

Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho

The Reminiscences of
Himani Patel

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Himani Patel conducted by Kathy M. Min on July 13, 2020 and August 5, 2020. This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Himani Patel
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Kathy Min called from Boise, Idaho. Himani Patel called from Meridian, Idaho.
Date	July 13, 2020

00:00:01

Q: It looks like it's recording, so I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and today I'm interviewing Himani Patel. Today is July 13, 2020. Both of us are calling from the Boise area, but we're doing it remotely through Zoom. And the proposed subject of the recording is an oral history of Himani's life for the Asian American oral history project that I'm working on. So to start with our questions. First question, what's your full name?

Patel: Himani Patel.

00:00:40

Q: And when and where were you born?

Patel: I was born in India, in Gujarat, India, like the northwest area, and I was born in 1998.

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Q: What's your current occupation and/or educational background?

Patel: I'm currently pursuing a dual master's degree in international administration and social work, so I'm working part time for that. And I'm also an intern at the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center. Those kinds of things are my occupation. And I have two bachelor's degrees in poli-sci [political science] and international studies.

00:01:23

Q: Wow, that's so cool. I think we'll talk a little bit more about your interests later down in the interview. But first, we can talk about your family. So what are the names of your parents?

Patel: My mom is Ragini Patel. And then my dad is Hasmukh Patel. And then—

Q: And can—oh, sorry.

Patel: I was just gonna say, I have two younger siblings.

00:01:46

Q: Okay. Could you spell the name of your parents for me?

Patel: My mom's name is Ragini and same last name Patel. And then my dad's name is Hasmukh, then the same last name, Patel.

00:02:07

Q: Tell me a little bit about your siblings—their names, their ages.

Patel: My younger sister is currently in high school and she's 17 years old. She's going to be starting her senior year. And her name is Bhargavi, same last name. And then my younger brother is in middle school; he's going to be starting eighth grade and he's 14, almost. And his name is Preet, same last name.

00:02:43

Q: And were they born in India as well?

Patel: Oh no, both my younger siblings were born in Boise.

00:02:53

Q: So how did you and your family come to Idaho?

Patel: When we first moved [to the US], we were in Portland, with our extended family there. And then we had other family here, and my family wanted to open an Indian grocery business. And it was really hard to do that in Portland, just because it's a bigger city and we had other family here. So we just opened one in Boise. And so we've been living here ever since, since 2001.

00:03:27

Q: And how old were you when you moved [to Portland]?

Patel: I think I was in first grade. I'm not quite sure of the exact age.

00:03:36

Q: So it sounds like a lot of your extended family was already in both the US and in Boise before your parents came here. Why were your aunts and uncles—or whoever the extended family was—why were they in the US first? And why did your parents choose to follow them?

Patel: I think my aunt and uncle—my aunt had an uncle who was living in Boise.¹ And so when she married my uncle, they decided to move to the US and they started living here, I think just for a pursuit of more opportunities and a different lifestyle than India, and they have been here since they were married. They've been here the longest. And then we had a family file that opened up, so my dad and all of his brothers were able to come on the family file. So we were just a part of that.

00:04:34

Patel: I think we just came for the same reason, like my aunts and uncles and everyone else came, just for better opportunity. And back then there was this idea of—the American dream was very visible in the Asian community. So that was a huge part of why I think we just decided to leave everything.

00:04:54

Q: And how old were you when you moved from India?

Patel: I think I was very young. I still remember India, though. I was probably about six, seven, maybe almost turning eight, because I was starting first grade. But I do remember India. I remember starting second grade when we moved, so I remember a lot of my education and friends and community and everything out there as well.

00:05:23

Q: Wow. Let me see. I think I'll come back to that kind of line of questioning in a second, but tell me how many siblings each of your parents have.

Patel: My dad has four other brothers, so five brothers in total and two sisters. There's seven on his side. And then my mom has four other siblings, so there's five on her side, including her. On my mom's side, there's two brothers and two sisters and her.

00:06:00

Q: Do you have any family still in India?

¹ Himani's aunt's family was in the US first, while Himani's uncle lived in India. When Himani's aunt married Himani's uncle, they moved to the US. They lived in the US for several years before moving to Portland.

Patel: Yeah, my mom's side is entirely in India still, because the way the family file works, usually the male, like my dad's family, was able to come, but not my mom's. The file process for that is much longer. So they're still working on that file, to open it up. But then my dad's family is mostly here, but they still go back. And most of the older brothers live back in India, half the time, and here [in the US], half the time.

00:06:36

Q: Okay. Is there a reason why they divide their time half-half?

Patel: Well, they're much older now, so they prefer living in India. I think they just came here so late into their adulthood that their life is still in India. They just come here to work and be with their kids. Their kids call America home, but for them India is still kind of home, so they'll go back just to be able to live how they've always lived. And most of my older aunts and uncles don't know English at all. They just work at their children's store, motel, whatever business that they own. Usually it's a business. So they'll just work there.

00:07:24

Q: And so, who was your first family member to live either in the US or in Boise?

Patel: I think the first one was my uncle's family. So my dad's older brother, his wife had a connection with somebody who's already living in Boise. Their file opened up first. And so they moved straight to Boise and they raised their family here and then moved to Portland 10 years in. And then we kind of [unclear] them in Portland and decided to come back to Boise for the grocery store after.

00:08:06

Q: Sorry, I think it cut out a little bit in the middle of what you're saying. I think you're just talking about how your aunt moved to Portland and then I think it cut off a little bit after that.

Patel: Oh, sorry. Yeah, I was just saying, my aunt, their file opened up and they were living in Boise originally for 10 years, and then they moved to Portland. And that's where we moved when our file opened up as well.

00:08:36

Q: So yeah, we can talk about what it was like for you, moving from India to Portland and then to Boise, since it sounds like you moved at an age where you can still remember things. So what were all those moves like for you?

Patel: Leaving India was a shock, just because my entire life was there and I had really close friends there that I grew up with. We were all born months apart. So we went to school together. We spent every day together. We were really close. And same with my parents and their family friends, so I think that left a huge impact on leaving India.

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Patel: Because then, when I moved here, we didn't really have a community. My aunt's kids were a lot older, and when we moved to Boise, we didn't really have family here that we connected with. We were kind of isolated, so it was really hard in the sense that we had nobody. And then on top of that, we didn't really have money. We came with a little bit of saved up money, but not really. Not enough.

00:09:46

Patel: And our uncle's families, they weren't really the best homes to be in when we first moved, just because they didn't really appreciate it. I don't think they really appreciated us being there. We had a lot of issues with food access while we were living there. And also, just access to money. So that was hard, because I grew up with a middle-class, happy home in India. And then facing living with somebody else and not having access to food and kind of living in poverty for the first four years that we were here was a shock, just in terms of lifestyle.

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Patel: But I think the biggest shock was definitely being isolated and having no one to really depend on. So I think it made me grow up a lot faster. I was a pretty rowdy kid in India. But as soon as we came here, I was a lot more calm and more mature, I guess, just because I didn't want to add on to my parents' issues of money and access to all these things. I just became a "perfect child," so they wouldn't have to worry about me and started handling them as well. So it definitely affected me in that way. It just made me more mature, way faster.

00:11:11

Q: Yeah, I think that's really impressive to grow up that fast at a young age. What did your parents do in India before they moved to the US?

Patel: My mom was a stay-at-home, but she was taking computer classes and English language learning classes. She was going to do a part-time job type of thing. And my dad owned, was a part of—a co-owner in a spices business. He would sell spices and package spices. And he was usually the person who drove them to different—he had the company itself, so he was the manufacturer of the spices and then he would drive them to different shops to sell them.

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Patel: We had a pretty good lifestyle. We were pretty well off. I went to a Catholic school in India, a private school. It wasn't really about religion. There's a lot of Catholic schools, private schools in India that they just pay tuition and have higher quality education, but it's not necessarily connected to religion. I went to that school since I was in preschool [unclear].²

00:12:25

Q: And then, what is the educational background of your parents?

Patel: My mom almost finished her bachelor's degree. She was literally one class away from finishing and she just didn't have the time, or I think she married early or something. So she never got to finish, but she did almost get a bachelor's degree.

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Patel: And then my dad, I think he did an associate, a two year vocational-type degree right after high school, but he was mostly a business person. He always always just worked at a store of some sort, and he just naturally has an inclination for math and accounting. So he understood the business model naturally. But yeah, I'm the highest level of education in my family.

00:13:16

Q: What was your mom getting her bachelor's in?

Patel: Commerce and accounting.

00:13:26

Q: And how did your parents meet?

Patel: It was an arranged marriage. So they met a couple of times and they were engaged for a few years. They met a couple of times then, but they didn't really get to know each other. And then they got married when my mom was, I think, 23 or 24 or something. And yeah, it was an arranged marriage. She just kind of moved in and that was it. [Unclear.]

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Q: How old was your dad at the time?

Patel: My dad was probably just a year older, like 25, maybe 24. [Unclear.]

Q: And then are all your grandparents still in India now?

² Himani's school in India taught her to read and write in English, so she never learned how to read and write in Hindi or Gujarati.

Patel: Actually all my grandparents from both sides have passed. My mom's side, the grandparents passed recently, but my dad's side, the grandparents passed a while, a long time ago, I think, way before, right when I was born. And then my grandma from my dad's side passed when I was in middle school. And then my mom's side, my grandma passed two years ago and grandpa passed three or four years ago. But both my parents are the youngest in their families. Their parents were much, much older, because they're the youngest. They went [passed away] from old age, mostly.

00:15:00

Q: They all were in India at the time?

Patel: Yeah. My mom's side, the grandparents did come here to visit us in the US. My grandma helped out my mom when my younger sister was born and my grandpa just came to visit us, but they lived in India.

00:15:19

Q: And then you were talking about how when you first—you were saying you were living in Portland at the time, and then your dad thought it would be good to open an Indian grocery in Boise. And so that's why you all moved over to Boise?

Patel: Yeah, he wanted to open an Indian grocery store no matter where we lived, but it was just not possible in Portland. And we had other family, like his second cousin or first cousin, I think, was in Boise at the time. That's why we moved there, just because they were already living there, so we had a connection to it. And it was much cheaper to get a grocery store or lease an area in Boise back during those times, to open a store from the ground up, than it would be in Portland. It was just like opportunity was way better here.

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Q: Yeah. And I know you're quite young at the time, but what was it like for them to open the grocery in Boise?

Patel: I remember it. It was quite a hustle. My mom just had my younger sister, because my mom was pregnant. She became pregnant right after we moved [to Portland], or I think she was pregnant before we moved. She just had my baby sister, so she was still recuperating from that. But she was still helping at the store.

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Patel: And at the time, my parents did it alone. And it was really small when it first began. It was like four shelves, maybe, just a tiny place. And they worked there every single day, for nine hours or something, from, I think it was 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. or something. So my dad was there all day. And then my mom would go and help him stock stuff. And we didn't have any employees. It was just them. So it was really hard in the beginning, because they were doing everything, like unloading trucks, stocking, checking people out, everything.

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Patel: And slowly, after four or five years, we got a bigger store, like a bigger space, right next to the old store. And it grew pretty quickly, because there were a lot of Indians in Boise, because there was quite an Indian community there already. There was a need for an Indian grocery store, so it grew quite big and so we were fortunate.

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Q: And so working at the store, has that been the only occupation that your parents have had since coming to Boise, or have they ever ventured into any other career?

Patel: That's all that they've mostly done. Currently they do own—they used to own a gas station with a couple of partners and now they own a motel with a couple of partners. So they do have other businesses that they co-own, but the store is our main income and that's where my dad spends most of his day. And then my mom has shifts working there throughout the week. That is their main store.

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Q: And was there a reason—since you mentioned your dad knew he wanted to open an Indian grocery store—is there a reason why he wanted to do that in particular?

Patel: Yeah, for him, it was just like, that's what he was good at and he wanted to open a business that he thought that he would be able to do. Also, my dad is not the kind of person who could work in a job. He doesn't know English that well; he could learn, but I don't think he does well if he's not the owner. He has to have control over a business. So it was just like one of those things.

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Patel: And my mom, she has [looked into other jobs]. Once she was going to get a job at Walmart, so they would have two separate incomes and stuff. But with the grocery store, it was just not possible for her to have her own job, just because all of our family's time and energy went into the store, just to make it successful and develop it. Now, she's trying to get other job, just to have a separate income. But yeah, it's still one of those things where it's like most of our time is invested in the store.

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Q: Yeah, I definitely have follow-up questions about the store, but I think I want to ask a few other questions first. So tell me a little bit about the personalities of the people in your family.

Patel: I guess that's a hard question. For my dad, he's very much like a [machismo] kind of personality type where he's got a big—I wouldn't say ego—but he's just very “he knows what he wants.” And he has to have it one way. My mom is kind of a little bit more easy going with him, just because of that. She kind of just follows along, but she will still share her opinion.

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Patel: I think it's weird to—they're both good parents in terms of providing for us and everything, but I think the store and having no community and moving to a different country and not really knowing the language, all those things made it so they didn't really have time for kids. It was always kind of like they were emotionally distant, and didn't really know what was going on with our lives, and kind of wrapped up in everything else that was going on with them. There's a part of that in their personalities, where it's a lot of my mom and dad are always just going at it, kind of, just because of everything.

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Patel: And then my siblings, they're really, very emotional. Very nurturing. I feel like they're very emotionally intelligent for their ages, even though being in middle school and high school, they still understand my parents and understand the generational gap and the cultural gap that exists. And they'll [Himani's siblings will] always call them [Himani's parents] out or call them in, but in a very respectful way that I definitely didn't learn when I was a kid. So I feel like they are Gen Z's. I feel like they have a lot more access to information about how to deal and how to understand and communicate with my parents in a way that I never did.

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Patel: So I think they've [Himani's parents have] changed a lot since coming here, but definitely there's a huge, huge cultural and generational gap between, all three of us, the kids, and then my parents. So our personalities definitely reflect that.

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Q: Do you have any examples of those gaps that you were mentioning, and ways that it sort of complicated communication or just relationships?

Patel: I guess coming here [to the US and Boise], there was just so much going on that, for example, that my parents would have a conflict, and then they would go at it. When we were in

India, they could just go call their friends or their older siblings or something. They would always have someone to reach out to who would come and mediate between them and figure things out in a fight. Because that's how Indian community works. Every time there's a problem, someone else will come in who knows both people and kind of mediate them. That's why we had all these family friends that would just do that.

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Patel: When we moved here, there was no one like that, so I would become that person. I would mediate between them. And I feel like that's a very huge generational and cultural thing, where it's like whatever I was saying came from—my perspective was way different in mediating between them than what an Indian person's perspective would have been, like someone who was their age. I would always kind of put band-aid solutions onto things. And I feel like everyone else would have done the same thing, but that was a huge, I think, cultural gap and generational gap, to have to be in that position.

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Patel: And then another better example would be my brother sometimes gets poor grades because he has trouble focusing in class. They'll really get mad at him and keep taunting him. It's this thing Indian parents do, where they don't come home all day, because they're working all day. But when they do, they feel the need to catch up on parenting or something. So they'll just nag both of my siblings on all the things that they do wrong.

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Patel: And instead of focusing on the stuff that they've done well, or asking about how their day went, they [Himani's parents] kind of skip all that and just get to the point where like, "You need to clean your room. You have bad grades. You need to fix this, you need to fix this, you need to fix this." The nagging and taunting the kids really creates a divide between them. And I completely think that's a cultural and generational gap, because, you know, if we were living in India, I feel like that taunting wouldn't feel as burdensome. Just because we'd have our own community there and a lot of other people there, so it wouldn't just be like we're just listening to our parents nagging us about all of our mistakes all day. Yeah, definitely, stuff like that pops up, just having to deal with normal life alone without help is hard.

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Q: So you've mentioned a few times that moving to Boise, it was almost like moving alone, and not really having a pre-existing community. So I was wondering over time, has that changed in any way? Do you feel like your family's become a part of any of the communities here in Boise over time?

Patel: Yeah. I think having an Indian grocery store really opened up all the Indian communities so they know all the Indian communities, like every part of it. And they go to Indian festivals, because there's one temple, they'll host certain festivals or certain celebrations or certain religious events. They go to those. And we do have a good—we're Gujarati, so we have a bunch of other Gujarati people who we hang out with, who they hang out with. Sorry. Just give me one sec. Sorry about that. I can restart if you want.

00:26:39

Q: Just continue from wherever feels natural. Yeah.

Patel: Sorry. They're Gujarati, so they have Gujarati friends. But the thing is we haven't formed a close community. Sorry. We haven't formed a close community with anybody. They don't really talk about personal things. They'll just hang out, have fun, have dinner. You know, just like normal—almost like acquaintances hanging out, like a work party kind of thing. They'll hang out like that. They're a part of a community like that.

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Patel: But there's no one like close families. We had close families come in and out of our lives since we've been here, just to help us manage the store, work at the store. But nobody ever stayed and nobody ever got that close with them. It was always a bit distant.

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Patel: But there is a huge, huge Indian community in Boise. We have the university students, we have a bunch of those. We have two giant companies where a lot of Indians work at and stuff like that.³ Because of the store, we had access to the community for sure.

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Q: I think probably everyone who makes up the community is different in their own way. But would there be a way that you'd describe Boise's Indian community?

Patel: I think it came in waves. When we first moved here, there wasn't really a community. It was kind of like people were separated and lived in certain areas. There's a company near Columbia Village [Apartments], and that's where a lot of Indians lived, so they had a separate community than the Boise people.

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³ Referring to Hewlett-Packard and Micron.

Patel: And then we had an AIDS⁴ [sic] Foundation. It was a nonprofit that operated from India. They would host annual Diwali festivals. Then a lot of Indians would come there, so that was the community. And then we have a small Hare Krishna temple downtown, but that temple comes from an American sect of Hinduism. It's not like—you know what I mean, if that makes sense.⁵ It has Indians that will go there, but it doesn't really have strong community events going on all the time.

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Patel: And then other than that, we have certain celebrations from the temple or AID does or certain other organizations will do. There'll be a part of the community there. And then there's also, we had a cricket team for a while, like an Indian cricket team. A lot of people were participating in that. And that was a huge community.

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Patel: But generally, I think that it's kind of separated by age group or occupation, so all the university Indian students hanging out and have their own community, and then occupationally, we have Micron and HP [Hewlett-Packard] headquarters here.⁶ Those people hang out because they work together. And then there's other Indians scattered throughout, like business owners, and so they'll kind of have a little bit of their own community.

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Patel: And we're Gujarati, and a lot of our community is Gujarati people, and they're all business owners. It's also like—in India, there's so many different states and cultures that community forms by your state, almost. So all the Gujaratis hang out. And then South Indian people hang out usually with other South Indian people. It's kind of still like that. That system still exists [to an extent even after moving to the US].

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Q: You mentioned that a lot of the business owners are Gujarati. Is there a reason why that is?

⁴ Association for India's Development. According to Himani, most of the community calls it "AIDS" (and not "AID") in conversation.

⁵ According to Himani, Hare Krishna doesn't have a strong Hinduism connection for Indians, and she believes it's more for Americans.

⁶ Micron is headquartered in Boise, but HP is headquartered in California, although HP is a major employer in Boise. From Don Day, "Large Boise employer HP launches restructuring effort with eye toward cutting workforce," *Boise Dev*, October 4, 2019, <https://boisedev.com/news/2019/10/04/large-boise-employer-hp-launches-restructuring-effort-with-eye-toward-cutting-workforce/>.

Patel: I think it's always been that way. Gujaratis, since we've come to America, it's always been business owners, just because I think we found success.⁷ Gujaratis are really close-knit. My parents know what's happening in other Gujaratis' lives in India. News spreads quickly. It's a very close-knit community and it's almost like—there's five villages that we are part of, that we know pretty much everyone in. At least my parents do.

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Patel: Because of that, when the first wave of Gujarati Indians came to America, they started operating motel businesses and those kinds of businesses and found success in it.⁸ And it was a lot cheaper, I think, back in the day, to get a motel, and then invest in that and then buy a bigger motel and kind of keep doing that. And it was a good business model with minimal effort. It doesn't really take that much work to run a motel.

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Patel: That's where it kind of took off. I think that's why there's so many Gujarati business owners, just because that's the model that they follow, that they found the recipe to success, and they just kind of follow it generation by generation.

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Q: How do you feel you fit in with the Boise Indian community?

Patel: I always wanted to be closer to them. But when I was growing up, I had no one my age, not really, that we were close with. It was touch and go. I felt a lot of social anxiety being at Indian events, just because I never felt like I fully fit in. Because I would still participate in them. For the Diwali function, I did a dance once with other people and stuff like that. So I felt like a part of the community.

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Patel: But other kids my age, if there were other kids—there were a couple of other kids my age—they were close. They were friends. And I was never friends with other Indians, so I never felt like that kind of a connection like I did in India where I had my own close friends. I always felt that a little bit, where it kind of felt like I wasn't really a part of it. I think my parents felt that way too, where it's like we weren't really fully invested or fully felt like a part of the Indian community here.

⁷ The Economist, “Why Gujaratis may be the most successful people in business in the world,” *StarTribune*, December 28, 2015, <https://www.startribune.com/why-gujaratis-may-be-the-most-successful-people-in-business-in-the-world/363675551/>.

⁸ Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, “How Indian Americans Came to Run Half of All U.S. Motels,” *National Geographic*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2018/09/south-asia-america-motels-immigration/>.

00:33:08

Q: You also mentioned extended family being really important for your parents, for people to talk to and things like that. But then also, I think you were saying it's kind of difficult to live with that aunt and uncle. So I was just wondering how are your and your parents' relations with extended family?

Patel: It's weird because our aunts and uncles did treat us really poorly when we first moved here. And that's actually very common in Indian society. Whenever a family just immigrates from India, they're almost looked down upon because they haven't really acculturated and assimilated into the culture yet, don't know English and that kind of stuff.

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Patel: Usually people—back in the day, at least. I don't think it's the same now, because so much has changed. But in the early 2000s, it was very much—and probably way before then too, that whole era—it was always like people looked down upon people who just immigrated. So that was a part of it. They treated us poorly because of that.

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Patel: But, with also a part of Indian community, you don't really disrespect your elders and your family. There'll be internal conflict with my dad and his first cousin. There's family drama there, internal conflict. They have no relationship at all. They're completely disconnected. But my dad and his older brother, even if they didn't treat us the best, they're [Himani's parents are] still close with them. And my dad is still close with his brother and they'll still talk and they still meet and celebrate stuff with each other and hang out. A lot has changed since then.

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Patel: I think my aunt and uncle have kind of realized. They never apologized, but they don't treat us the way that they used to when we first moved here. But they will still kind of say some things that make us feel like—you know what I mean, it's almost like internalized racism that they're displaying against us, just because we emigrated after they did. So there's a weird dynamic there. And I think it's actually common in a lot of Indian families to have that dynamic. And a lot of other Indians do that to other Indians as well. If you just immigrate, you're kind of looked down upon, no matter what.

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Patel: I'm not really close with my uncles and cousins and everybody because they never treated me well. I just am not close with them, but my parents are always going to be and my parents are

close [with extended family]. Same with my siblings. My siblings are not at all close. They don't really know them at all.

00:35:58

Q: That was, I think, really insightful. How about on your mom's side of the family? So it sounds like they're all still in India. Do you feel like you have better relationships with them or it also feels more distant?

Patel: I personally have better relationships with my mom's side, just because every time we go, it's just like a vacation. We hang out. Even though we lived in India, we would go to my mom's side of the family for Diwali and hang. When my mom was pregnant, we would go and it was always just very warm and welcoming. I always felt included there and my cousins always treated me well and treated me like a part of them, even now when we go back.

00:36:40

Patel: So I think it's a lot different. And my mom's side, it's more comfortable for sure. And yeah, they have drama and stuff. Mostly, the only problem on my mom's side is that my aunt, she borrowed money and didn't give it back or something. That kind of stuff, which is very common in Indian families as well. There's always monetary problems, because we always borrow money from each other to start businesses.

00:37:07

Patel: That's why we do businesses, because we usually borrow money from the community and then invest it into a down payment, and then pay that money back. Now we have a business. That's very common. So that's the only thing there. But yeah, I think it's [Himani's relationships with family are] a lot different on my mom's side. And I think it does have something to do with the fact that they're still in India.

00:37:29

Q: And so it sounds like you've taken trips back. How often have you gone back to India, and are there any trips that stand out to you in your memory?

Patel: I don't go back very often. I think I've been back maybe four or five times since I came here. The first time I went back was when my grandma died. That was the very first time, so that stands out, because it was the first time after moving here and that was all the way in eighth grade. So I spent eight, nine years in Boise before moving back.

00:38:03

Patel: And then another time that stands out was the most recent trip where we went back for my grandparents. My grandparents' health was declining. We went back just to hang out with them. And my mom wanted to give them a tour of all the temples around the Gujarat area, because that's very common with the elders. They love to take a tour around all the temples. It's very common. So my mom wanted to do that. We rented a tour bus and just took a trip around all the temples. That was really fun. And I got to hang out with my cousins and stuff and learned a lot about the religion and Indian culture. I was only there for a month, so that stands out for sure.

00:38:52

Q: What was your first language, and do you consider yourself multilingual?

Patel: Yeah I do. My first language was Gujarati. That's a sub-dialect. India has 37 languages last I checked, so that's just one of the dialects in Gujarat.⁹ And I am multilingual, because I still speak Gujarati to my parents. We don't speak in English. Even my siblings speak Gujarati, so they understand it.

00:39:23

Patel: And I also grew up with Hindi movies. So I know Hindi. I don't speak it as well as I can—I understand most of it but I have a hard time speaking it sometimes. I can pretty much—I would say, I'm medium level of Hindi speaking [rocks hand]. But I would say I'm multilingual.

00:39:42

Patel: I don't know how to read and write in Gujarati or Hindi. That's a problem. I've tried to learn, but even in India, because I went to the private school and Catholic school, I grew up reading and writing in English. So I would consider—English is the language I think in. I would say that that's my main language, but I am multilingual in that I speak Gujarati at home.

00:40:06

Q: That's really cool. I think I'm always very impressed by people who are trilingual. So I know we're living through a world event now, but were there any kind of major events when you were growing up that you can remember? And were there any that impacted your family? If that question makes sense.

Patel: Yeah, yeah, it totally does. I think we were coming in [to the US] right after 9/11 so that was a little bit of an impact. We came in 2001, so it was right on the tails. I didn't really understand politics. I was too young. But I do remember learning about it in school, a little bit,

⁹ There are 23 officially recognized languages in India but as many as 19,569 languages and dialects. From Valeria Castillo, “Which Languages Are Spoken in India?”, *Babbel Magazine*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/what-languages-are-spoken-in-india>.

very quickly. And then, we didn't experience anything, thankfully, just because we didn't like—so yeah. But I do remember that being an event.

00:41:06

Patel: And then the biggest thing was the 2008 Recession. It was a huge thing that I remember because it affected the store, and a lot of my friends' parents got laid off, and it affected a lot of people at my school, and schools were talking about it. Teachers are talking about it. That was probably the biggest one that I remember.

00:41:27

Patel: Yeah, I don't really remember other huge world events. I think my parents probably, even now do—they kind of focus on Indian events more, so they can tell you the timeline of world events from an Indian perspective. But yeah, I don't really remember anything else.

00:41:51

Q: On a different line of questioning, describe to me a typical family meal. Who's the one that's cooking? And do you have any favorite dishes?

Patel: My mom always cooks. My dad, he never really cooks unless he has to. We eat a traditional Gujarati meal every night, because my dad kind of asked for it. He has to have a traditional Indian meal. My mom always makes it. It's always like rotli, which is a flat Indian bread, kind of like a tortilla, made out of whole wheat. We have that with different curries, all kinds of different curries. And then we'll have rice. And then we call it a dal; it's a lentil soup that you put in rice. So we'll have that, which is a very traditional Gujarati meal. We'll have that every dinner.

00:42:45

Patel: During lunch, we'll have whatever. As we grew up, we, the kids, started asking for other types of food because they were kind of sick of the traditional. So during lunch, my mom would just make different things for the kids and different things for them, for my parents. But, yeah, generally every dinner, it's a traditional Indian meal.

00:43:06

Q: What were some of the other kinds of dishes that you or your siblings asked for?

Patel: We would kind of ask for everything. I always liked Indian foods, so I would ask for parathas, which is like stuffed bread. They stuff it with different curries. My siblings like South Indian food a lot, so they would ask for dosas and all those kind of things. And then other than

that, we would ask for American food like pasta, lasagna. Mostly Mexican-based or Italian, because we're still vegetarian.

00:43:37

Patel: Everyone in my family's vegetarian, and we have a choice. We don't have to be vegetarian. We have access to meat and we could be eating meat if we wanted to, but even my youngest brother, my siblings, nobody wants to eat meat. So we've always been vegetarian. We just find different vegetarian recipes and cook them.

00:43:59

Patel: And my younger sister is really interested in cooking, and she wants to kind of be a chef. She will come up with different recipes and experiment all the time. She's always doing that.

00:44:10

Q: Do you like her cooking?

Patel: Yeah. Yeah. She's really good. She mostly does sugary snacks and baking and stuff. But yeah, it's really good.

00:44:26

Q: Sorry, I always forget some of the questions that I want to ask. It'll come back to me. Oh, is there a reason why your family's vegetarian?

Patel: Gujarat, Rajasthan, that whole northwest area, everyone's pretty much vegetarian culturally. And Patel actually means "farmer." It comes from farmers. We [Gujaratis] grew up farming. We had access to vegetables. We always, traditionally, we've been vegetarians.

00:45:03

Patel: And religiously, I think it came from religion and culture. That's why my family was vegetarian. And then when we grew up, we grew up with that. We grew up being vegetarian. And none of us strayed from it. I mean, we still have a choice to just randomly start eating meat, but nobody wants to. And now it's become like a principle thing too, where it's like, "I'm always going to be vegetarian. I know that." So yeah, it's just one of those things.

00:45:32

Q: Would you say religion is important in your life or your family's lives?

Patel: My family, yeah. My entire family's religious. My mom and dad are Hindu, really super religious. They follow different rituals and prayers, and every night they pray, every morning

they pray. Everything like that. I'm not religious practicing, but I am spiritual and I really love Hinduism, and its traditional concepts are incredible. And I think it inspired a lot of different religious theories. I'm really interested in that part of it and the Vedas and all the original scriptures. They are incredible, so I am really interested in that.

00:46:17

Patel: My siblings, from what I can tell, are practically atheist. They don't believe. They don't care. They don't pay attention to it. They're very distant from it and cut off. So it [religious adherence] leaves. Generation by generation, it leaves, but my parents are super traditional and super religious.

00:46:37

Q: How do your parents feel about your younger siblings then?

Patel: Before they would still try and get them to participate, but now they're kind of like, “If they don't want to, we can't force them to.” They'll still make them sit down and do certain celebrations with them, like certain celebrations that are really important like Diwali or, we call it Janmashtami, which is a birth of one of our gods.¹⁰ There are certain celebrations, though, that they'll sit down for. And my siblings don't oppose that. They don't mind celebrating with my parents and being a part of the traditions. They just don't pray and they don't believe. My parents are always like, “Can't really force them to,” so they don't really say anything about it.

00:47:26

Q: It sounds like there's a lot of traditions that your family observes. I was wondering if there's any that you feel are the most important or the ones that have the most meaning to you?

Patel: I think Hinduism is a lot more deeper than the traditions, from what I've observed. And I think the traditions don't really get at it all the way, because there's fasts and there's celebrations of different gods being born. I think one that I really like is called Ganesh Chaturthi, where we celebrate Ganesh and that's a huge one.

00:48:05

Patel: And I have a connection to it personally, because where I grew up, I was born in Gujarat, but I grew up in Maharashtra, which is a different state. And Ganesh Chaturthi, Lord Ganesh is huge there. That's the main god that people follow and people believe in. We had a huge celebration every year and I was way closer to that. So I think that's the one that stands out to me personally.

¹⁰ Janmashtami celebrates the birth of Krishna. From *Time and Date AS*, “Janmashtami in India,” <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/india/janmashtami>.

00:48:34

Patel: But generally, what I found the most insightful is the conversations I have with my mom. My dad doesn't talk about his religious beliefs, but my mom will share them and she'll explain Hinduism to me and explain where everything comes from. And that's been more meaningful to me than any of the celebrations we've had, because everything else felt kind of ritualistic and it's always, you know. But they know the meanings behind the rituals, whereas to me it just seems like a ritual. So I think her explaining the religion to me was a lot more insightful than any of the celebrations we've had.

00:49:09

Q: Yeah, that's really cool. And it's really great that you can have those conversations as well. Let's see. You mentioned Patel meaning "farmer." I was wondering if there's any other sort of meanings to the names in your family.

Patel: Yeah, they all have meanings. Ragini means "poetry" or "poems." It's like lyrical poetry. Hasmukh means "someone who smiles a lot." Hasmukh, very smiley. It's a very common Gujarati name. Half the Gujarati men have the name Hasmukh. It's very common. Bhargavi is the name of an Indian goddess and it's another name for goddess Lakshmi, which is the goddess of money and prosperity. And Preet, it means love. It just means love, like a different word for love, and then harmony.

00:50:04

Patel: And then Himani, my name, means—it comes from the root word "hem" from the Himalayas, meaning cold. So Himani is meaning "daughter of the Himalayas." And it's also a different name for one of our goddesses, Parvati. It's also actually a Nepali name. A Nepali princess was named Himani, and then that's where it kind of comes from. But yeah, Himani's "daughter of the Himalayas" and that kind of thing. It also means "peaceful" and "reserved," from what I understand.

00:50:39

Patel: But a cool thing about our—at least part of Gujarati religion—is we pick names based on your birth date and your birth chart. Indian astrology is different than American astrology, but certain birth periods, like times of months and certain times, are connected with different letters. They have to choose the names based on those letters.

00:51:02

Patel: The time when I was born, it was “Huh,” “He,” and “Ha”¹¹ [sic]—you have defined names that begin with those letters, so that's how everyone is named. It's kind of random in a way. Nobody picks the name beforehand, but when they do, it's based on astrology.

00:51:21

Q: Yeah, that's really cool. And I think, yeah, your sort of namesake, also, I love the story behind it. Do you feel like you have any kind of special pride or relationship in your name?

Patel: Yeah, definitely. I think it's very fitting, because the more I research it, it means “strong” and like it means “mountain.” The Himalayas, it's a very religious mountain too. And for Indians at least, it holds a religious aspect to it. Our god Shiv is supposed to live up there and it's really connected to Indian spirituality. So to me, that means a lot. And I always wanted to—understanding more and more what it means makes me very proud. Definitely don't ever want to change that.

00:52:21

Q: This was also kind of a random question, but do you have any pets in your family?

Patel: Yes, yes. After years and years and years, we finally got a dog. His name is Oreo. He's a Double Doodle. Yeah, we just got him a couple years ago, but generally my parents would never have allowed us to have a pet, but we convinced them after years and years and years.

00:52:45

Q: How do they feel about Oreo now?

Patel: Oh, they love him. Yeah. He's very calm. He's great. My mom calls him “beta,” which means—it's what Indians call their kids. She treats him like a son, pretty much. And my dad spoils him with treats like how he spoils us with good stuff. So they're fully attached.

00:53:11

Q: That's so funny. I'm kind of moving in my questions to the “growing up” questions, which we already touched on a lot. But how would you describe your experience growing up? And I think you can answer that however you want to, whether it's in India, in Portland, in Boise, however you want.

¹¹ Himani clarified that the letters should be Dah, Huh, or He.

Patel: I should've mentioned, I was only in Portland for two, three months. So I grew up in Boise. Boise, growing up, was really, very—it was just so different than India. But it was also—I guess I can't explain it in one word. I'll just share the story.

00:53:55

Patel: When we first moved, I had struggled with English, so they put me in ELL [English Language Learner] classes, but it was first grade ELL, and like I said, I was going into second grade in India. I understood a lot more English than that, so they moved me through it quickly. I was kind of stuck in between, where I understood English—I could read and write it—but I had a hard time speaking. And I still had a hard time understanding certain people in certain accents.

00:54:22

Patel: That made it really challenging in the first three grades, because sometimes I would have certain experiences where I'll stare at a teacher to understand them. I would have to lip read almost, so I would stare at them directly. And they would get really uncomfortable. And I remember one time, a teacher pulled me aside and was like, "I don't think it's very comfortable when you stare at me." And I understood what she was saying. But to me as a child, I couldn't even explain to her that "I have to stare at you because I don't know what you're saying." So then I would just not look at her and I would just figure it out some other way.

00:54:59

Patel: And I still had pretty good grades, all things considered, just because my education in India was really well. I had multiplication [tables] up to 20 memorized. All the multiplications memorized, because that's how it was taught. I was good at math and I could read and write. I read books when I was in first grade. All that kind of stuff was very visible. And I remember certain experiences where I never wanted to seem like I was not intelligent or I didn't understand or that I needed help. I would never ask for help. I would always be the quiet kid, and I'd always observe and I'd just get my work done. And I think that was a coping mechanism.

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Patel: And the school district that I was in was in, Franklin Elementary, and it was kind of in a poor area. Everyone around us was living in apartments and kind of at the same socioeconomic level as me. And I think that was helpful, a lot, because the school had a lot of resources. They would give a lot, like donate a lot of clothes to the kids, and give kids free school supplies who couldn't afford it, and that kind of stuff. And I remember feeling really happy. I remember just feeling really taken care of and cared about, that they had those options.

00:56:21

Patel: And I'd never felt out of place, because all the other kids understood. You know, at least being in the same socioeconomic status, they understood. And I never really felt like I experienced racism from the kids as much. There would be kids who would say certain things, like they would ask where I'm from and stuff. I would say, "I'm from India," and then they would make really weird jokes about Native American stereotypes versus mine. Like, "Are you this kind of Indian?" And they would make some sort of gesture for Native American stereotype. Literally, they would go, "Ahhh [puts hand over mouth to "war cry"¹²], are you that kind of Indian or the one with the dot [points to forehead]?" They would say stuff like that all the time. And I remember as a kid feeling uncomfortable by it, but not really understanding why I was uncomfortable by it, and just feeling really uncomfortable. There was a *lot* of microaggressions in all the classes.

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Patel: But most of the time, the kids were a lot nicer and the kids just wanted to play. I mean, we were in first grade. So first, second, third grade, it was like the kids just wanted to play. I still didn't really have close friends. I had a good friend in first grade, but then there was a hole from first grade to sixth grade. I had no friends, at all. No close friends. That was really hard because I was all alone, and I had no one to talk to. And on top of that, every time I tried to make a friend, I would experience microaggressions or I would experience outward racism. I only experienced that after I moved schools.

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Patel: That was really bad. I remember in second grade, I was eating—my mom would pack my food. I would eat Indian food. I was eating and I was eating with my mouth open, because I didn't even think about it. And kids would make fun of me because I was eating with my mouth open, and call me a cow and stuff, like Indian stereotypes. That was really weird. There was certain microaggressions like that all the time. But still, Franklin Elementary, I felt more comfortable there.

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Patel: But then when we moved and we went closer to the Meridian area and sort of a middle class area. I went to Ustick Elementary there. And that's when racism started. That's where I felt way out of place. I had no friends. I tried to make friends with a girl once, and she grew up Mormon and she came over to my house. We were playing. We were fine. You know, we were

¹² Sarah S. Manning, "Manning: Pushing Back Against Racist War Cry Mockery," *Indian Country Today*, July 1, 2016, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/manning-pushing-back-against-racist-war-cry-mockery-gQJOauJ9kUeFyW0EbkrAQw>.

just kids. We were just hanging out. And then I took her upstairs to my room and our temple was there, because we have a temple where my parents pray.

00:58:54

Patel: And our temple was there and she asked me about it. She's explaining and she's like, "What's this?" And she pointed at Ganesh, and he has an elephant head. She's like, "What's this?" And I was like, "That's one of our gods, Ganesh." She's like, "Why does he have an elephant head?" I was like, "That's just him." I didn't know what to say to that. I knew the story behind it, so I don't think I explained the story, but I was just like, "Yeah, that's my god."

00:59:19

Patel: And then she was sitting there for a second. And she started crying. And she's like, "I want to go home right now" and freaked out. And I was like, "Are you okay? Why? Are you okay?" And she's like, "I've just never seen other gods." She'd never even seen other gods than Jesus, because she grew up Mormon. And that was actually very common in the Ustick area. Most of the Mormon kids just fully did not understand.

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Patel: Her mom picked her up. And then the next day at school, a bunch of the girls came over and were like, "Himani, is it true your god has an elephant face?" I was like, "Yeah." And then they started laughing and pointing and walked away and stuff. It was a lot of children not understanding other religions and other cultures, so making fun of them, and at the same time, making fun of me.

01:00:07

Patel: And as a kid, I wasn't the most beautiful child, so I think it added to that. So I had no friends. That's why I think my experience was a lot different. And I don't know if it was a lot different. I think it was very similar to a lot of kids of color, at least in the early 2000s, where entertainment and TV was our only outlet and our only connection to the world and other people and friends, because at school, there was none of that.

01:00:37

Patel: And on top of that, for me at least, I couldn't really go home and share those things with my parents, because I didn't want to burden them with my problems. As a kid, I thought, "They have so many things going on. They're starting a new business, my baby sister is young. We're still living in lower middle class. They had family problems. My mom and dad had conflicts all the time." Because of all that, I never shared anything and I would just help them with their problems, but they never understood what was going on with me. It was just a lot of repressed feelings and not really understanding everything until way later.

01:01:17

Patel: I felt my childhood in the early 2000s was a very different experience from my siblings and how kids are now. But it definitely was hard. And yeah, even in middle school—but in middle school, I had friends and I discovered media and I discovered culture and *Harry Potter* and those kinds of things. So I had outlets in middle school, at least, and I had a group of three close friends. I had someone to sit with that lunch, so I didn't feel so bad. In high school too, I had some friends.

01:01:54

Patel: But other than that, yeah, it was a weird experience growing up in Boise, Idaho. A lot of random microaggressions that just kind of came out of nowhere, or people just didn't understand.

01:02:07

Q: Yeah, definitely. And thank you so much for sharing. Even if it happened a long time ago, it shouldn't happen. So yeah, I really appreciate you sharing. I'm interested, since you mentioned it, things started to get bad when you moved to Ustick Elementary. And so, was there a demographic difference? You mentioned it's lower socioeconomic status at Franklin. And was it also more diverse and was Ustick just more white? I'm just curious about reasons why it was one kind of environment in one place and another environment in another.

Patel: Yeah, definitely. I mean, Franklin was majority white, but they had a lot of kids of color. And in my apartment building alone, there was quite a few families of color, so it was a little bit more diverse. I remember, there was a little Middle Eastern girl, who was my friend. People like that reached out to me, a little bit. She was more of an acquaintance, we had different classrooms. So we knew of each other.

01:03:22

Patel: But in Ustick, it was majority Mormon and majority white. And I think there was a select few students of color. There were some Latino kids. I think that was a bigger population there. A couple of people in Ustick, much more Latino. I remember there was only one African American girl from what I remember in my class, in my grade. We were friends for a while. We would walk home together sometimes.

01:03:56

Patel: And yeah, and it was weird because it was like stacked racism almost, because my parents weren't really exposed to other communities. They would tell me things about other cultures as well—not white people generally, but African Americans, they [Himani's parents] had their own

stereotypes about them [African Americans]. And they would tell me things. And as a kid, I remember feeling that that was really wrong.

01:04:20

Patel: And I don't think they've ever experienced the amount of racism that I did growing up in a majority-white school. Because in the Indian grocery store, usually it was Indians coming in. And when there were Americans that came in, it was people who were a little bit more accepting, because that's why they're coming to an Indian grocery store. So they never experienced it at the level that I think that I did, at least back in the day. But yeah, definitely, there was a lot, lot less diversity at Ustick. And we were right next to the Mormon community, so I think that really added to it.

01:04:56

Q: And you also mentioned teachers not being really understanding, at least when you first moved to Boise. Did you ever feel like teachers in a way also contributed to those microaggressions, or is it more so from the students?

Patel: I think in Franklin Elementary, it depended on the teacher. My first grade teacher definitely was, I think. I think she was racist because she would randomly call my mom and say that my mom wasn't feeding me enough. Because in India, during lunch, you get snacks. So my mom would pack me snacks and that's just how I grew up. It wasn't a full-on meal. I was used to that.

01:05:42

Patel: But my teacher found out one day, and she called my mom and she was like, "You need to feed your kid more. You're neglecting her" and all these things. My mom didn't even understand English at the time, so she was really shook by that, because, you know, she didn't know English. She's getting called over to her kid's school. It was huge for her.

01:05:58

Patel: The teacher did that kind of stuff a lot. And then she was the one who told me to not stare at her, and she was the one who'd treat me kind of like an outsider, and she would always try to push me into the ELL class. In elementary school, you had your normal classroom, and then the ELL students were sent away in a different classroom and all kids of all grades went to that class. And then they would have teachers who would go around and give them help as needed. There was kids from first grade to fifth grade in one class who were language learners.

01:06:31

Patel: She would send me in that classroom and then the ELL teachers would send me right back, because they were like, “She understands the first grade material,” because of the school I grew up in. And they were like, “She doesn't need to be here.” So then they sent me back. She would do that every day, almost. I remember that was hard.

01:06:48

Patel: But then my second grade teacher, she was awesome. She was very inclusive and she would talk to me about things and she was really close to my mom. My mom would—in India, it's very common to ask for other materials to teach kids more at home, kind of tutor them at home. She asked her [Himani's teacher] for other stuff like materials and packets to work on. So that teacher literally researched packets to help me understand more English and learn more at home and do those packets at home.

01:07:15

Patel: So I had some good teachers. In elementary school, I don't think it was that bad. I think the teachers didn't really care as much. In middle school, there were some teachers where I felt like I never was the teacher's favorite in any school ever. Even if I had—I had good grades, I was a perfect role model student because of how I grew up, but I was never close with any of the teachers like other kids were. That was, I think, a part of it. But I was also not really treated actually poorly, outright, by the teachers. It was just like I was another kid in class.

01:08

Q: And then you mentioned, you moved. You mentioned a little bit about that neighborhood you first grew up in when you were attending Franklin Elementary. Tell me a little about that neighborhood, as well as the neighborhood you moved to.

Patel: We were living in an apartment building. Our neighborhood, which is just a bunch of apartments in Boise, it was authentic Boise or in Overland [Road] and Franklin [Street], and they were called [Chaparral] Apartments.¹³ There was a lot of kids living in those apartments with me. They were demographically, like I said, they were all poor kids. They usually had five people in a one bedroom apartment. We had a one bedroom and we had three people, and four people with my sister, so it was demographically a poorer zip code, I guess. It was where a lot of the refugees were living when we first moved, and a lot of the poor Boise people were living.

01:09:16

Patel: But I honestly feel more comfortable there than I ever did at Ustick. And I think it's because, the thing that connected us was the socioeconomic status and having a life of

¹³ Himani lived in two different apartments, Chaparral Apartments and Denton Apartments. In this section, she meant to refer to Chaparral Apartments.

poverty—not really full-on poverty—but still poverty. I think that really did connect us. And we all grew up with junk food, because it was so cheap in the early 2000s. That was the only food we had access to. There was no such thing as healthy food because they're too expensive. There was also that idea of, we're all kind of chubby and kind of gained weight together and that kind of stuff. We all just got along a lot better.

01:09:59

Patel: And then in Ustick, the demographics were, it was all majority-white neighborhoods. We were living in suburbia, in the Redfeather community [a subdivision in Meridian]. We had a house. We just got a small house. We were living in a zip code where it was mostly middle class people, majority white. Everyone has good jobs and parents who earned well, or they were well off.

01:10:26

Patel: But I never really felt—I felt less accepted there a lot, than I did at Franklin. I mean, at that point, we were middle class, too. My socioeconomic level was a lot higher. And our lifestyle was the same as everyone else's. But they still treated us like they would expect me to be in poverty. Or they expected me to be different than them or kind of outcasted, at least in Ustick.

01:10:55

Patel: And then in middle school too, middle school was just a lot of bullying. It was pretty diverse. It wasn't a fully white middle school, but there's just a lot more racism and bullying. And I think that's because the kids were understanding what racism was. I think elementary school kids didn't really understand fully what racism was, like the Mormon girls. They just approached racism from their religious perspective, which I think made more sense. But in middle school. It was outward racism, where they kind of pinpointed me for being Indian. Whereas in elementary school, it was more like they just didn't understand me. That's why they were pinpointing me. So that difference was what I experienced in middle school. That was really a lot more different than elementary.

01:11:42

Patel: And then high school too—high school, I think, was kind of the worst in terms of race. I went to a medical charter high school. It was a smaller high school and mostly everyone was inclusive and educated and progressive and it wasn't that bad. But the people that I was close with—I remember it was a medical charter school, so we did an after school club called HOSA, Health Occupation Students of America, and they do statewide and national competitions.

01:12:11

Patel: I had a partner for that. And sometimes—we got close, just because we were both pretty smart, and we were both interested in this, and we were interested in HOSA and we became friends because of that. But every time she would come to my house, she would just stand at the door. She kind of looked down at my mom, and my mom would invite her in or talk to her. She [Himani's friend] really looked down on her [Himani's mother].

01:12:35

Patel: And she dismissed her a little bit and would come to the house, and we would have something cooking or something. And she would smell the air and make faces and stuff. And even when she came upstairs to my bedroom, she would say stuff like, “It was a little bit too small.” And we mostly hung out at her home. And she would kind of put me down, say that I was so stupid and so dumb all the time “jokingly.” But I think it was weird because she would only say that kind of stuff to me. And I think there was this level of—we were both pretty smart, and we both understood things, so she always tried to put me down and was kind of mean to me.

01:13:15

Patel: High school was hard because of that. But then I found other friends who are actually accepting, and so after eleventh grade, I think it was a *lot* better. And most of my friends were people of color. I had a South Korean friend. We talked about culture and she would share food with me all the time. And then I had a Ukrainian friend and we would talk about religion. She would share Christianity views and I would share Hinduism. We hung out a lot. And then all my other friends were—I had another friend that I was close with. And she white, but she grew up poor, she grew up with a single mother, and she was just a nice person.

01:13:47

Patel: All my friends, I realized, if they hadn't gone through a struggle, they just weren't friends with me or they just didn't understand me. Everyone who I was close with had gone through something, moving from Ukraine or poverty at some level or something. And that was the only people who accepted me fully. Learning about those struggles was the biggest thing of high school.

01:14:20

Q: Yeah, I'm really glad that you were able to find a group that sounds just a lot better than some of the other people you've encountered. So, those were your friends from eleventh grade onwards?

Patel: Sorry, I missed that question. You cut out.

01:14:41

Q: Yeah, no problem. Those girls you described, the three people who've all gone through some kind of hardship, they were your close friends from eleventh grade onwards?

Patel: Yeah, I would say. My closest friends was Jessica and Julia. Julia was one of the friends I met in middle school. We were always close and we just talked about *Harry Potter* and culture and media and that kind of stuff. It was just a pure friendship, nothing else. There was no dynamics of anything else as much. And her family was pretty inclusive as well, and her family really accepted me as well into their home.

01:15:24

Patel: And then, Jessica, she had gone through a lot of trouble. She was living alone. She kind of got kicked out of her house because her parents are separated—and she didn't get kicked out, but she didn't want to live with any of them, so she was living alone. She lived with me in twelfth grade for a couple of months. After living with her foster family, she kind of moved in with me.

01:15:49

Patel: We got really close, and she was the only person that I shared everything with. All these years, I hadn't really talked about everything with anybody, like my parents. I didn't have a therapist. I didn't talk to myself about it. Everything was kind of shut off inside and she was the one who I shared with for the first time. So we became really close, and she shared her life story and I had to share mine as well.

01:16:21

Patel: And then we went to college for the first year together, but then I moved college, so we couldn't. We still keep in touch, but we weren't as close as after that. But it was great to have her in my life, because she was the only person that I opened up to. And I feel like high school would have been a lot different without her, because I had no one else to share with. So that was nice. That was great.

01:16:45

Q: Yeah, that's really, really nice. I think I just want to make sure I hit some more of these childhood questions, so what were some of the hobbies that you had when you were growing up?

Patel: As a kid, I loved reading and books. I think that's why I understood English. And that's where I learned English from, is from reading books. That was my favorite thing to do. It started with like *Magic Tree House* and *Goosebumps* and *Harry Potter* and that kind of stuff. And just random series mostly.

01:17:18

Patel: And then other than that I loved TV. PBS [Public Broadcasting Service] was what I had access to for most of my childhood. I watched all the PBS shows. And I thought those were really, really helpful in teaching English and understanding American culture and understanding everything. Those were really helpful.

01:17:37

Patel: My hobbies were always centered around stories. Stories in written form, stories in movies, just stories. And that was my access to the outside world. And I think that came from not really having close friends. I didn't have anyone to hang out with, so I would just find stories. That was my main thing.

01:18:01

Q: And then I know we've talked a lot about this, but was there ever a particular moment where you'd realized that either you're Asian or you're different? Yeah. Was there ever a moment of realization with that?

Patel: Yeah. I think it happened a couple of times. In elementary school, I think that's when I realized, like when I was in third grade or something. I had a friend who pulled me aside once. She was a friend; I went to her sleepover and everything and then we kind of drifted apart. But she would still talk to me.

01:18:43

Patel: She pulled me aside once and was talking about how she was accepted to the Challenge Program, which was a program for gifted students. And then later I was drafted into this thing called the Gate Program, and I thought it was the same thing, so I was really excited to go. But during recess, they pulled me into the Gate Program, and it was me and a teacher—who I think was a social worker almost. She had social worker training. And it was a couple of other kids, four or five other kids, who were all really quiet and shy.

01:19:12

Patel: And she pulled us in there and we had this group where we would make arts and crafts during recess. And I later found out—I found out during then—that it was a program for kids who didn't have friends. That's when I realized. I was like, “Wow, I am different. Because of this. I am different, because I'm Indian, I don't have friends.” And that's when I kind of realized that. But that program was great. That program was super nice. I always had fun there.

01:19:43

Q: More so into middle school and high school, were there any activities or sports that you participated in, or any job?

Patel: Yeah, in middle school, I played volleyball and tennis, just, you know, very—I was C team for both. It was just for fun. And I had friends there, during then, that played with me. That was the big thing. I was a lot younger than my classmates in high school. I was three years younger than most of them. Because I was born in 1998, so I didn't have jobs. I didn't have my license until senior year. And I hated it. I wanted a job really bad because I wanted that freedom and I always craved that independence. I hated spending anybody else's money, even if it was my parents'. I always wanted a job, but I didn't have one until college. But yeah, my hobbies didn't really change. It was always reading, TV shows, movies, very entertainment world.

01:20:50

Q: Yeah. And then, moving past high school, where did you go to college?

Patel: I went to Idaho State University [ISU] in Pocatello for a year and I was pursuing the nursing program there. And then halfway through the year, I decided that that wasn't my thing. And I don't think I wanted to be a nurse. And so I found poli-sci to be my calling. Then I went to Moscow, in University of Idaho in Moscow, and that was where I pursued poli-sci, international studies. I spent [two] years there. And that was great. I had really close friends. My friend Julia lived there for the first year, so I had a connection there.

01:21:41

Patel: And then my second year, I had Oxfam. I was part of the Oxfam club. I had my own really close friend group from that club. I was the president of the Oxfam club, so we got really close because of that. And that was my favorite year of undergrad, was that year, because I learned so much and I learned so much about myself. And that's where I decided that I wanted to be in a humanitarian aid field and international studies field and do what I do now. That was a really important year, I think.

01:22:17

Patel: And then, after that, I had a six month study abroad program in Morocco for one semester. Yeah, it was so last minute, but it was *so* fun. And I made close friends and it was great. And I was still studying poli-sci. I learned poli-sci from a Moroccan, Middle Eastern perspective, which is really interesting, and learned a lot more than I think I would have [than] by not doing that. That was super fun.

01:22:45

Patel: And then, after that, I am now currently at University of Denver in Colorado. I'm now starting my last year of my dual degree program. I'm at social work now. Pretty much I'm finished with my International Studies degree. I just have one more class left. And then now I'm

just doing my final year at social work. And I hope to work in the international—in humanitarian aid nonprofit fields or international organization field, like working for a UN [United Nations] agency in the future.

01:23:21

Q: Yeah, that's so cool. It sounds like in college, it feels like it opened up a lot of things for you. And I'm just wondering, do you feel like it changed you—besides your goals and things—but do you feel like it was a space of change for you?

Patel: I think more than a space of change, it was a space of understanding and reflection. I always say, I always wanted to be a humanitarian aid worker type, but I didn't even know that that was a thing. I thought medicine was the closest I could get to that. That's why I chose nursing.

01:24:00

Patel: But that was a period of reflection, because I had therapists. I had access to information and knowledge. I had understanding. I started to dissect myself and reflect on everything more, like my personal family issues and everything. I think that was just a time of self-growth and self-understanding, more so than change. And then also understanding the world. I guess it was changing in terms of my perspective, about the world and its problem shifted, because I just learned more. But more than that, it was about reflection.

01:24:37

Q: Yeah, definitely. It sounds like it was just so worthwhile for you, which is really lovely to hear. I think we'll definitely talk more about future plans, but I want to get to some questions on identity. And I know we've talked a lot about identity-related things already, but we can start with a few questions. How would you describe the ethnicity of your friends?

Patel: My current friends are all majority Indian or Nepali. I have two friends—Jessica, from my high school. She's white. And then Rachel is another friend. We went to college together. But we weren't close, and then now in grad school, we are roommates. She's white as well. And then her husband is Nepali. We all live together, just because it's cheap and we know each other. So him, and then my other friend is Indian, so all of our friendship group is a lot more diverse now.

01:25:47

Patel: But still, I would say my closest friend is still Jessica and she's white. And then I would also consider my younger sister to be a really close friend. We talk about everything. And I think we understand each other a lot more. I feel like we're really close as well.

01:26:06

Q: It sounds like a lot of your friends are white. Do you think you interact differently with different people of color versus people who are white, or you think you are kind of the same with everyone?

Patel: No. I think now with Jessica, she's pretty, I guess, white. She is more presenting white than my other friend. My other friend Rachel is the only other—so I only have two white friends, and then the rest of my friends are people of color. But with Rachel, she is an international studies major as well and she's married to somebody who is Nepali. I behave normally with her, like I would I do with my friends of color, and we talk about issues and everything like that. And she grew up in Idaho too. I think we're closer because of that. I just talk normally to her.

01:27:05

Patel: And even Jessica—certain things Jessica doesn't understand that I've gone through, because she's just never experienced it, but we still talk about them. I don't think I behave differently with any of my friends, but I will say that I'm a lot—I just know that my friends of color just get it more. I'll share some things with them, like I'll ask certain questions with my friend who's from India that I probably wouldn't ask Rachel, you know, just because she wouldn't be able to talk to me about that. Our conversations are different, but I don't act different in front of them. And that took a while. I had to find the right friends to not be able to do that.

01:27:45

Q: Right. This is more of a personal—I think all of these are personal questions—but do you know if your parents have particular thoughts on dating? For example, do they want you to date someone who's Indian or they're just like, “I don't care”?

Patel: Yeah, they do. They definitely want me to date and marry someone who's Indian. But I've told them that obviously that's not in my priority list. If I fall in love with someone, I don't think it's going to be about race. I might fall in love with someone who's not Indian. My dad, I don't think has accepted that and never will. But my mom's okay with it, because she's like, “Whoever you end up with, just make sure it's a good person and it's fine.”

01:28:42

Patel: And then with my younger sister, she has a boyfriend right now. My mom knows about it, but she's not fully okay with it. And my dad's just not okay with her dating, so he doesn't know at all. They're very traditional still, and they're still really very strict. There's still a lot of secrets that we keep from them. And like we don't talk to them about everything. It's definitely different.

01:29:09

Q: And then this again, it might not apply. But if you were to have kids, would there be some traditions or beliefs that you'd want to pass on to them?

Patel: Yes. If I do have kids—or I do want kids, but, you know, things change—so if I do, then I would definitely want them to know Hindi at least, if not Gujarati. I do want them to know Gujarati, just so that they can talk to my mom and dad and talk to other people in my family if they need to, or if we're still connected with them. I would teach them that, and I would definitely make them grow up watching Bollywood movies and knowing about Indian culture and understanding Hinduism, as much as I understand it.

01:29:57

Patel: Because I do want to pass that down. And I do think the values there need to be heard and understood. I definitely would want them to know all that. I just don't think that I would be doing the prayers and rituals or anything, but I'd still celebrate Diwali, celebrate some things with them. Definitely want to pass that down.

01:30:17

Q: Yeah, and then I was wondering how you feel about the label “Asian American.” I think it's something I see a lot in the Asian community where it can often feel like people actually just mean “East Asian” when they say “Asian.” So I'm wondering, do you feel like you identify with that label? Do you feel included in it? Do you use that label for yourself? Et cetera.

Patel: Yeah. I think I identify with it, just because I'm from Asia, so I do. But there is such a diversity in Asian Americans. And I think it's too much of an “over” term. I think it should be based on country, maybe, because there's just such a difference between India and Japan, for example, that Asian American just doesn't encompass everything.

01:31:09

Patel: And sometimes in “Asian American,” that label, I do feel represented in it because Indians are such a huge part of that label. But generally in forms, I go by Indian American, just because that's always an option, which is, I think, a luxury because I've never seen like Japanese American or Chinese American as an option, you know, so it's definitely—I think there's a separation there that people have, just because of from what I've seen in forms and stuff. But yeah, I do identify with the label overall. I am Asian American, because I grew up there.

01:31:48

Q: Yeah. And then what do you see as your “place” in America?

Patel: Like how I identify?

01:32:01

Q: I guess, like how do you see your place or position in the US, if that makes sense?

Patel: I think I see it as I'm pretty privileged. I mean, I'm getting two graduate degrees. I'm educated. I feel privileged. I feel like I'm a privileged part of America, because, I mean, my family's way well off now than we used to be. We're pretty upper middle class. The store's doing well.

01:32:35

Patel: And I am educated, so I do feel like—but I do identify as Indian and I am Indian American. While I feel inside, personally, I feel like I'm pretty privileged and educated, I think the world still doesn't really see that fully. There are moments where I feel looked down upon, even with other people who are graduates. Or I'm not really considered at the same playing field as them sometimes. I think it's always going to be that kind of a battle for the world's perception. But personally I feel like I'm pretty privileged and well-off.

01:33:20

Q: This is more of a question I wanted to ask earlier. But you talked about trips back to India. And I was just wondering what the feeling was after being in the US for so long, and then going back to a place where you were born. So I was wondering, what is the feeling? When you go back to India, is there sort of a disconnect or anything? I guess sort of like that, for lack of a better term, “in-between” feeling?

Patel: Yeah, I think there is. The most recent trip I went back didn't feel like that, because I reconnected with my old friend who I grew up with, who was born a month apart from me. She just talked to me like she always does. And the good thing about Indian community is even if you move to America, people—when you go back—they just pick up where they left off. It doesn't feel outcasted or anything. I didn't feel excluded.

01:34:24

Patel: I felt in-between, sometimes. My cultural beliefs were kind of westernized, so I would share some things, then they were like, “That's just not how it works here.” But then we would have a conversation about it. I didn't feel a bad thing or a thing where I just didn't fit in. So I actually really found it insightful, and I thought it was good and I never felt out of place there. Nobody looked at me weird or anything like that. It just didn't feel out of place.

01:35:00

Q: And then I'm in the “looking forward” section of my questions. So I have a few current events questions. So obviously COVID is really big and I think I want to ask about COVID. But aside from COVID, how is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?

Patel: Wow, a lot different. I think the biggest change I've noticed is technology and access to information and other people and facts and just understanding. At least the people that I'm surrounded by and the community and the social media echo [chamber] that I have, it's very much inclusive. Very international, very interested in world issues, and very accepting and inclusive community. So much has changed since the early 2000s, in terms of race, acceptance, everything. And I do feel that it's way, way, way more accepting.

01:36:03

Patel: But there is also a part where when I first moved here in Boise, nobody was outwardly racist. Everything was, people are polite to other people. And it was a lot more subjugated and people were just more polite and like a little bit—even if they weren't accepting they weren't outwardly racist. Now in Boise and everywhere, it's just very bipartisan where it's very outwardly. People who are racist are very outwardly racist and then everyone else is just very outwardly neutral, you know, either neutral or or just fully anti-racist. So that is one of the biggest changes that I've noticed.

01:36:48

Patel: Moving back here, living in Boise, I have had kids like 12-year-old boys yelling at me, threatening me, and stuff like that, just for being Indian. And I've never experienced that in Boise, never experienced an outward threat, you know. And the Trump supporters and Confederate flag supporters, people with Confederate flags on their trucks, will straight up yell out their windows to people of color in Boise. Idaho is majority-white and it is pretty Republican—or, you know, right-wing and there's a lot of racism in parts of it. But it was never so visible. And now it just feels terrifyingly [more] visible than before.

01:37:37

Patel: But there's also this other part of it where the people who are inclusive have access to more information, and they are learning more, and willing to listen, and change, and outwardly face and have these conversations. Early 2000s, I would have never felt comfortable talking about these things in a classroom setting, but now I feel no hesitation at all. And same with my siblings, where before they probably would never share their experiences in the middle of class, but now they call teachers out for not sharing accurate history. They'll talk about Indian experiences. They are just brave in a way that I never was. I think it's a positive change.

01:38:23

Q: Yeah, I'm also very impressed by your siblings. I think we should talk a little bit about COVID. How has COVID impacted your life and your family's life?

Patel: Oh, in a major, major way. I came here for a week in Boise, just to spend spring break. And COVID happens, so I stayed for, now, four months. I just got stuck here and I think it's helped a lot. My family's facing personal challenges right now. I was able to, as always, mediate those challenges. And I don't think I would have been able to do that from Denver. And also being in Denver alone, even with roommates—still, they're married—so I'm still alone in Denver. That would have been really hard, just to experience that COVID alone.

01:39:16

Patel: And it being a grocery store, COVID has really affected us, because people come in and out without masks and stuff like that. We have to sanitize everything. It's an Indian grocery store, so we get pretty crowded and busy. We put up precautions and we sanitize stuff as much as possible. But we can't force people to put on masks or leave, just because we're such a small business, so they [Himani's parents] just don't feel comfortable doing that, you know. Costco does it, but we can't because we're a small business. We would lose too many customers, and we're afraid to lose customers.

01:39:53

Patel: My mom definitely was really scared to work in the beginning of COVID, and now she's kind of gotten used to it and has suppressed her fear. But in the beginning, she was really terrified of contracting COVID, just because of her exposure to it, and getting it spread to everyone else in the family. That was challenging, just to have a business in the middle of the pandemic. But we never closed the store, just because we didn't have to, because grocery stores always stayed open throughout COVID.

01:40:25

Patel: So that change, but yeah, and personal life change. There were huge changes in our personal life too, in a good way, I think. Because I think if I wasn't here to keep the peace, because I've always kind of done that, then things would have gone out of hand, because everyone's at home. At least my siblings are at home. And then my mom is home half the time. And my dad is working most the time but he does come home at night. I think there would have been a lot of conflict and trouble if everyone was at home [without Himani], just because of how the family dynamics work. I'm glad that I'm here to [unclear].

01:41:05

Q: Other current events. So I'm sure you've been aware of all the protests that have been going on, in Boise, outside Boise, related to racial justice. I was wondering, have those protests

affected your life in any way? Have they caused reflection? Have they caused conversations with family?

Patel: Yes, definitely. I took part in the Boise protests and ever since the protest movement began, I started reading the resources and everything. And as an international studies and political science major, obviously, I was aware of the issues in the African American community. And as a social worker, I was aware of those issues. And I was aware of systemic racism. But having a week—at least that first week when the protests were happening—that whole week, I had a chance to understand all the issues that the African American community was facing, and really understand how deeply ingrained it was and how many people had lost family members and all these things and just understanding history better. I think I generally did wake up.

01:42:15

Patel: You know, before, it was like the African American community felt just like any other community that has problems and that needs, you know, help as a minority in America. But with the protests, I understood, to what extent that their issues were a lot more ingrained and part of systemic racism and intertwined in American history in a very grotesque way that I was never taught, even in grad school, and I'm an international studies major and poli-sci major. You know, I should have been taught these things. It was definitely a time for reflection and understanding more and more.

01:42:52

Patel: And then I started understanding, after having that awakening, of obviously these issues are pertinent and need to be addressed now, and are getting changed and affected by the [Trump] administration and current climate right now—after having that kind of moment of realization, understanding every other culture and every other minorities' issues and really comprehending those issues became really important.

01:43:18

Patel: With the Indigenous communities and Native American communities, people going missing, all those kinds of issues that are coming up. With the Latino communities and immigration and ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] and deporting kids, kids going missing. The treatment of kids and human trafficking in those ICE centers. And all of these issues that I think the people of those communities knew, but the majority of the people didn't. I finally realized that now we all can have access to that information and now we all know about these issues. And I think that movement was really, really crucial to bring all of these issues to the forefront and to put it in people's faces and be like, "If you're not understanding and accepting and really taking the time to reflect on this, you're not doing the work to be actively

anti-racist, then you probably are racist, or you're ignoring it for a reason because it makes you uncomfortable. But you still have to take the journey and start the process of dissecting these things and reflecting on them.”

01:44:21

Patel: I've definitely reflected on my own racism, like that African American girl I was mentioning in elementary school. My mom grew up in a racist environment, and she told me not to hang out with her because she was African American. And the first day after that, she [Himani's friend] was yelling after me to walk home with me and I didn't stop. I kept running and I didn't stop and I said I couldn't be friends with her anymore. And she asked me why and I just didn't say anything.

01:44:47

Patel: And that came from my mom [but] it was my choice, ultimately, to do that. Having a moment of realization where all these microaggressions I must have caused against African Americans or Latino communities or Native Americans, just as much as everyone else. It was really eye-opening, because I've experienced these microaggressions all my life, but that doesn't mean that I never displayed them against other people.

01:45:09

Patel: It was definitely—this whole period and time period, I think is very important for them for all Americans. And we all need to understand that what we're experiencing in these minority communities—what we call “minorities”—it's not a minority community. It's an entire race. It's racial, it's systemic, and it needs to be understood at a level that it is very deeply rooted, and talked about and changed. So I'm very, very happy about what's going on right now and I will never stop fighting the way that I see others fighting and the way I'm fighting currently because of this awakening. And that was because of COVID. Without us all being at home on our computers all day, I don't think we would have had the time or the ability to reflect the way we did.

01:46:00

Q: Yeah, I think that was all really, really beautifully put. Have you been talking about these sorts of issues with your mom or dad?

Patel: Yeah, yeah. I've had some heated discussion with my parents. My dad's the kind of person who is too stuck in his ways to ever change, so talking with him is futile because he just doesn't listen. And I know that he and I are such different people that I'll never really understand him or get along with him as much. He's my dad, but nothing beyond that.

01:46:36

Patel: And my mom, she at least takes the time to listen. But I still don't think she's ever changing her perceptions and her internalized racism and her racism towards other people. While I've had all of these really deep conversations with her, in the moment, she'll be like, "Okay, yeah, I understand that that's not okay." Right away, the next day or the day after, she'll say something towards that person or that race that's a full-on microaggression and is racist. And I'll call her out on it. But then she just doesn't really take the time to dissect it or say that she was wrong or apologize.

01:47:13

Patel: My parents, definitely—I always say that if they were white, they would be very conservative and very traditional. I think we are just too separate, too just very different people. It's really hard to have the values that I do and be a part of that family, part of, you know, talk to my parents. But at least my siblings understand, and my younger sister understands and she was with the protests with me, and we have conversations. My siblings and I are fully dissecting everything together. At least that we are changing, but my parents, I don't think that they will ever change. They're just too stuck in their ways to take the time to reflect.

01:48:00

Q: Last current issues question. 2020 is an election year—and you don't have to tell me how you're voting or anything—but do you have any thoughts about the upcoming election?

Patel: I think we're stuck between a rock and a hard place. But I know for sure that one side represents racism, and discrimination, and hate, and separation, segregation, and just every negative quality of humanity. And one side is just the other option. Either way, I mean we're not gonna—like President [Joe] Biden, or President [Donald] Trump—definitely I'm never, ever voting for him [Trump].

01:48:45

Patel: But, Biden isn't the best option. And I don't think he's gonna do everything that needs to be done. I feel like after this kind of a revolution-type culture that we're experiencing right now, with the protests and COVID and everything, I think we need somebody who's super revolutionary as well, and able to change things. Make these systemic changes. Just because there's momentum right now to make it happen. I really, really wish that there was a candidate like Bernie Sanders, who was on the front to do that, to make those changes. And I'm disappointed that Biden is there because I don't think he will. I think he's too middle ground to ever make those changes.

01:49:26

Patel: I'm very, very, very disheartened by this election, just because it's like, after all of this understanding and change and I think cultural shift that has happened with the protests, to end up with somebody who's middle ground and then somebody who's full racist is just not where I saw. It just doesn't sit right. But I'm definitely never voting for Trump.

01:49:49

Q: Yeah, okay. I think I want to finish up the interview with just more questions about yourself and what you see for your future. So first question, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

Patel: Probably my education and my understanding of the world. My degrees, and being a part of Oxfam, and that club, and some of the things that we did as a part of that club, and some of the change that we made, even if it was super small—I am proud of that. And now I'm just fully proud of who I've become because of my education and feeling like advocating for the people. And advocating, and understanding, and giving a voice, and actually standing my ground because of what I've learned and education access I've had is definitely my proudest accomplishment. What I've been able to learn and how inclusive and understanding I've become because of that access to knowledge that I had. And obviously getting two degrees, it feels, so far, that's my biggest accomplishment.

01:51:12

Q: Yeah, amazing. And I think those are definitely really great things to be proud of. What is the one thing you want people to remember about you?

Patel: I think I would want people to know what I stood for, and what I stood up for, and what I wanted to see different in the world, and how I wanted to change things. Definitely that. My life story doesn't need to be shared, or I don't need everyone to know my life story, but the lessons that I learned from my life story and how they're contributing to how I want to change the world. I think that I would be—that's a lot—but that would be what I would want to leave behind.

01:52:06

Q: Yeah. And what are your dreams and visions for your future?

Patel: I just want to work at making these changes happen in an actual fruitful way. And if that means being a humanitarian aid worker in a UN organization, a nonprofit work, whatever that looks like, whatever job that looks like, it has to be a job that represents all my values and something that I'm actually skilled at, because I have to have a good skill set for it as well. So definitely something that contributes to making everything different, like systemic change in the most, best possible way. That's what I would hope to get at.

01:52:59

Q: Yeah. And then do you see yourself ending up in Idaho, or do you think you're going to leave Idaho at some point, like when COVID ends?

Patel: Oh yeah, I'm just here for until August, when school restarts. I'm definitely not living in Idaho. This was a great place to grow up, but this is not home. I've always felt that. I definitely want to live in New York, on the West Coast somewhere, but definitely thinking in New York, Tri-State area, because that has always called out to me, and I feel like the culture and community there is something that has always spoken to me. I definitely want to live somewhere there.

01:53:45

Q: Yeah. So I think that I'm coming up to the end of the interview. The last question is just, is there something you feel like we haven't covered? And if so, you can just add it here.

Patel: I'm trying to think. I guess, not really. Overall, I would just say that Boise, Idaho, has seen a lot of diversity, because it's seen waves of refugees from first Bosnia, Serbia, and then Somali refugees, Nepali, a lot of refugees.¹⁴ It used to be a very inclusive community. And I think it still is, but I would just say that people now have taken a position of neutrality or not ruffling feathers, and I just want that to change.

01:54:40

Patel: And I see that change happening now. I think that I believe in and I have hope for Boise, and I have hope for the US as a whole, but I definitely have hope for this state to be a lot more inclusive, just because we've seen so much diversity, because it's a growing city.¹⁵

01:55:01

Patel: I never lose that hope. I would just say that, yeah, Boise has made a lot of mistakes and has been racist. But I do see it becoming better and becoming more inclusive and I think that there's a lot of space for conversations. And people just need to be open for those conversations from both sides.

¹⁴ One out of every 16 Boise residents is a refugee. From Todd Shallat, "Improbable Sanctuary," *Investigate Boise Community Research Series* 8 (2017): 10,

https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1481&context=fac_books.

¹⁵ In 2015, Idaho's Hispanic population grew by 2.9 percent, African Americans by 3.9 percent, American Indian or Alaska natives by 1.9 percent, and Asians by 3.9 percent. From Associated Press, "Idaho's population becoming more diverse," *KTVB7*, July 3, 2015,

<https://www.ktvb.com/article/news/local/idahos-population-becoming-more-diverse/175335608>.

01:55:26

Q: Yeah. I'm going to stop the recording. Let's see. Stop recording.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Himani Patel
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	2
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Kathy Min called from Boise, Idaho. Himani Patel called from Meridian, Idaho.
Date	August 6, 2020

[INTERRUPTION]

00:00:02

Q: Today is August 5, 2020, and I'm Kathy, the interviewer, and I'm talking with Himani for a follow-up interview. Again, we're both calling through Zoom but calling from the Boise area. And then, first question. I think in the [previous] interview, you mentioned that you were a lot younger than your high school classmates and I was wondering if you could explain that a little bit.

Patel: Well, I guess just in age, I kind of skipped a couple of grades. So I was a lot younger than some of them.

00:00:38

Q: Did you skip grades, when you were in the US or when you started first grade here?

Patel: I think when we first moved from India, I skipped it right when we were in the US.

00:00:51

Q: Is there a reason why? It's just your school was more advanced already?

Patel: Yeah, I think that had a part to do with it. Yeah, it was mostly just that.

00:01:02

Q: And then you also mentioned changing from ISU to U of I [University of Idaho], and I was wondering if you could explain that?

Patel: Yeah, actually, ISU had a really cool nursing program. Like I said, I wanted to be a nurse. And then U of I had a good international studies and political science program. I wanted to pursue political science, international studies, so I figured Moscow would be better and I knew friends there. And ISU, it just wasn't feeling like home. So it was the perfect time to move.

00:01:38

Q: Mm hmm. And then, also I think I meant to ask this question [in the last interview], but I think I skipped it because I felt like we talked about it a lot. And so the question is have you encountered stereotypes or discrimination in Idaho? But I think I should have just asked you directly, just to see if there's anything you want to add on that.

Patel: Yeah, I think, right now it's gotten a lot worse. And I think it's been converted into symbols now. In my own neighborhood, right around my house, in the immediate street that we live on, there's two houses with a lot of Trump flags and then flags about guns. And then there's a house with the Blue Lives Matter flag. And all these, I think it's just been translated into symbology.

00:02:28

Himani: We put out a sign that says “Black Lives Matter” and they literally scoffed at us from across the yard. And there was this feeling of fear that I don't remember existing to the extent that it does now, so I do think that it's gotten pretty more severe on either side. If people are even a little bit discriminatory, it just comes out now and it's very in your face to the point where it's scary, which I think is the point of that intimidation. And then the other side is people really want to go out and protest. There's the neutral people—I feel like there's a lot of those as well—who just don't seem to care about what's going on.

00:03:17

Q: I think in your interviews, you were also talking about just ways that—I'm not sure if it's stereotypes or just kind of hostility, I think, to Indian and Hindu culture that you've experienced. And I was wondering there's also, you know, interesting things in the US I see related to cultural appropriation of Indian culture. And I was wondering if that's something that you wanted to talk about.

Patel: Yeah, I mean it happens all the time. The one that I notice a lot, which it's one of those things that I think a lot of colonizing countries do well, where they'll mask the egregious mistake that they've made by making fun of what they did to it.

00:04:02

Patel: And feel like America does that with like Indian typology and all those cults. Every single time there's a picture of a cult on TV, it'll have Hindu music in the background. It'll have literally yoga symbols and Om. These are all usually people who are inspired by Hindu ideologies. And they're shown as these cult members and stuff like that.

00:04:25

Patel: And that entire ideology was actually completely taken from Hinduism. Stolen. It was cultural appropriation that a bunch of random white people started completely just creating whatever the fuck they thought Indian culture was and creating a couple of cults and that became our entire mark, you know. And so they actually did do that. They culturally appropriated. And on top of that, they made fun of Hindu culture for being “culty” and “hippie” and “wishy-washy,” like it didn't even like having any deep spiritual significance. They were just kind of making fun of it.

00:05:01

Patel: And I see that in a lot of cultural appropriation that happens, like Native American culture or even Cinco de Mayo and all these things. It's just like people are making fun of these cultures, instead of respecting them. And that's what America, I've seen, is good at.

00:05:19

Q: And then, I think the question I meant to ask and didn't [ask] in the last interview is, could you talk a little bit about the role of gender and sexuality and your life?

Patel: I identify as female. And I'm pretty sure I'm pansexual but it's demi-pan, so just meaning demi-pansexual. College was great because—especially having a social work degree was great—because it made me comfortable talking about these things and a lot more open to it, which I definitely never had. I think extroverts and people who are able to talk with other people easily will talk about that kind of stuff a lot quicker than introverts or people who've never had a lot of social contact, which I feel that way. So having that social work background made it really nice and comfortable to go and figure out what everything was and where my head was in that space.

00:06:26

Patel: But definitely, yeah, I know that I'm a demi-pansexual. The only thing is it's really, really, really hard to date or find anybody in like Boise, Idaho, when you're a high schooler who's Indian American and you have oil in your hair. You know, there's not a lot of crossover between other Indians or people who understand your culture that are your age, living in these small towns, so I never had any relationships in high school. And then I never had relationships in

college because I went to Pocatello, Idaho, for college.¹ And then I went to Moscow, Idaho, for the rest of college.²

00:07:08

Patel: So it was just like I never found anybody. Yeah, I think that's very common for a lot of immigrant kids as well, where they know their sexuality and are able to explore, but they don't have like a constant or haven't had a relationship. I don't know if that's true for everyone, but I've seen it for my friends.

00:07:29

Q: And do you think you feel like you're a part of different queer communities or queer spaces?

Patel: No. I mean, not really. I do—I would like to be if I find the right queer community and space, but I've never had a chance to be, just because I'm still going to school, so I just move around from one place to another for undergrad to grad and whatever. So there just hasn't been a place where I found my one community yet.

00:08:01

Q: Yeah. And if you don't mind me asking just a few more follow-up questions to that, but did you ever have a coming out experience?

Patel: Kind of. I think I came out to my best friend a little bit. She kind of came out to me, but she didn't really go into it and I didn't want to push her into asking. So then I think I came out back to her. And then one of my other friends, we kind of came out to each other. We found out because we had a crush on each other. So that's how we found out. So that was—yeah. But yeah, there have been weird times when I felt like I was out of the closet.

00:08:51

Q: And I know you were saying that you don't really feel you have a strong queer community necessarily, but if you have friends are LGBTQ, do you think race plays a role in any of those particular friendships?

Patel: I'm thinking of all my queer friends and most of them are white, but that's just because all my friends are in Denver and Boise, and I was always in more predominantly white spaces in both states. So maybe that's why. I don't think has anything to do with race, though. I feel like

¹ Pocatello has a population of about 56,600 people and is 90 percent white. From *Census Bureau*, “Pocatello city, Idaho,” estimates from July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/pocatellocityidaho>.

² Moscow has a population of about 25,700 people and is 90.1 percent white. From *Census Bureau*, “Moscow city, Idaho,” estimates from July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/moscowcityidaho/LND110210>.

there's a lot of people of color in different races in the queer community and it's very, very diverse.

00:09:45

Patel: From the big parties and parades that I've gone to, it's definitely not at all a singular, not a white person thing at all. But so I do admire the diversity and how much that community has fought for people of color as well. But yeah, I don't think that I ever have had a really close-knit family or community that was queer.

00:10:13

Q: Yeah. And then you've also mentioned different parades and different events. And I was wondering if there were any queer-centered events that you've attended that have meant a lot to you?

Patel: I used to always go to drag race shows, like any drag race shows that came to town, because I used to watch *RuPaul's Drag Race* with friends. And that was our own version of trying to find a small queer community or accepting community in our own space, but we just did that. And then we didn't really have big events in Boise related to queer events or anything, but anytime there was a pride parade or anything to the Capitol Hill in Boise or in Denver,³ we would go to those and that kind of stuff, just to show support.

00:11:04

Q: And then, does religion play a role with gender and sexuality in your life?

Patel: I think it does in a way where I am a spiritual person, but I'm not a practicing Hindu. I don't do Hindu rituals and everything with that. And for that, there's a lot of symbology in Hindu culture, where it's like you fall in love with whoever you fall in love with. I don't think it is that stringent.

00:11:37

Patel: Even one of our gods is, half is Shiv and half is his wife—like their face. And it's a combination of masculinity and femininity, just saying everyone has both sides. So I feel there's a lot of symbology like that. And I think it's a very open and loving culture, but that's my interpretation of it.

00:12:00

³ Denver has a Capitol Hill neighborhood, but Boise does not. However, Boise Pride Festival typically takes place in downtown Boise near the Capitol building.

Patel: So I think in my head, it does. But if I was to find somebody who was very religious as a partner and they wanted to raise our kids in just one religion, then I would have a little bit of objection with that, because I would want to teach my kids both religions and let them figure out what they liked.

00:12:21

Q: Yeah. And then, you mentioned *RuPaul's Drag Race*. I'm wondering, has pop culture played a role with your identity and if you have any particular LGBT Q role models that you look up to?

Patel: Yeah, definitely, like *RuPaul's Drag Race* and *Pose*. It's a much newer show, but Janet Mock—and Laverne Cox. Laverne Cox changed transgender imagery in entertainment with that *Time* cover.⁴ It was a huge moment and [her] *Orange Is [the] New Black* role and all that kind of stuff. So there is a lot. I mean, the original person who led the pride parade was Marsha P. Johnson, the transgender black woman. *Pose* talks about that kind of stuff. That show's really cool, I think, to really understand what the queer community represents, especially the original queer community from back in the Club Kid days in New York. That was the true queer subculture. So I really think that that show's a pillar.

00:13:26

Q: And then are you involved with any LGBTQ groups or organizations, or have you been involved with LGBTQ activism?

Patel: No, unfortunately, I've never really had a close activism role in the LGBTQ space. I don't know why. I think most of the activism or advocacy that I've done has always been petitioning under organizations and charities. So yeah, I haven't had a chance to do that, but I would. Definitely when the Marriage Equality Act was being passed, we did march then.⁵ So that kind of stuff, like really big petitions I know about, but I don't really keep up with it in my state or locally.

00:14:12

Q: Yeah. And then, how do you see your own kind of queer identity—how do you see it as intersecting with your racial identity, if that makes sense?

Patel: I guess one thing I know is that I would never tell my mom and dad, ever. Even if I fell in love with somebody who was not a straight man or straight man-looking. They would have a

⁴ Katy Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point," *Time*, June 9, 2014, <https://time.com/magazine/us/135460/june-9th-2014-vol-183-no-22-u-s/>.

⁵ In reference to *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), the Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage across the US.

really, really hard time accepting it. I don't know if they even ever would, until we were fully settled and they understood that there was no other choice. So there is the cultural part of it.

00:15:03

Patel: But in terms of race, I know that dating has been—I think I attribute it a lot to race, I don't know if it's actually accurate—but in terms of dating and stuff like that, I feel like it's been really, really hard to find somebody, because of my race. And there is a huge racial aspect to it, where it's like I always felt like I was considered ugly in comparison to other kids like and the other girls, especially. And just in the dating space, I've never felt pretty in that space. So I feel like that has been hard, to grow up in these really small conservative areas where dating or finding somebody special felt impossible. And it still does. So yeah, I think it's just been hard.

00:15:53

Q: It's definitely interesting. I think dating has come up in a lot of other oral history interviews. And I think it is quite—it's a theme that I think I hear a lot across interviews of “dating while Asian in Idaho.”

00:16:07

Q: I don't know if this is a redundant question, but do you have any further reflections on what it means to be queer / queer POC / queer [and] Asian and American [sic] in Idaho?

Patel: I think there's a huge culture for it here. In downtown, there's quite a big queer community, so I feel like people would be welcome here. And I think it's a lot more welcoming than before. So I do consider that an aspect of it. And yeah, I don't really have any other reflections. I just feel like I've seen Idaho be a lot more accepting towards the queer community recently. And that's just been really nice to see.

00:16:55

Q: Yeah. And then those are really all my follow-ups. Thanks for entertaining all the follow-ups to follow-ups. I think you had a chance to look through the first transcript and then we've also had this follow-up interview, so between those two, is there anything else that you felt like we should talk about that we haven't covered and is important to you?

Patel: Right now I can't think of anything. I'm sure I will think of something. I mean, the message that I always want to wrap up with is I do see a lot of hope and I do see things changing in Idaho especially. But it's just hard when it seems like the symbology for hatred and negativity—I see that a lot more than any symbology for acceptance and equality or justice of any kind, especially in this area.

00:17:49

Patel: So it's just like you have to understand that your symbols, how they work and what they are trying to do to your neighbors and that kind of stuff. And I feel like Idaho just needs to understand to just accept the fact that they are huge refugee community and immigrant population. You know, we've been here for a long time. So I just feel like they need to embrace that move forward.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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