?

**GN:** Well, that was a short time.

**PS:** You also sent your children to SILC. Tell me about that, what that experience was like for them, from your perspective, as their parent. How old were they when they started, and all of that?

**GN:** The younger was probably eight or nine years old, the second, Krishnan, was probably—he's a year and a half older. Krishnan was more like nine or so, Unny was probably eight. And then it was kind of interesting that Guptan, our older boy, didn't come to SILC the first year. I didn't force him either, you know. It was his choice. It wasn't my choice. So it was interesting, after one year, and he finding that Unny and Krishnan were having fun, Guptan also joined SILC.

**PS:** Of his own choice?

**GN:** Of his own choice. And then after—it was kind of interesting, also. After three or four years, we could not offer him anything more. He had gone through all the levels he could and all that kind of stuff, in three or four years. But he stuck around for another year or so until he finished his high school, because he was having fun there.

**PS:** What do you think was the biggest benefit that your children got out of attending SILC?

**GN:** I think one part is learning about your heritage and language and culture and all that, but the other part is that if you take the community we live in, there are very few other people like them in their classrooms, so it's nice to be with your peers and people who have the same color, kind of have the same background, same type of parents, complaining of the same type of problems.

**PS:** I was just thinking that, but I was not going to say it.

**GN:** So that was fun. The other part of it is that we had fun as a family, in a sense. I took them in the car and so we had fun going back, going and coming back, and then often, we would stop at Burger King on the way back, and it was treat for them. Especially the days when, if I remember right, Aparna Ramaswamy was in the car and she would sweet talk everybody into, "Let's do that."

Then the two boys actually learned driving, quite a bit of it, driving to SILC and back, so it was kind of a—I was teaching them driving also. And then I think there were a couple of other families in the neighborhood so we would share rides, and so it was a social thing, some aspects of it. The children were more into that kind of thing.

**PS:** Was your wife involved at all?

**GN:** No, she was not involved in it.

**PS:** And how was that?

**GN:** That's her choice. She's comfortable with very selective people and very selective situations, so she's much more selective in who she associates with. I'm not selective at all.

**PS:** You said Guptan kept on going to SILC school, even after he had studied everything that could be offered. What did he do when he went that last year?

**GN:** Well, we were lucky in having some teachers there, some motivated teachers. I think it was especially Anoop Mathur, who challenged Guptan and gave him an assignment, I think in Indian philosophy, or some of those kind of things, and he made him think and write and read about those things, to discover things on his own, some of those kind of things. So that was what he got involved in after he finished what we could offer in the regular classrooms.

**PS:** And how about the younger two sons? How long did they continue to go?

**GN:** They continued until they kind of graduated through the courses that they offered, which is four or five years.

**PS:** And then after that?

**GN:** After that, they said SILC didn't have much more to offer, and so they dropped out of SILC.

**PS:** How was that for you? Were you still involved with it at that time?

**GN:** Yes, I was still involved.

**PS:** So even after your own children were done, of getting everything SILC had to offer, you kept being involved?

**GN:** One or two years I got involved, yes.

**PS:** That's pretty astonishing. That's a lot of time to put in.

**GN:** Yes, at that time, after my children were out, I only taught one subject or so, so I could just go there, teach that subject, come back.

**PS:** A big commitment of time and all.

**GN:** Yes, it was.

**PS:** Now the next set of questions is for board members and presidents, and you were both a board member and a president of the board, right?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** So when you think about the time that you were on the board, how many years was it, and what years was it? Do you remember that?

**GN:** It was two years I was as a president, and then as a board member. I can probably find the exact years, if I can look through—

**PS:** Sure. Oh, you've got a cheat sheet there.

**GN:** Yes, I have a cheat sheet here. Let's see, I was president in '85-'86 and '86-'87. I was president and then for one year I was as a board member, and looking at that, I can see that I did actually start in '83-'84 school year.

**PS:** And what was it that motivated you to be on the board? Because you were also teaching at that time, and then you took on extra responsibilities. How were you persuaded that that was a good investment of your time?

**GN:** When I started teaching, we kind of found, we were, like I said, it was a young organization, it was looking for how to evolve, where to get the material, what to do, what should we be teaching, how should we be teaching, all those kind of things, so that's why I got involved in organizing the strategic planning meetings. So it was kind of a natural thing for me to be the president after I got these things organized and trying to see what I need to do, so it's kind of a natural thing, I guess.

**PS:** But you kept on teaching even while you were being on the board?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** Which just increased the amount of time that you spent.

**GN:** I don't know whether it made a big difference because I was teaching something like language, and it wasn't that difficult. I didn't put in a whole lot of time. Because being a president, you are there anyway, and bringing the children, you are there anyway, so you had enough time while you were there, because you were only teaching one hour. You had the other two hours to do the management kind of thing, and could prepare for the next class if you wanted to.

**PS:** So in some ways, you did double duty?

**GN:** Yes. Efficient use of time.

**PS:** If you're going to do a lot of things, at least do it efficiently. What was the most challenging thing about being on the board of directors?

**GN:** One aspect is the administrative side, and the other aspect is what you have to get done. There are two aspects, I guess, being on the board. One is what you want to get done, the other one is how you're going to get it done. How do you get things done. It was kind of hard to get all the board members together for meetings. That was one problem. I guess it's almost all boards. Voluntary boards, especially, have that problem.

I don't know what the other—we didn't have any structured board meetings. It was, sometimes the board meetings get into not just board meetings, but also what curriculum we need to teach and all that kind of thing, so it was a very fluid kind of thing. We were doing many things. And a lot of trying to decide some administrative things, like where are you going to teach this, so there is a place. So it was kind of a mushy situation, because the problems that we were facing were just enormous in range.

**PS:** So not your typical budgetary questions or policy-making questions. They were more broad.

**GN:** Yes. An established organization will have a board which kind of, all it has to do is to give strategic direction, more or less, and kind of oversee the administration. But we were doing both, trying to have a strategy, trying to give some directions, and doing also the administrative things.

**PS:** It's what we call a working board.

**GN:** Yes, it was very much a working board.

**PS:** So it was challenging to find times to get together, and also to handle the quantity of things that you needed to get done as a board?

**GN:** Yes, the type of things we had to get done was hard.

**PS:** And were there certain areas where there was strong agreement?

**GN:** I don't remember. It was too long ago. If you ask me to go back in time seven years ago, seven or ten years, and I could probably answer that.

**PS:** Do you remember any times when you had lively disagreement about a course of action?

**GN:** I cannot think of any big, lively disagreement, on any course of action, but maybe for a specific topic or specific thing, there may have been some, but not in a course of action, but some administrative things, say, what do you do next year, kind of thing. It's much more difficult to decide.

**PS:** So it was harder setting a strategic direction than to handle the administrative tasks?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** How did your board make those decisions? Did you do votes or did you do the consensus, or how did you make choices?

**GN:** I don't remember now, but I don't know whether we had actual formal vote on all those kind of things. We were more trying to have consensus than actual vote. Maybe we did take a formal vote on items but it was more consensus building. Because a lot of the work was actually not decision making, it was more exploratory. It was, what do we want to do? What do we want to be?

**PS:** And were there certain people who came forward with a lot of ideas and others who sat back and were more quiet?

**GN:** Yes, I'm sure.

**PS:** As most boards are.

**GN:** And then sometimes even the people who are not on the board were invited, people who were experienced in this kind of work, so board meetings were not very strict "board only" meetings either.

**PS:** What language did you use during board meetings?

**GN:** English.

**PS:** And would people have side conversations in their own language?

**GN:** I don't think so. I don't remember anyway. It was a long time ago.

**PS:** Were there any special challenges with language or understanding each other?

**GN:** No, it was pretty easy. English. Because we were together all this time, not just in board meetings, so we knew each other as persons.

**PS:** Because you socialized with each other as well?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** Where were the other places that you would bump into the folks from SILC?

**GN:** No, what I meant is, I socialized quite a bit in SILC itself.

**PS:** Within SILC?

**GN:** SILC itself. And then some of the people socialized outside.

**PS:** It sounds like you didn't do very much of that?

**GN:** Not a whole lot.

**PS:** You wanted to hang out with those Malayalam speakers?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And you have this discriminating wife. When it was time to find new board members, were there any special challenges that came with finding new board members?

**GN:** No, we usually recruited new board members from the teachers who come regularly to SILC.

**PS:** So you had a ready-made pool?

**GN:** Yes, we had a ready-made pool, pretty well.

**PS:** How did you recruit new teachers?

**GN:** Word of mouth. Ask, ask, ask, and you kind of watch the other groups you know, and you ask, and word of mouth, that's all.

**PS:** And you served on the board for three years at the same time you were being a teacher?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** What was the most satisfying thing for you about being on the board?

**GN:** Well, seeing the growth and getting some results on that. Again, the two or three years in curriculum that I managed to get incorporated into SILC, and those kind of things.

**PS:** Do you have any real vivid memories of any particular board meetings or certain things that went on that you can tell stories about?

**GN:** I think at that time the Hindu Mandir and Geeta Ashram both were trying to attract us and say, "Hey, come on, bring your school to our building." So we tried to work with both of those groups and see if it fits our needs and our aspirations and all that. So we discussed that a lot, so that's kind of something that I remember quite a bit.

**PS:** And in the end, you decided not to do that.

**GN:** That's right.

**PS:** Because?

**GN:** Because it doesn't—SILC is a more nondenominational, nonreligious, what they call in India, a secular kind of organization, so that doesn't quite fit with the objectives of the facilities that these other organizations had to offer. For the community, having these kind of facilities close by would have been nice, but it wasn't an option for us to do that.

But if you talk about memories, not necessarily as a board member, but as a teacher, one interesting thing is, sometimes you teach and you try to let the students lead what you want to teach. So one year, I think it was 1990, it was Earth Day, so I was teaching them on that weekend, March 20 or whatever, April 20 or something like that.

**PS:** Yes, it's mid-April.

**GN:** Mid-April, late April kind of thing. And I asked, "What do you want to do?" They said, "Let's do something about ecology in India." And I said, "Okay, let's do that." And then the students wrote, "What do you want to do?" "Well, let's write a letter to India, somebody in India, to say they need to clean up the place there." And here's a bunch of letters that I found, when I was looking for some things that the students wrote, to the Prime Minister of India, so I collected those letters and sent a cover letter, and the Prime Minister of India, or his joint secretary to the Prime Minister, replied.

**PS:** Would you read that to us, what he wrote back?

**GN:** Okay, here, "Prime Minister's Office, New Delhi, June 19, 1990, Godan Nambudiripad. Sir, the Prime Minister has received your letter of 27 May 1990, regarding environment. He has asked me to thank you and the children of your school for the active interest evinced in environmental issues relating to India. Yours respectfully, P. M. A. Hakim, Joint Secretary to the Prime Minister."

**PS:** How did the kids feel when they got this letter back from the Prime Minister?

**GN:** Well, the thing was that I got—this was sent in June, so it was the next year that they would have seen the letter and I wasn't there, probably. I don't remember what they thought, because I wasn't teaching at that time. But I feel they probably should have felt great about writing something.

**PS:** What kind of suggestions did they make in their letters to the Prime Minister?

**GN:** Do you want me to read a couple of things?

**PS:** Sure.

**GN:** Oh, sure. "May 6, 1990. Dear Prime Minister of India. Hello. My name is Seema Kakde. I'm twelve years old and I live in the United States." Now, going down all the suggestions, okay. "My idea is to put public bathrooms in some of the big cities. You can put bathrooms in the parks." She goes on and then says, "The government could pay people with no jobs to clean the bathrooms." Goes on and on and on, for four pages.

And another one. This is from Alok Bachuwar. “Dear Mr. V.P. Singh. My name is Alok Bachuwar and I’m nine years old. I think you should have more trash cans for people to throw their garbage in. I also think people in India should recycle more, and they should not smoke, because it is bad for your health and it pollutes the air.” Then goes on.

Then this is from Mallika Arudi. “Dear Mr. V.P. Singh.” And here is again the same thing. “Should have more public bathrooms in cities, and garbage cans.” Then from Krish Subrahmanian. “Dear Mr. V.P. Singh. I think you should make more public bathrooms, schools, and cut down factory smoke. Smoke is not only bad for them, but it is bad for the environment, too.” So these are the letters they sent to the Prime Minister of India.

**PS:** So you never got to find out how the kids responded when they got this letter back?

**GN:** No. Unfortunately, these were sent in May; I got a reply in June. I probably would have taken the copy and gave it to the teachers or whoever, but it was the next school year by that time.

**PS:** Okay. What fun.

**GN:** And another thing I should say is that I collected something like \$101 or so and donated it to the Statue of Liberty, that was renovated in that time period. And supposedly, our name, SILC’s name, should be there. I never went and verified it, but they promised that, at that time, if you give over \$100, they will do that. So that was another thing I did.

**PS:** So that’s how you came up with 101.

**GN:** 101, right. I added the one.

**PS:** [Laughter] Whatever it takes, right?

**GN:** Yes. Whatever it takes to put your name some place.

**PS:** So how did that become a project? Was that from your students or from the other teachers?

**GN:** I find that out in some—either somebody gave it to me, that information, or it was in some newspaper or wherever I found it, and I tried to get the money to do that. From donations.

**PS:** So how did you make that a project of SILC school? How did you tie that in with Indian language and culture?

**GN:** I told them that if you put that money in there, you can have our name there, and tried to collect money.

**PS:** Okay. So it was just purely to get your name on a plaque?

**GN:** Yes, exactly right. I think also, you know, symbolically, the Statue of Liberty, which stands for the immigration program, it's the program by which we came, so I think there's some emotional connection there.

**PS:** And yet many of you, when you came from India, came by airplane rather than boat?

**GN:** Of course.

**PS:** But that doesn't matter?

**GN:** No.

**PS:** It's still the symbol of it.

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** So as an immigrant, you have a sense that the Statue of Liberty represents something really important to you?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And do most immigrants have that, do you think?

**GN:** I don't know whether people are aware of the Statue of Liberty, I don't know that, but I have studied the history and seen the pictures in New York quite a bit, so yes.

**PS:** But have you yourself ever actually seen the statue?

**GN:** Oh, yes. A couple of times. I've even gone and climbed up with one of my sons, all the way to the top, at that time, into even the arm, which I don't think you could do that today.

**PS:** That would be an interesting field trip for the SILC students, wouldn't it?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** We're going to New York this Saturday.

**GN:** We brought back the Statue of Liberty here, though.

**PS:** You did?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** How did you do that?

**GN:** One year, the Festival of Nations, their theme was immigration, so we made a Statue of Liberty and put a sari and a bindhi and all that on it, and had fun with that. That's how we brought the statue here.

**PS:** Oh, that's great. Okay. Well, now you've just led right into what I wanted to talk about next, which is the special celebrations that SILC was a part of creating. And I know from my own experiences, a person who attends a lot of festivals, that SILC has been very heavily involved in the Festival of Nations as well as the India Day, right, at Landmark Center?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And some others as well. Could you talk about any of those projects that you've been involved with?

**GN:** I think if you look at special events, first of all, let's look at internally. Internally, SILC started to celebrate some of the Indian festivals, so it got the students involved in that. So that is one type of celebration. It wasn't as much at that time, when I was teaching, but kind of towards the end, it was evolving into that. So people can learn about festivals. So that was one part of it.

Then, SILC has always had close association with India Association. It used to be called India Club at that time. That's because those are the two secular organizations with people from many different areas of India, so there's something common about it. So SILC was involved in the Festival of Nations, under the India Club umbrella, I guess, ever since I was involved in SILC. So always we provided quite a bit for the entertainment. A lot of the SILC people chaired the entertainment section.

Also, always, till now, the cultural booth was created, manned, and all that by SILC, so I was involved in that. India Day, probably SILC was more like a guest or wasn't involved in organizing or any part of it, but participated. And I think we got a few students, being there, so that was another part of it. Then, it's not quite a festival, but another area we were involved in was with the Children's Home Society. We did give seminars on Indian culture to the prospective adopting parents, so we did that a few years. So that was all.

**PS:** And which ones were you personally involved with, of all of those?

**GN:** I was involved in the Festival of India, in the cultural booth, three or four years, I think. And the exciting thing was, the first year I was involved, our booth won the best booth awards. I think there were two booths. So we were pleased with that. I still remember Preeti Mathur

calling me at night, at ten o'clock or so, and waking me up to tell that. I wasn't angry with her for doing that.

**PS:** You were angry?

**GN:** No, I was not.

**PS:** You were not angry?

**GN:** No, I was very excited. It was a great feeling.

**PS:** Describe that booth for me. What was in it?

**GN:** I don't remember.

**PS:** Not at all?

**GN:** Maybe I can use my cheat sheet here, if I can find that. Festivals of India. Now I remember. Festivals of India, and each day we had a different theme, and for one thing, one of the festivals from our area is Onam, which we used an arrangement of flowers, so we had a flower arrangement made there and Onam was celebrated one day. So different festivals were celebrated on different days. I managed to get people from different parts of India to do different things.

**PS:** Tell me about the Festival of Onam.

**GN:** Festival of Onam is—Kerala is the only state where that is celebrated, and the story is that an ancient emperor who was so good that the gods were not happy, he being so good to the people, or the people having such a great time, I guess. They got jealous or whatever, and he was sent to somewhere else. The story is that he got permission from the god that he can return once a year, and it was a time of his coming back, to visit us.

And that also, incidentally, happens to be the end of the rainy season, which is much like the winter here. The rainy season is one of the worst times of the year, especially in an agricultural society where usually there is too much rain to even do anything. And by Onam time, it will be the first crops might have come out. So it's a festival.

**PS:** So it's a spring celebration, sort of.

**GN:** Sort of thing, right. The first crop of spring, and harvest festival together. You can do those kind of things when you're in the tropics, you know.

**PS:** Right, right. So how did you illustrate that in the booth?

**GN:** One of the things you do for Onam is to have a decoration of flowers in front of your house, to welcome this king who is coming, so you did that, in the middle of the booth there, so that was one of the things.

**PS:** Was there anything special about how the flowers were arranged?

**GN:** It's in circles and it's very traditional to have circles.

**PS:** And then what else in the booth?

**GN:** Well, we had a lot of gods and goddesses and art things and all those kind of things, brought from different houses and put there, and arranged in different ways in which these are arranged usually in some of the festivals.

**PS:** So people would bring things out of their own homes for these?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And keep them in this public place? This was at RiverCentre [St.Paul], right?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** Did people have any concerns? I mean, these were their own personal statues and things.

**GN:** No. We only took it from people who we knew and who are willing and involved in it.

**PS:** But didn't they worry about that their statues of gods and goddesses might be broken or stolen, or anything like that?

**GN:** I don't know.

**PS:** Just never was an issue, right?

**GN:** Some of the people, if they think like that, they won't probably give you anything, so we only take from people who don't mind that.

**PS:** And was everything always safe?

**GN:** I think so. I might have lost a few things, but I brought a lot of things of my own. A lot of things broken, but that's okay.

**PS:** So it was just important to get that word out?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And did you staff that booth?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** What was that like?

**GN:** It was nice to explain your culture to other people, especially children, so it was a lot of fun. To meet a lot of people. A lot of Indians, actually, came in to us, because the Indian population here was small and sometimes people from other parts of the state would come. It was a lot of fun to meet all these people and talk to them. I probably met a few people through that.

**PS:** What kinds of conversations did you have? What did they want to talk about?

**GN:** Gee, this is a long time back.

**PS:** You can't remember.

**GN:** I don't remember much. Basically, you know, how Indians are here, and where do you live, and those kind of things.

**PS:** So the other Indians who came would want to know about that?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** How about for the people that weren't Indian who came up to the booth? What kinds of things did they tend to ask about?

**GN:** Don't remember.

**PS:** Don't remember. Okay. You just would meet them and talk?

**GN:** Yes. The fact that they are there and talking is because they're interested in something.

**PS:** How many other vivid memories that you have about working on any of these festivals?

**GN:** I think one of the vivid memories I have is, one of the other projects was the one that we did for the Children's Home Society. We had a kind of a planning session that I had with those people, and I kind of wanted to make this as a tour of India. They had planned a few things, and I planned the initial part, which is the tour of India. So we had really some great fun, creating it. It's a very fun event.

**PS:** A tour?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** A real tour, or a virtual tour?

**GN:** A virtual tour. We didn't give any advance notice to anybody, but when they came, first they had to apply for a passport and visa, and we had the visa stamps and all those kind of things up front. And then they go into this room and then I had managed to get a slide collection about different parts of India and had a couple of SILC students, very good speakers, take them as if this were a tour of India.

But before that, after they take the visa and passport and all that, you came to the room, and then we darkened the room and said, "This is an airplane you're taking to India. And Captain Rajeev speaking." And then suddenly the lights come and the plane lands in India. And we had people in Indian dresses, and they would swarm the whole room, and made all kinds of Indian noises, selling tea and knick-knacks and scents, as if it is the sights and—I wanted to have the sights and sounds and smells and everything of India there. So we created the sights and sounds and smells and everything of India there.

**PS:** What smells did you have?

**GN:** We had some tea, is one, and the other one is the sandalwood smoke.

**PS:** Incense?

**GN:** Incense sticks. So those were the things that you could do.

**PS:** I would imagine that one of the strong smells in India is the cow dung.

**GN:** Yes. I didn't have any of that.

**PS:** You didn't do that.

**GN:** No.

**PS:** And how was this received? That's so creative.

**GN:** The speaker, after, you know, us setting the stage, and then after this sight and sound and all that, we had a slide presentation, which took them to different parts of India, the speaker afterwards was Eleanor Zeliot, who is a professor at Carleton or St. Olaf College, I think, on

Indian culture or whatever, and she said she had spoken to many different groups, but this warming up for her was the best she had ever seen.

**PS:** So did you get invited back?

**GN:** I think, unfortunately, there was a kind of break in the relationship with India adoptions for some time, so I didn't but I did get a good—they gave us, as a reward, a slide projector.

**PS:** That's very nice.

**GN:** Yes. So yes, I got invited back to the Children's Home Society to receive that, at a public function, and they really appreciated our effort.

**PS:** Oh, how neat. So did you bring the whole school, all the students there, to create the sounds and smells and people talking?

**GN:** I don't know that it was the whole school, but quite a few people from the school.

**PS:** Like how many?

**GN:** I don't remember that. Probably twenty, thirty.

**PS:** Okay, so it was an immersion experience.

**GN:** Oh yes, it was, oh yes.

**PS:** Wow, that's very creative. Well, any other things like that, that stand out for you as very vivid memories?

**GN:** The other vivid memory for us, one of the early ones, I think it was the year—I may not have even started teaching, it was probably the first day that I visited there. There was this group of students singing a kind of an invocation song, a Malayalam invocation song, and none of the students were Malayalis. It was a strange experience.

You wouldn't see that, say, for example, in India. Malayalam is a language not very many people outside Kerala know. Malayalis would probably go outside and learn the other languages and the songs and all that, but I've never seen any persons outside Kerala learning Malayalam songs and singing. So here it was, the music teacher at that time was a Malayali, and he was teaching this beautiful invocation song and these Gujaratis and Hindi-speaking people and Tamils and Kannadigas all were singing this beautiful Malayalam song. That was a strange experience.

**PS:** Now, as a Malayalam speaker, can you look at or even know the names of a group of other Indian people and know what part of India they're from? Or can you tell from looking at them or seeing their names? How do you know whether they're Malayalam or not?

**GN:** I think if you know the name, quite often you can see that. Then the looks, also, gives off something. And even the way they speak English sometimes gives off—all of those. Though, these days, it's kind of getting even more difficult because people, even the naming conventions have changed in India, and some of the Malayalis and have gone out and lived in Bombay, and if they speak, or even their name, can you say, sometimes call it, sometimes not, and sometimes yes. It's more difficult now.

**PS:** So what would be the characteristics, in terms of appearance, that would tell you that somebody was Malayali, or would you call them a "Keralite?"

**GN:** Malayali is probably what—I don't understand the question, I guess.

**PS:** You said sometimes you could tell by, when you were young, you could tell by looking at somebody if they were Malayali. What would be the look that would say, "Oh, that person's Malayali." Would it be their clothes or their body build or their features or their hair?

**GN:** It may be many different parts of those kinds of things, because Malayalis are dressed in one way.

**PS:** And how is that way?

**GN:** Back in India, they will have a lungi or a mundu or a plain, white cloth, wrapped around like a skirt. Even men will have that, and a shirt on top of it. And the way that you, which way you wrap the cloth, Keralites wrap it in one way, all the other south Indians wrap it in a different direction. So that itself is a giveaway.

**PS:** If you know that's what to look for.

**GN:** Right, right.

**PS:** And what else?

**GN:** Depending upon different parts of India, north Indians don't use that—they use the cloth in a different way. And then the facial characteristics like racial, you know, kind of, I think, is different from different parts of India. So many different things, it's not just one thing.

**PS:** So what would be the facial features that would be a tipoff to you as a native Malayali that you're with another Malayali person?

**GN:** Almost all Malayali men will have mustaches in those days. It's not that others didn't have, but all Malayali—I've hardly seen any Malayalis without mustaches. But otherwise, I don't know that I can explain that, but it's just, you know it.

**PS:** And my guess is that the children who go to SILC school didn't know those things and the people that they were encountering here in the United States weren't, for the most part, wearing lungis anymore, right?

**GN:** No. No, they didn't know, and they probably didn't even care that much. For my son, whether a person is Malayali or somebody from some other part of India isn't that much important, because he didn't have a language to talk to, and the language is English, and the background is much more similar, than for me. But for me, it is different because our experiences, for a person who comes from Bombay, it's quite different from my experience. But for my son, it is not. So they didn't care about that.

**PS:** Interesting changes from generation to generation.

**GN:** And it may be also true for people who come from India these days from cities. They tend to be more, you know, breaking some of the barriers of languages and all that, people who come from, say, Bombay or something like that.

**PS:** Breaking the barriers of language? Say more about that.

**GN:** Because if you live in Bombay, if you grew up in Bombay, your mother tongue sometimes could become second language almost.

**PS:** So if you were Malayalam growing up in Bombay, you may or may not speak Malayalam?

**GN:** You will probably speak Malayalam, but it is not as strong as, you know, they would feel very at home in Hindi.

**PS:** Now, SILC as an organization is quite unique in many ways, because it's been around for twenty years now, and it's been completely volunteer. There's never been a paid staff person, in twenty years.

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** So for twenty years, it's been a thriving nonprofit organization. What do you attribute that success to? That long-term success as an organization?

**GN:** I think it is the parents who want to teach their children about their background. I think it's the one single most—you know, how we started was parents getting together and trying to find a common place to teach their heritage, and that's exactly what is going on even now. And that, I

think, is there always. And it's easier to do that in an organized fashion than people trying to do it on their own, even though people do a good job on their own. But I guess you could do it more efficiently and more thoroughly if you pool your resources.

**PS:** And this group of parents that pulled it together, here in Minnesota, all came from different parts of India, different language groups, different religions, even? Is there a variety of religions represented?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And economic levels?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** And yet, those same people in India probably wouldn't have ever encountered each other, even if they all lived in Calcutta or Bombay or Delhi, right?

**GN:** Probably would not have done something like this together. Let's all get together and teach Indian culture to our children, no. It would never happen.

**PS:** So this was really a very interesting incubator of a new way of all these Indian families thinking about even being Indian, right?

**GN:** Yes. I think there is more Indianness there than the connection to your own language group.

**PS:** So that the fact of being Indian transcended all the other qualities about you, like your education level and your language and your religion?

**GN:** Yes.

**PS:** Whereas in India, those things would have kept you all separated?

**GN:** Right, that is correct.

**PS:** And what was it about being here that made you able to transcend that?

**GN:** I think the smallness in numbers, I think is probably one major thing. I think that probably is the major thing. And the other thing is that the people who came first are more educated and had probably more contact with—you know, quite a few of them were graduate students here, so they had associated with these people in the University. So it was kind of easy for them to continue doing that kind of thing when their life got transformed into becoming employees and family people and all that.

**PS:** So they were just staying in touch with their college friends?

**GN:** Yes, I think there is a certain part of that.

**PS:** And they did that transcending part while they were all college students, so that was their shared experience?

**GN:** Yes, right. That's what I would guess it is.

**PS:** And you joined in a little bit different route, because you were all done with college by then?

**GN:** That's right.

**PS:** I've run out of questions, unless you have other things you want to talk about. I've got a few more questions, but you've answered them in one way or another already.

**GN:** I didn't answer them?

**PS:** Oh, you did fine. Are there any things that you want to tell me about?

**GN:** I can't think of anything particularly. I think I touched on most of the things about SILC. Some of the people in SILC. Actually, one of my brothers is still—he's involved in SILC, and his wife, so I still have a good connection in SILC in that way. I'm out of SILC but still connected. I know what is going on in SILC and that kind of thing.

It was a very rewarding experience and I felt the greatest part was, again, here is an organization trying to help this community establish here and create a community, so it was very much of a creative force, especially the first few years that SILC was going through. So it was very satisfying from that perspective.

**PS:** You were birthing an organization.

**GN:** Yes. Birthing an organization. Not only an organization, but birthing a community, you know, the Indian community here. Helping that, helping the Indian community to establish here. So it's more than just this organization. So they were very exciting days.

**PS:** Much to be proud of. Anything else that you want to tell me about? You've got the floor.

**GN:** I think I'm running out of ideas.

**PS:** Okay. Well, thank you very much for taking time to talk to me tonight.