RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH V.K. RAJU

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
OCTOBER 26, 2022

TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. V.K. Raju, on October 26, 2022, with Shaun Illingworth. I am in Hightstown, New Jersey, and Dr. Raju, you are in West Virginia?

V.K. Raju: That's right.

SI: All right, wonderful. To begin the interview, can you tell me where and when you were born?

VR: I'm born in India, in South India. Andhra Pradesh is the state. Rajahmundry is my hometown. [Editor's Note: Rajahmundry is a city on the eastern banks of the Godavari River, located in southeastern India in the state of Andhra Pradesh.]

SI: Now, for a little bit of background on your family, can you tell me your parents' names and, starting with your father, a little bit about what you know about his early life?

VR: Yes. My father's name is Vadrevu V. Narasimha Rao. You want me to spell it, or is there no need for that one now?

SI: We have it on the survey, I believe.

VR: Yes.

SI: I will let you know.

VR: Narasimha Rao [was] a lawyer, a very well-known lawyer. He [was] a compromising lawyer, I heard, but my father died when I was five years old. So, I don't remember him that much. But my mother, the architect of our family of seven children, she brought us up with only a fifth-grade education. That is the true background of [my] mother, how important is mother--of course, father--but if the father is not there. He was, as I said, a lawyer, a practicing lawyer, with a great reputation for compromising. It was said that there were a lot of lawyers in a lot of countries through those years, they were always compromising rather than taking them to the court.

I had my basic education, high school education, in Rajahmundry, then moved to Visakhapatnam. That is a city 120 miles [away], where I went through medical education. It's called M.B.B.S., Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. After that, I left India to go to England. I did all my ophthalmology education at the Royal College of Surgeons. Then, I was planning to go back to India. I sent some paperwork to India. There was some delay in replies, and I had an opportunity to come to the United States, come to West Virginia. I never left. In '77, I came here; I never looked back. [Editor's Note: Visakhapatnam is the largest and most populous city of the state of Andhra Pradesh. The Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (M.B.B.S.) is a medical degree conferred by institutions that follow the medical education system of the United Kingdom. Dr. Raju is a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, a

professional organization based in London that was established in 1800 to promote the practice of surgery and dentistry.]

SI: Well, that is great. I want to ask a little bit about your early life. You mentioned your mother had to raise seven children after your father passed away. How was she able to do that? Did she work? Did family help her out?

VR: Not really, because we [were] pretty well off. Financially, she did not have any problems, and she was found to have diabetes. One thing with her was she was a determined woman, gentle and helping others. Generosity was the character of our mother, and she never forced anything on [us], anything. Whenever we did something to her dislike, she just stopped talking to us, and that we could not stand, when she stopped talking to us. That's all my daughter says, when I tell her that my mother did it, and I used to do with my children the same thing, because a lot of things in our life depend on how you are brought up. Our upbringing has so much direct influence on us. When I do it with my daughter, she says, "Oh, what a passive aggression." I never heard that before, yes. [laughter] Passively, when my mother kept quiet, we did not like that, and we never did that again with her.

SI: You were growing up in the 1940s.

VK: The '40s.

SI: You were born in '42.

VK: Yes, that's right, yes.

SI: You were growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. You would have been probably five years old when the partition happened and India became independent, right? [Editor's Note: In 1947, with the end of British colonial rule, the Indian subcontinent was partitioned into the independent nations of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.]

VK: Exactly, that's right.

SI: Yes. Do you have any sense of how, if at all, your family and you were affected by that?

VK: Not at all.

SI: Not at all, okay.

VK: I never heard anything, and I don't think we were affected. It's all in south, that's why. North of India, south of India, [there] is such a difference. They never had these invading--you know, Muslims invading and that kind of thing, all the time in the north. The south was always protected. There's such a difference in south and north that way. No, we had no problems at all, yes.

SI: I would imagine your mother put a heavy emphasis on education in your household.

VK: Absolutely, absolutely, yes.

SI: Were your siblings able to go on to higher education as well?

VK: Absolutely, everybody, yes. Everybody went to graduation, post-graduation. My brother was a lawyer and accountant. All the sisters were graduates or post-graduates, yes. The youngest did MSc [Master of Science] in nuclear physics, yes. [Editor's Note: A Master of Science post-graduate degree is abbreviated as MSc in Europe.]

SI: Were you the only one that went into medicine?

VK: That's right, yes.

SI: Okay. Was there anything in your early schooling that led you towards the sciences in general or medicine specifically?

VK: When they ask such question, I really cannot recollect, but I've always enjoyed interactions with them, whenever I went to a doctor's office and all that. I liked the atmosphere in doctors' offices, yes.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in your city and your neighborhood, what your life was like when you were going through high school, for example? I want to get a sense of what you were like growing up.

VR: Yes, a lot of friends. The neighborhood where we lived, we knew every neighbor. We knew each of them. If somebody, neighbor's kids, something happens and all the other people knew it, and always we [were] very much dependent on each other without any problems. Today, in the same neighborhood, a lot of people don't know each other. It's not a big city, but it became quite big and close to about one million people. But when I was there, it's only one-tenth of that population.

SI: Oh, wow.

VR: But it's grown. My hometown has grown enormously. I can't really spot all those areas; I can be lost in my hometown now. But life was very simple then. Not very far from our home, there was a river called Godavari, and it's one of the biggest rivers in India. We used to go there and bathe in the river. We learned swimming in that river. Truly remarkable, everybody knew each other, just like in almost every country, it is like that probably. I had a college education for one year. There's a college there, too, near our home that is the city, our city, our town, whatever you call it, government college. A lot of villages were surrounding us. A lot of villagers used to come to our city and go back in the evening after selling their ware. We always used to talk

about those people, villagers, and we always used to make fun out of them because of how they used to talk our own language, because we think we are educated. That's kind of a ridiculous thing. But Rajahmundry is dependent on all the villages. Because of the river, it is green, green, nothing but green all around. The district is very green. [Editor's Note: The Godavari River is the second longest river in India.]

SI: Was the city very cosmopolitan? Were there a lot of different religions and ethnic groups?

VR: Absolutely. It is cosmopolitan. A lot of religions, there are Muslims, Jains, Sikhs. In South India, we hardly had any problems of religious violence; it is a little more in North India because of the background. There are a lot of invaders [that] came from the northwest border, because all around India, the sea and then, northeast, Himalayas. So, no foreigner could come. All around it is a huge country, but still nobody could come, except [in the] northwest, and all the invaders, Muslims and even the Portuguese, French, English, they all came from the northwest (and some by sea voyage).

I'll tell you, since you asked that, something struck me. One of the first synagogues was in [the] south. They came by sea and [established] in Kerala, the southern state of Kerala, one of the first synagogues of India, but they came as refugees. I wrote a couple of articles on that one actually. That is still live and functioning. There is a rabbi there, and there are other synagogues also in the nation. [Editor's Note: This refers to Paradesi Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in India, located in the port city of Kochi (formerly Cochin), in Kerala. Sephardic Jews who had been exiled from Spain and Portugal settled in Kochi and built the synagogue in 1568.]

SI: Wow. Did religion play any role in your life growing up?

VR: What a wonderful question. My mother used to say the religion, Hinduism is actually a philosophy [that] became religion. The roots of Hindu thought is called, in Sanskrit, *manasa, vacha, karmana*, what you think, what you say, what you do is the true religion ("*manasa*" referring to the mind; "*vacha*" referring to speech; "*karmana*" referring to action, or the belief that one should strive to achieve the state where one's thoughts, speech and actions coincide). But after that, the things that came into religion, this became more and more rituals. That religion, truly the roots of that, my mother always used to say things like, "You don't need to go to a temple if you don't want to. You don't need to, but you can have a belief." She always wanted us to believe in something and they always focused on your *dharma*, your attitude, what you do in day-to-day life. [Editor's Note: Sanskrit is the classical language of India and of Hinduism and is the language in which the Hindu scriptures and classical Indian epic poems are written.]

That reminded me, a few months ago, one of my ninety-year-old patients said it. I was stunned. When I tell my Indian friends, they don't think, "Oh, an American patient said that one." Everybody thinks their religion is the one. They are the religious people; others are all not really anything. She said she saw one of my articles in the local newspaper. I love reading, a lot of non-medical reading, non-ophthalmology and non-medical reading, and I do a lot of it. I have

written a lot of non-medical stuff. One of the articles I had written in the local newspaper, the editor is my patient. He is on the Board of Directors of our foundation. [Editor's Note: Dr. Raju is the founder and president of the Eye Foundation of America, which seeks to eradicate childhood blindness, especially in underserved communities around the world.] He was on the board for a couple of years. Every three or four months, we have to write an article, a different [subject], schooling, education, and I brought [up] this religion. She was very happy. She said to me, "Raju, that was wonderful what you said in the newspaper. I agree," and she added something, which I told her I never heard before. She said, "Raju, religion is like our underwear. You take care of it. You don't need to expose it." I quote [that] to a lot of my Hindu friends. Some are staunch Hindu friends. I'm not a staunch Hindu.

If you are a real Hindu, you respect every religion equally. That is true Hinduism. What is real Hinduism? You don't separate because you accept everywhere all the religions. The three religions came from India, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, the three from the East. One built a temple next to each other, whereas I wrote in my book--did I send you my book? [Editor's Note: Dr. Raju and his daughter, Dr. Leela Raju, are the co-authors of *Musings on Medicine, Myth, and History: India's Legacy* (2018).]

SI: I do not believe so.

VR: I would love to send that to you, because with your background, I think you would enjoy reading it.

SI: That would be wonderful.

VR: Whereas in Jerusalem area, there are three religions, major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each time a new religion came, they destroyed the previous temple and built their own. When Islam came, the Christian temple, they destroyed it. That's all, historically, the three religions there and the three religions in India, a [historical] point of view just like that. That strikes me, ultimately, the tolerance to other religions is the real teaching or the roots of Hindu thought, but a lot of people are forgetting [those] roots. They're becoming like other religions and otherwise. Hindus think, "Everybody will engulf us. We'll be destroyed," because they're all really concerned, these conversions are happening in India; but I don't subscribe to that. The true roots of Hinduism is accepting other beliefs, and that is called, in Sanskrit, "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*." That means, the entire world, humanity, is one family. Those are the roots. I'm always fascinated with the roots. Nowadays, a lot of people [are] changing those roots even and trying to interpret differently. You can stop me in between, if I am digressing a little bit here and there, you could tell me. I will be glad to ...

SI: No, this is good.

VR: Yes, yes.

SI: Yes, we want to get a sense of your beliefs.

VR: Coming to my mother again, under the roots of Indian thought is, in Sanskrit, "*Matru devo bhava*." These are the roots, pillars, of Hindu thought. Mother, I see the presence of God in you. Father, I see the presence of God in you (*Pitru devo bhava*). Teacher, I see the presence of God in you (*Acharya devo bhava*). Guest, I see the presence of God in you (*Atithi devo bhava*). See, nobody has seen God according to any religion, who has seen the God? Some people may claim, but we all know very well, nobody has seen the God. But the Hindu thought says, first, a mother gave birth to us. She took care of us, there's nobody like a mother. There's incredible literature, in Hindu literature, in Sanskrit, written about mother, you know, the goddess. But the same thing we can say in Western literature, in Christianity too, somebody said long ago, "God could not be everywhere, that's why he created mother." Mother, father, teacher and guest, these are the four pillars of a society. If these people are not taken care of properly, there won't be harmony in the society. There's always that word harmony is used, you know, not material pleasures, that are fun, nothing like that. Harmony is very important culturally; that word is in Hindu thought or Indian culture. So, she insisted on that one; like Jesus said, love thy neighbor, or do to somebody what you want others to do to you, that kind of thing. My mother always insisted on those things. She never believed the hypocritical things in religion. She did not condemn them. She said, "If they follow that, [that's] their problem, or whatever they want to, but you [don't] be like that." She always talked less and she used to say, "Talk less and you can do more."

SI: Wow, that is a good lesson for anyone.

VR: And she died in her sleep.

SI: Oh.

VR: In spite of diabetes, all the problems, she always believed in being positive one day at a time, like, "Good morning, God," rather than, "Good God, morning," she lived like that, with all the complications of diabetes.

SI: Wow.

VR: In Hinduism, a lot of people after death, they do a ceremony every year, calling the priests, giving them food. They do rituals, for about six hours, eight hours of rituals, on that day, to keep the soul peaceful. Well, if they do it, that's all; I don't have any problem. For my mother's anniversary, a hundred trees I plant in West Virginia, it could be anywhere in the United States, in her name and in my father's name. Every year, I plant them. That is [how I show] my respect to my mother and appreciate, and if her soul is watching, I think she will appreciate that one.

SI: That is great.

VR: The trees, they always say that a tree is a life for ours, you know, half of our lungs is a tree, yes.

SI: Also while you were still in your home city, would you get involved in a lot of social activities or clubs or athletic activities?

VR: Yes, basically, athletics, we used to play soccer (football). I used to do some in high school, but after high school, I left to [go to college]. I went to medical school; after one year college, I left to [go to] medical school. At medical school, I played a little bit of soccer, as a college team, but [I was] more of a benchwarmer, focusing on education. But social activities and all that, not really that much. I don't think I was involved in many social activities at that time, no.

SI: All right. Tell me a little bit about what medical school entailed where you went.

VR: Sure, yes.

SI: Was it similar to what you would find later in England, or was it more general? Tell me a little bit about that.

VR: Yes, medical school, that's one of the oldest medical schools in India. It started in 1927. It was a truly wonderful medical school, but after finishing there, when I came to London, I felt in certain ways we were far behind. [Editor's Note: Dr. Raju earned his M.B.B.S. from Andhra University, a public university in the city of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. The university was established in 1927.]

India got independence in 1947; I have incredible respect for Nehru, the architect of modern India, but unfortunately, the socialism he taught did not work. Until 1991, India was going through, I think, without realizing its potential, it was struggling and struggling, but '91, the real changes happened. Now, there's an incredible difference between that India and India after '91. They opened to privatization. That's what happened. So, [there were] still some socialistic policies, but they opened to the other investments. Incredible things happened since 1991. [Editor's Note: Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), a leader in India's independence movement, served as the first prime minister of India from 1947 to 1964. In 1991, in the midst of an economic crisis, India passed economic reforms that ended socialist policies and allowed for private and foreign investment, which led to quick economic growth.]

In medical school, what they gave us, our professors at that time, gave stellar [basic] medical education, incredible education. There are almost a hundred thousand doctors now of Indian heritage in the USA, and they're doing extremely well. Of course, the next generation, they're born here, like my daughter is an ophthalmologist. She's born in West Virginia. She went to medical school here, and now she's an ophthalmologist at New York University.

When we did our medical school, certain things were missing, we found out, when we came to London and to the United States. But they gave us incredible basic medical education that really made us [successful]. We did not struggle. Wherever we go, we could adapt very quickly.

Certain things I [had] not seen in India, when I came to London, but within six weeks, I could adapt to the emergency room, what they were doing and all that. In that way, I'm eternally grateful to our medical school and the India that gave me [the] education, a stellar medical education almost for free. I used to pay like about ten dollars for a six-months' fee. The government [had] given all the funds to the medical school. We hardly paid anything to the medical school fee, but now things are so different.

SI: I am curious, did they have clinical service at the medical school there?

VR: Absolutely, the hospital. It's called King George Hospital, but as I said, the equipment they did not have during those days, but the clinicians were superb. Clinicians were superb, but those were different [years]. I mean, the '60s is different from today, but our clinicians were excellent and the technologies were lacking until the '90s. But now, it's [still like that in] in poor, certain areas in India. [Editor's Note: Established in 1923, King George Hospital is located in Visakhapatnam, India.]

Still, sometimes I feel it is a little bit lopsided; [there are] too many corporate hospitals for profit. I think they're going too far in a way. I think they are needed, the corporate hospitals. The old Hindu thought in medicine is always one word called moderation. Anything you do in moderation, you can never fail. When it goes beyond moderation, anything we do, overeating, drinking, doing the things, luxuries, we can be in trouble. Sometimes, I feel that corporate hospitals are very expensive and a lot of people cannot afford. At the same time, each state has a Medicaid system, you know like in this country. That's pretty good, but I would like to see it much better than what it is. [Editor's Note: Medicaid is government-sponsored health coverage for people with limited income and resources in the United States. India provides for universal healthcare. However, there are problems with the system in terms of medical facilities being underfunded and understaffed, and inequalities exist in terms of accessibility.]

We participate, I mean, our hospitals, our group, Eye Foundation, we participate more and more with [those] kind of patients and especially children. India has 534 million youngsters below the age of thirty-five. No country has it. I feel that India is the richest country for [that] natural resource. If the politicians do it right, I think India can surpass every country in the world.

SI: Well, there is a good argument for that.

VR: Yes.

SI: How did the opportunity to go study in England come about, and what was that trip like, getting settled in England?

VR: Yes. There used to be called employment voucher; nothing exists now, that type of [program], what I'm saying. At the time, Britain used to offer doctors, other professions from Commonwealth countries, an employment voucher. You just apply for it in your chosen specialty or your chosen vocation. They'll send you a voucher, one-page document. With that

one, you go to the British High Commission. Within half an hour, they will give you the permission to go to England. It was so simple. When you go there, then you look for your job. If you don't get a job, they'll give you ten pounds every week, which is comfortable to live, amazing.

I joined ophthalmology in India for no particular reason, but I always wanted to be a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. That, we all wished at that time. Like today, a lot of people would like to come to America, too, all over the world. If they have a chance, they would like to go to the United States. At that time, [it was] England, London. I applied for it, I got it, and then I went to London. Ophthalmology, I could not get in immediately. I joined the emergency room, and then things changed. I got incredible references, and then, when I got my FRCS, I wanted to go back to India. I felt that, "Let's go home." I told my fellows I'm coming back, and they're all supposed to give me a teaching job in the university because I'm a FRCS, which, at that time, [was] a rare degree. [Editor's Note: FRCS means a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.] Not many people did it. But there was a delay. Anyway, I never heard from them.

During that time, I had an opportunity in the United States, and they are looking for a corneal transplant surgeon, which is my [specialty]. In the eye, the cornea, the front part of the eye, [to] replace [the cornea], a blind person can see again. I trained with two people in London, the top-notch surgeons in cornea, and they knew people here in West Virginia. Without doing any residency, I was taken as an assistant professor. I was lucky, truly lucky. [Editor's Note: Dr. Raju is a Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia, and also an adjunct professor at the Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins University.]

After one year, I was about to leave West Virginia, go to Chicago, or California, because I found certain things are, well, for lack of a better word, unacceptable. Certain things happen in our lives, it's called a synchronous destiny. What do they say, chance favors the prepared mind. I stayed back. I never regret it. Today, I'm so glad I stayed back in West Virginia.

One of the awards I got is the Martin Luther King Jr. Award in West Virginia. I value that so much. Why? I put it in the book. In the East, the time is a cycle, no beginning, no ending. In the West, it is called a timeline, beginning, ending. In the east, it is called time cycle, Sanskrit, *Kalachakra*, time wheel. [Editor's Note: For over thirty years, West Virginia University's Center for Black Culture and Research has presented the Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award to an individual that meets the following criteria: "The awardee must be a resident of West Virginia and must have, or be making a substantial contribution in the advancement of such concerns as: civil rights, human rights, humanitarianism, social action and advocacy, civility, improving the human condition, acting as a change agent for an inclusive and equal society for all people." Dr. Raju is the 2008 recipient of Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award.]

People think that Gandhi got this idea and he popularized the idea of nonviolent passive resistance. He led that. Probably you know it, Henry David Thoreau, when the unjust war was going on with Mexico, he would not pay the taxes and he went to jail. He wrote that there [*On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*], without violence, passive resistance. Gandhi, in 1934, wrote in

his book, "This is what I learned from [Thoreau]." [Gandhi then influenced] Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King came to India later and he practiced Gandhi's [nonviolent resistance]. In India, when we're growing up, people used to call Martin Luther King as American Gandhi. Nowadays, they don't use that word, but they used to call American Gandhi is Martin Luther [King]. So, the passive nonviolent resistance originated in the United States, went to India, and came back to United States. That's the whole time wheel. It is a cycle, rather than a beginning and ending. I'm always very fascinated when I say this thing. A lot of people, "Oh, that's very interesting. We never heard anything like that." [Editor's Note: Henry David Thoreau was an American philosopher and writer in the transcendentalist movement. In opposition to the Mexican-American War, he refused to pay his taxes and spent a night in jail. This inspired Thoreau to write *On Duty of Civil Disobedience*, an essay first published in 1849 under the title "Resistance to Civil Government." Mahatma Gandhi adopted many of Thoreau's ideas in his development of nonviolent civil disobedience against British colonial rule, which he called *satyagraha*. While a seminary student, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was influenced by Gandhi's ideas. In the American civil rights movement, King first implemented nonviolent direct action in the Montgomery bus boycotts in 1955. In 1959, King made a five-week trip to India.]

SI: Yes.

VR: I came here to the university. I never liked the word charity. Only God can be charitable; none of us are charitable. We are [self]-interested and we do these things. My mother used to say, "Whatever you do, you keep doing the same thing again and again, because success brings more success in that small area." If you keep on watching football, you keep watching more and more. If you watch cricket, you can keep doing the same over and over. That's all I started to do, and I liked it more and more, especially treating children with vision problems. There's nothing equal to [it]. A fifteen-minute operation or a one-hour operation could give them seventy-five years of productive life.

I must tell you a true story. The kid I had operated on when he was one-and-a-half years [old], Srinu Maddula, whom I saw in India, was brought to West Virginia. I brought him. I did the corneal transplant on him right in Morgantown in '85. He went on to finish a doctorate in pharmacy from Rutgers, and he's the biggest benefactor of the Eye Foundation of America. Sometimes, I feel, when I think philosophically (Eastern philosophy), if I can meet another Srinu, I am ready to die or quit this life. I think of him that highly, that little kid who when he first got a salary, he went to India, went to our hospital, and gave that six thousand or whatever to the hospital. After that, he has enormously contributed to this foundation for childhood blindness.

We have a major program in Ghana. Of course, the main focus is India. The institute's name is Goutami, and it is a teaching institute. Many doctors come to our Institute from other countries. Another most important aspect of this foundation: how can we teach more, so that they can [do operations], rather than me doing a hundred operations. A lot of people ask me, "How many operations [have you done]?" I say, "I taught in this trip more than thirty ophthalmologists. I might have done a hundred operations, but these guys are going to do 3,000 operations." That is

the goal, not me doing operations. [Editor's Note: The Eye Foundation of America (EFA) has established two eye institutes in India and offers services in twenty-five nations globally. The EFA manages eye camps and masonry hospitals in developing countries, trains medical personnel, and educates communities on preventative eye care and healthy lifestyle choices.]

Not a day goes by without thinking of Srinu. This kid never forgot what has happened to him. I did corneal transplants on lots of children here and in India. Some of them are doing pretty well, but I don't think they have that kind of dedication that this kid had in him. He is very successful [in the] pharmacy business.

SI: Wow. Before we get to West Virginia, I want to ask a little more about your studies and work in England. Can you tell me, is that where you first started doing eye surgery?

VR: Yes, that's right, yes.

SI: What stands out about those early years of doing surgery? Was it using new techniques? Does anything stand out about how you do things now versus how you did things then?

VR: Yes. At that time, it was the late '60s to '70s, eye surgeries, at that time, were very primitive compared to what we do now. After cataract surgery, we used to keep the patient [in the hospital for] five days, sometimes seven days, ten days. Infection was not uncommon. Today's antibiotics did not exist. We did not know how to use them properly. We used to do whatever [was] the best; patients always trusted us. Today, the cataract surgery is done; the patient goes home on the same day. He can drive on the next day. At that time, there was no intraocular implant. You should think the eyeball is like a camera. The lens became cloudy; camera is useless. The eyeball also cannot see well because the lens is cloudy. Cataract surgery means you remove the cataract. Today, we replace that lens and put an implant during the surgery in ten minutes, whereas we used to take one-hour surgery, bleeding, because of the large incision, sutures, etcetera. Our surgery improved tremendously with better understanding of the basic sciences.

At that time, I worked with the two extraordinary consultants. I'm very grateful to them. Dr. Burn, God bless him, he just died a few years ago at the age of ninety-four. He was in India as an Army colonel. He took [me] under his wings and he taught me incredible things, the fundamentals very well. But the procedures were very crude compared to today's surgery in the USA. The United States always changes before any other country. Unfortunately, a little bit of that, we are losing it, because of disagreements and various other things. Let me not say anything more.

At one time, that intraocular implant, which started in England in 1947 after cataract removal, but surgeons were fighting with each other, "No, this should not be done," because it gives some complications. It went on like that until the 1960s. That is before my time though. I am a history buff. I wrote a lot of articles on the history of medicine, especially ophthalmology and Indian medical history. Four ophthalmologists, two business guys, sat in one room once in the

1960s in this country. They heard that on the other side of the Atlantic, there is an operation (cataract surgery with implant). At that time, even here also, they remove the cataract and give glasses after six weeks. During those six weeks, patient is still blind, maybe worse, because the lens is completely removed. They thought, "What a wonderful idea, why it is failing. We need to look into it." They went there and found out that the implant they were putting in, in England, had rough edges. There was no polishing, and there was no proper sterilization methods. People were getting infections and other things. When they corrected these two fundamental problems, the rest is history. They had some controversy here, too. But quality control, Shaun, the United States taught the rest of the world what is quality control, how to do the things right.

Even if a discovery happens in other countries, not just in ophthalmology, you take urology, you can take [the] heart or cardiology, anything, some innovation comes, it is truly properly exploited only when American medicine gets involved. You can write a book on that one. People have written books on that. But, sorry to say, we are losing a little bit during the last few years. I hope we won't.

That is the implant, the story of the intraocular implant. If we live long enough, every one of us will get cataracts. Cataract is like grey hair. When surgery is needed, this goes on so wonderfully today, highly scientific, painlessly, a ten minute, fifteen-minute operation, and you start seeing straight away. We don't tell them to drive on that day, because we'll give some sedation. The patient may be a little bit drowsy. By the next day, they can drive their car, read, whatever they want to do, they can do from the next day, compared to five to ten days in the hospital.

SI: Tell me a little bit about what your early years in West Virginia were like, getting acclimated to America in general and the university in particular.

VR: Yes. Coming from an eye hospital to an eye department in a general hospital is always a very difficult change. In [an] eye hospital, everything is eye; nurses and everybody knows so well. In ophthalmology in a general hospital, in a U.S. hospital, as a department, it is just one among thirty departments. Certain things are a little different. It is a little difficult initially. I didn't like it. Actually, I did not like it so much, after nine months, I went to England and kept my immigration status there.

Certain things are also, in the United States, very informal. Even the residents can call me, "Hey, V.K., come and look at this patient," like that. There, I was called Mr. Raju. Mister is a title after you get FRCS, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. Everybody calls you Mister, not Doctor, as a title. There is a historical significance there, too. At one time, the doctors in England are truly doctors or physicians. A barber was the surgeon. So, he was called Mister. When it's a surgical condition, the physician used to stand there, the barber used to operate, either tooth extraction, or they did something on the abdomen. The barber is the one who does the surgery. So, he was looked down on [by] them. The surgeon is one step below. But, later, when the surgeries became wonderful and surgical cures very dramatic, the surgeon's status was lifted. But old things, still continue, Mister. Mister is a title in England for a surgeon only after

you pass the Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons exam. It gives you a little ego and a little chip on your shoulder. Nurses would call, "Mr. Raju, please come." Because the rest of the junior doctors are all doctors. That's in the British system. Things are changing there quite a bit, too. Anyway, I'll find out more. I'm leaving to England on the 7th for five days. I want to see how things are. I went there many times. I'm giving a talk at one of our hospitals there. I will find out a little more. [Editor's Note: In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, barber-surgeons in the United Kingdom attained a diploma, not a medical degree. Therefore, surgeons were not called Doctor and were designated the title Mister, Miss, or Misses.]

Anyway, the residents and nurses are so informal. That's very nice. I like it now, this [informal] system than the formal system, but I was not used to it. I just went to England for a weekend and kept my immigration status, so that I can go back if I wanted to. After one year, you lose that one. So, I went and came back.

One of the greatest, most wonderful humanitarians and genius is Robert Murphy, [who] was the librarian in the medical center. We became very close friends. He helped me enormously. I have over a hundred publications, and my CV, you might look at it. In the initial stages, his help was enormous to me. We give Robert Murphy Visionary Award to distinguished individuals each year when we have our event of the Eye Foundation of America. He read a book a day on average. That kind of a genius he was and a chain-smoker, all the time smoking. He never had enemies in his life, he says. That's so true. I don't think I met another high-quality person, remarkable. He helped me to start the Eye Foundation of America.

Anyway, during London times, I went on a holiday. A farmer came to me, asked [me] to see the eyes and all, but I did not have instruments. I later, after coming to United States, I thought, "Why can't we do a camp?" The camp concept started in India. It's a remarkable thing, like health fairs in the United States. Does Rutgers University Medical School [do] any health fairs?

SI: I believe so, yes.

VR: Incredible. The whole concept came from India. In '79, a Harvard group went to India and wrote the article in the *Annals of Ophthalmology*. That means outside the hospital, you can advise the patient, do investigations with the least cost. When they need a procedure, they were brought to the hospital. In India, ophthalmology uses it very well. Even other branches use it, too. Less cost, less threatening to the people, because hospitals are always intimidating to a lot of people. So, I started eye camps.

I was stunned to see, in the first camp, children's eye problem, this is when I went in '77 and '78, I could not resolve the eye problems, and technology was not there. Doctors were giving just drops. It's not what it [is] today. After 1991, things have changed enormously. Very advanced techniques were followed almost everywhere. Still disparities exist.

I bought an instrument, first came in the '70s, late '70s, it's called a vitrectomy instrument. You remove the gel; in the eye, with the small needles, put into the eye, very safely, you remove.

That's a tremendous advancement in the mid-'70s, late '70s. I took that 25,000-dollar instrument. Bob Murphy helped me to get that loan. One bank doesn't give me a loan because I'm a university professor. Bob found out about a leasing company in Chicago. Although I was doing pretty well, the banks don't do [loans for professors]. A practitioner is different for them. But when I became a practitioner, the banks come to my office asking me, "Can I give you a loan?" That was the difference when I was in the university.

I took that instrument, and in Mumbai airport, they kept me like a criminal for six hours because they never saw that instrument and asked me, "Well, is it an expensive instrument?" They didn't like it. Customs, during that time in airports, forty, fifty inspectors used to be there during that time, Shaun. Today, there will be one inspector there, that's all, and he says, "What are you [carrying]?" Unless you are bringing gold, they don't care. You can bring anything, because they're all available in India today, since 1991.

At that time, I'd take bulbs for the projector lights for the meetings. They were not available at that time in the name of unfortunate socialism. They never exploited Indian innovation. They never realized it. They never allowed it until [1991]. There'll be chaos in India, but ultimately, things will happen. They allowed me; I signed some papers, "I'll take it home," and I brought it back.

Then, he [Bob] advised, "We'll start the foundation so that you will have a type of legitimacy to what you are doing," and that's all. We called it the West Virginia Eye Foundation. The vice president of West Virginia University, on whom I did surgery, advised me to change the name to a broader "Eye Foundation of America," as I was doing some work in African countries.

The first sixteen years, there was never a fundraiser. I never asked anybody, until my daughter organized a tennis tournament as a fundraiser. This tennis tournament for children raised 150 dollars. She was tennis captain at Brown University. After that, my inhibitions are also gone and I don't mind asking for the foundation. But still, most of the time, the funding comes from my practice. The roots of our culture in India, they said, "You didn't bring anything when you are born. You will not take anything. Don't accumulate the wealth." They also say, "Whatever you have given away is going to be with you." I read a lot about Christianity and other [religions]. There is a lot of things like that in Christianity, too, but in each religion, people think, "Oh, our religion said it, not the other one."

SI: You got involved in other outreach and service to other types of organizations. Can you tell me a little bit more about some of the other ones you got into?

VR: Yes, lot of newspapers used to cover my work. An ophthalmologist in Wisconsin who lives in Afghanistan sends me a letter, "Raju, we heard about you going to the other countries and all that. Would you come [to Afghanistan]?" Of course, I went to Afghanistan three times. I went to Iraq, Iran, of course many African countries. Only when they ask, somebody would like [me] to get involved, I volunteer. Guatemala's president, through the Indian ambassador,

and through local journalists, invited me to come to Guatemala. In March, we are going to do a project. In Guatemala, the children's eye problems are bad.

With today's resources, today's technology, we can wipe out this kind of childhood blindness. Only three things are needed: political will, professional will, and people's will. Because these three wills joined, there is no more polio on the planet because of Rotary International's dedication. You can see that flower I wear. This crocus flower represents the end of polio.

A lot of people, even in this country, do not know that Rotary Clubs originated from Chicago in 1905. That is the kind of education, I think oral history, can help younger people to know. The service clubs are doing enormous things; these clubs are all born in this country. In 1905, there is no Social Security; people are dying on the street side, drunk, no jobs, hungry, in Chicago. That's how Paul Harris (founder of Rotary) got the idea, "Why can't we do a little above ourselves?" [Editor's Note: Rotary International is an international service organization with over one million members. It was established in Chicago in 1905 by Paul P. Harris. In 1985, Rotary International established an international campaign called PolioPlus to vaccinate children against polio. The organization provided over 900 million in funds and over two billion children were vaccinated. Lions Club International is an international service organization with over one million members. It was established by Melvin Jones in Evansville, Indiana in 1917.]

In the last thirty, thirty-five years, there are forty major breakthroughs in medicine, incredible. We can do almost anything. That can be done only with these three wills coming together: political will, professional will, and people's will. I got this idea, [which I am] expressing like this; when I went to the Rotary International in Australia about four or five years ago, the prime minister comes to the Rotary International meeting and gives a hundred-million-dollar check to the Rotary Clubs, Rotary International. It's like that everywhere, all over the world. Bill Gates gave more than a billion dollars, maybe two billion. Other industries and people, just people, ten dollars, a hundred dollars, like that, we all give and think "no more polio." [Editor's Note: Bill Gates is the co-founder and former CEO of Microsoft. In October 2022, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a philanthropic organization, renewed its partnership with the Rotary Club and announced a joint commitment of up to 450 million dollars for efforts to eradicate polio globally.]

Still, prevention is the most important in medicine. There are 700,000 physicians in America; less than one percent practice in public health. In India, there are more than one million physicians; less than nine percent are in public health. We have to bring back the public health. Yes, they're doing some, but still, we're all focused on tertiary care, tertiary care. In West Virginia, one in five children in fifth grade have hypertension (high blood pressure), in fifth grade. Nutrition and exercise are still fundamentals, as the old medical system of India (Ayurveda) advocated before the construction of the pyramids. The old medical system, I am writing another book on it, really practical. They all say, "You are what you eat," even in the West. Eating right, exercising right, not taking yourself too seriously are the basic ingredients of our health. How do we bring [that] to the people? I think that is the challenge.

SI: You have also been very active in Lion's International.

VR: Yes, Lion's, I have been [involved]. Certainly, I've been in the Lion's here and the Rotarians in India, but our Lions in Morgantown, all are close to centenarians. Our Lion's Club became inactive for the last so many years. I'm still a member, but my work is all through Rotary International. Rotary International with the eye care in India especially, they're involved tremendously.

SI: You have had a very long career in West Virginia University, as well as in private practice.

VR: Yes.

SI: What have been the biggest changes and challenges? We have talked about some, but are there others that stand out over your long career?

VK: I don't think of them as a big challenge or big hurdles. But one thing is, when people promise--they like my work and they promise, but when it comes to action, they don't have time for that. Those are the things that make me tired. Sometimes, I see two hundred, three hundred patients in Nigeria or Tanzania, "Oh, it was a pleasure." "What a wonderful day." Until nine o'clock we operate, that doesn't bother me. But when people go back on their promise, that one tires me out. That is the one I got used to. The greatest thing I practice is deep breath, deep breath. You take a deep breath three times and let it go. That helped me a great deal in my continuation of my work.

I believe, as I get older, in Eastern philosophy, our life just doesn't end with ninety years or eighty years or a hundred years. I think there may be a continuation or something. The East believes that way, because in the universe, there are billions and billions of years. Our life of a hundred years [snaps fingers] is a flash of a second. So, there's no disappointment; well, we'll just continue.

My mother used to say things like this, "Life is a journey, not a destination," type of thing. She did not say [it], in those words, but [life is] just a journey. As I get older, I accept whenever it doesn't happen, take a deep breath, "Well, tomorrow is there. We'll do it." I feel that yesterday's a cancelled check, tomorrow is a promissory note, but today's the cash. Today is the best day of our lives.

I'm equally grateful to West Virginia University. They gave me the opportunity to grow, and I did a lot of work and all that for all these years. As I said, education is very important in all religions and all that, but there are a lot of things said in ancient Sanskrit literature about education. They said, "Without education, you are an animal." That was ten thousand years ago in the literature, "If you don't have education, you are an animal."

I gave a lot of endowments in Eastern doctors' names, Charaka and Susruta lectureships, Robert Murphy travel scholarship for the libraries, and the resident teaching laboratory for the eye

department. Again, there are a lot of these endowments I created. I thought that when I left the university full time, in my heart to heart, I didn't like it, but travel was easier for me. I got on very well with the university. I gave a couple of named lectureships; the university invited me. We get on very well and still teach. [There is] no town/gown conflict for me.

SI: Well, very good.

VR: Yes.

SI: I was curious, when you would go on these trips to Africa, India, other countries, how long would you be there working with the children?

VR: Initially, I used to start with six weeks. Then, my practice kept on building. I was the senior most practitioner and introduced new procedures. I do a lot of clinical research. Later, I joined a Florida group. I traveled to Florida. I wrote a lot of papers; the amniotic membrane from the mother's womb, we put it on the eye for rare diseases, like alkali burn and some very bad inflammation, scarring. You could put this membrane and get some vision back. For healing, to accelerate healing, to regenerate cells, that's regenerative medicine. So, we're doing those things like that. What was the question you said exactly?

SI: How long would you go?

VR: Six weeks or four weeks. I restricted it to two weeks later, and I started to do surgery and invited a lot of surgeons, too, to teacher them. I utilized my time even better. There are more than seven hundred ophthalmologists we trained like that. They all became part of our group. Some are excellent. Some, after a while, they don't have interest. They have more interest in other things. I don't have any quarrel with them.

SI: It sounds like your family has also been involved in ophthalmology and higher education. Can you talk a little bit about them?

VR: Yes, my daughter Leela [Leela V. Raju, M.D.] is a board-certified ophthalmologist. She did medical [school at Marshall University] in West Virginia, then went to Hopkins and Baylor, so did a fellowship at the corneal institute in Houston. Now, she's on the faculty at New York University. She's very much involved in the Eye Foundation of America, secretary of the foundation. My son is also involved as a board member of the foundation. He's an investment banker and big supporter of the foundation.

When they were little kids, Leela and Ashok, they used to [rent out] our parking area. At my office space, there were about eighteen parking places. They [rented parking spaces] during football home games, for each one, five dollars or four dollars, whatever it is, I don't remember. They used to get about fifty, sixty dollars when they're all given. Half of it, they used to give to the foundation. When I would like to slow down, she's ready to take over the presidency of the foundation.

She started a program in Ghana, a very active program in Ghana. Though we are in fourteen, fifteen, sixteen countries, the Ghana program is very active and continues. She went there three times, and the two doctors, we trained. They come to the United States every year, and the program is going to continue because of those two doctors. One guy is Dr. Seth Wanye, a Ghana doctor, ophthalmologist, top-notch guy.

SI: You have also become involved in the Johns Hopkins eye center. [Editor's Note: This refers to the Wilmer Eye Institute, an ophthalmology center for research and treatment at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland.]

VR: That's right. Johns Hopkins, I was very fascinated, even from when I was living in England. Johns Hopkins, what they did in research, bringing the new stuff is [incredible]. The history of Johns Hopkins is incredible, probably you know. He gave six million dollars, half to the medical school, half to the university. They have three hundred named lectureships. [Editor's Note: In 1870, merchant, investor, and philanthropist Johns Hopkins bequeathed seven million dollars for the incorporation of a free hospital and a university, now known as Johns Hopkins Hospital and Johns Hopkins University.]

If you look into old Indian history and culture, two great universities, Nalanda and the Takshashila, existed. We are talking about BC, about Sanskrit, and the whole education was respected. I'll send you a couple of things (my book and the Bower Manuscript). [Editor's Note: Nalanda was a university in ancient India that operated from 427 to 1197 CE. Its ruins are located in Bihar, India. Takshashila, or Taxila, was a university in ancient India that was established around 700 BCE and remained active until about 400s BCE. Its ruins are located in Taxila, Pakistan. The Bower Manuscript is a Sanskrit treatise that was produced on birch bark between the 4th and 6th centuries CE. It was discovered in western China.]

I'm always fascinated with the things that happened in Hopkins. I teamed with them for vitamin A studies in some countries. It went pretty well. We wanted to do sixteen countries at the time; we did five countries, meta-analysis on vitamin A and distribution. One vitamin A tablet, twice a year, just for two to three years for a baby, a one year old, two-year-old baby, you can give them seventy-five years of life. They did well, but still, there are a lot of pockets in many countries that still have the problem, because one child is born, mother is giving mother's milk. When the second child is born, the mother gives the milk to the second baby. The first baby doesn't have enough to eat. They develop Vitamin A deficiency. Measles could kill them, but if you give them vitamin A, they survive. Vitamin A is important for the immunity, not just for the eye. Shaun, what is your background?

SI: I am a historian and archivist.

VR: Not much science background.

SI: Not too much.

VR: Yes, vitamin A is important for the vision, but it is important for immunity, simple infection. Measles can kill the child if they are deficient in Vitamin A. But vitamin A is so important.

We've got this relationship. Last year, they [Johns Hopkins] invited me to be [an] adjunct professor. I teach mainly at the university. Their residents will be coming to India, will spend time with us, two weeks or one month, in our Institute. That will be a [great] stimulus for our doctors. Any exchange programs are wonderful to have in this world today, because the world is so small. It is a very small world, if you can only just try to communicate rather than keep on disagreeing with each other.

SI: I am curious, given the scope of your work and how much travel you must do, how did the pandemic affect you personally and also the work that you do?

VR: Absolutely. We stopped when--our clinics were closed. I spent a lot of time reading and joined a book club. Prior to COVID, I joined a group of nine ophthalmologists. I trained a lot of them, most of them, and when I said, "I'm going to join you now," that they're thrilled. So, I don't have any administrative responsibility; I see patients only twice a week, though I started four days a week. When COVID came, the first three months, we stopped seeing patients. During that time, I joined a club called Publish Your Book Now, Bradley Communications, incredible people. Those guys are incredible. We meet, about a hundred, a team [of] writers from all over the world but mostly English-speaking areas. I started writing two books [about] the heart of Hinduism, not the religion that is being practiced today, but how the philosophy, how Hinduism [has evolved].

Shaun, Hinduism is a foreign word for us. There's no Hindu word in Sanskrit. Foreigners called us Hindus. A group of people got together, they followed the *dharma*, the righteous behavior is called *Sanātana Dharma*. You follow *dharma*, that's what they called it. The people living on the other side of the Indus River (Sindhu), the Persians called us Hindus. Sindhu became Hindu because of the linguistics or whatever the problems there. Subsequent invaders continued using the word "Hindu." Hindu word doesn't exist in our ancient literature at all in Vedas. I'm trying to write, put together, the fundamentals of the philosophy, how *Sanātana Dharma* started. [Editor's Note: The Indus River is also known as Sindhu, derived from the word in Sanskrit. Ancient Persians in India mispronounced Sindhu as Hindu in describing the people who lived along the Indus River. The Vedas are a large body of religious texts consisting of poems and hymns that originated in ancient India. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.]

I'm always looking for expressing a disagreeable thing in an agreeable manner. That is my biggest battle today. How can I express, "Well, this is not really true Hinduism." "Oh, how could you say that?" Without using that kind of expression, there are a lot of ways George Bernard Shaw, Winston Churchill, they did it, especially George Bernard Shaw. Do you know what he said about English people? "Oh, they always follow the principles. They are great.

English people are the [greatest] people, they follow principles. Principle of exploitation." That is a disagreeable thing he expresses in a witty, agreeable manner. I'm trying to find out how to write [the] book [in that way].

During COVID time, I made about eight thousand pages of notes, seven to eight thousand pages from different books. I'm relearning Sanskrit a little bit because I was a student of Sanskrit until I went to medical school, and it is incredible that you can learn Sanskrit freely on the Internet. There are so many things you can learn freely on the Internet. How we use Internet is the issue. If you use badly, Internet is bad, cell phone is bad, everything.

We are publishing a book on how to live like Gandhi. It is written by a brilliant neuropsychologist from London of Indian heritage. After this, I'll send it to you, the PDF, but I would like you to look at it and comment on that one if you can, yes. [Editor's Note: On its website, the Eye Foundation of America is promoting *How to Live Like Gandhi: Life's Little Rules* by Dr. Narinder Kapur.]

SI: Great, yes, I would be happy to read it. You mentioned the Martin Luther King Award that you received at West Virginia.

VR: Yes.

SI: What was that award for?

VR: The awardee must be a resident of West Virginia, making a substantial contribution in advancement of civil rights, human rights, humanitarianism. Often, we talk about peace. Ultimately, somebody said, "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way." Peace means just doing a little good. About three weeks ago, we picked up, [on] the roadside, they throw away the cigarette butts and beer bottles and all that. Rotarians, we do that, our club does it. In the United States, Rotarians do these things; I don't know whether other Rotarians in other countries do this. We just picked up, I couldn't believe what we see each year, we do in the springtime, just [after] the winter. We do [the cleanup], one hour of excellent exercise. If everybody does it in India with 1.3 billion people, that's half of them just to pick up. The question is, how can we make people do that? I think somebody must think of that one, like Steve Jobs or somebody, yes. [Editor's Note: Steve Jobs was the co-founder and CEO of the tech company Apple.]

SI: In interviewing other folks who have been involved in the Indian-American Club, it is interesting to see how some of them came in the '60s and '70s and there was not very much of an Indian-American presence in Central New Jersey and then it grew exponentially into the '90s and to today. In Morgantown, was there any kind of Indian-American community there?

VR: We are all a big community now. Every department in the university has an Indian professor. So, here also it grew tremendously since I came. Yes, a lot of growth was in the '60s, '70s, a lot of educated people were allowed to come to USA.

In 1925, I read somewhere, the Supreme Court said not to allow liberally people from India, because they're very homogenous people. They don't mix with others. How wrong they were. They heard some odd Brahmin doing something, or some odd story, and just to generalize, stereotype, but we are the most heterogenous because our roots were like that. India has been like [that] for more than five thousand, ten thousand years. What United States has been for two hundred-plus years, India has been like that for eight, nine, ten thousand years. Jews came there. Christians came there. Of course, Iranians, the Zoroastrians came there to escape from religious persecution and all that. So, India has been [heterogeneous]. Yes, there are some elements here and there you hear, but it is magnified in the media. The Supreme Court people, whoever it is, thought these are very homogenous people; they don't mix with others. How wrong they were. [Editor's Note: The United States Supreme Court case being referenced above is *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923). In the decision, the Supreme Court barred all Indians from becoming U.S. citizens and revoked citizenship from many who had attained it. In its reasoning, the Supreme Court undertook an analysis of race and determined that Indians were unable to assimilate the way more typical "white" immigrants were. Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian Sikh man born in Punjab, had migrated to the U.S. in 1913. After enlisting in the U.S. Army, Thind obtained approval for citizenship in 1920. Thind had entered the country prior to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1917, which barred all immigration to the U.S. from Asia. However, the Bureau of Naturalization appealed the grant of his citizenship request and the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court.]

SI: Is there anything else you would like to discuss or that I missed in going over with you?

VR: I always say this one; people still say, "East is East, West is West," but East plus West is the best, and we made use of the best of the United States. India gave us an excellent education; probably ninety-five percent of people who came from India [are professionals]. There are only three million Indians here, that's all. Either they're engineers, doctors, Ph.Ds. Most of them are educated, and India gives us a marvelous education. That's why we could do [it].

Another thing I'll say, since we are ending. When I visited England after migrating here, I went back, they invited me a couple of times, I gave talks there. Some Englishmen, nice guys, but they still have a chip on their shoulder. There's an English expression, which is getting less and less common. Well, an Indian heritage guy became British prime minister. What a wonderful thing to happen in British political culture. [Editor's Note: Rishi Sunak has served as the United Kingdom's prime minister since October 25, 2022.]

SI: Yes.

VR: That's wonderful. I don't look at it in any other way, I feel, when some people were commenting different things. [Somebody once asked me], "Raju, what's the big difference about America? Not thinking about cars and these material things." Suddenly, it clicked to me; I still use that one. I said, "In the United States, one of the biggest differences is, nine people are not respecting your idea. The tenth guy will say, 'No, there may be truth. You come with me. Follow your idea. I want to support you.'" Whereas in most other cultures, if nine people say no,

the tenth guy will say, "Well, let me follow them and just say no." But here, that tenth guy will stand, support the guy who's got an idea. Everybody else is denying it. They support it. I think those things are some of the greatest things of America which I talk about. In the last few years, we are losing [that] a little bit. I think we'll never lose it; it will come back. That is the culture. This country's culture is like that. It will come back. Otherwise, it will be like any other country.

SI: Thank you very much. I appreciate all your time today. We wound up going quite a bit past where we thought we were going to end, but I appreciate all your extra time.

VR: Thank you.

SI: Yes.

VR: Yesterday's gone, tomorrow you don't know, this is the best day of our lives. Thank you for your time, too.

SI: Very good. All right, well, I am going to end the recording.

VR: Yes.

--END OF TRANSCRIPT---

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 1/8/2023
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 1/24/2023
Reviewed by Dr. V.K. Raju 2/24/2023