

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

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AN INTERVIEW WITH ASHOK CHADA

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and  
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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Mohammad Athar: This begins an interview with Ashok Chada on October 13, 2015, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Mohammad Athar and in the presence of Govinda Rajan. Thank you for having me in your home. To begin, I would like to ask you where and when you were born?

Ashok Chada: I was born in Wazirabad in 1939.

MA: 1939, okay. I just want to start with your family history. In terms of your mother do you know anything about where her family came from?

AC: Yes. She belonged to a village. Wazirabad was a small town type. She belonged to a village (Dinga?). That is also in Punjab, Pakistan. So she belonged to that place.

MA: In terms of your father, where did he come from?

AC: He is again born in Pakistan. (Jogalia?) is the village. He was born there.

MA: Did your parents share any stories with you about living in these villages?

AC: Yes. He was sharing plenty of things about the hostel in his childhood where he studied, and I saw that hostel in 1946. I remember that even now. The train was going and my father told me--we were two brothers at that time. Now we are four brothers. So he said, "Ashok look, this is the hostel where I studied." [laughter]

MA: You noted in your survey your father had some education. Graduate school education you said?

AC: He was an MA in English, Masters in English. He was teaching English in Delhi University.

MA: So talk about some of your very first memories about Wazirabad and your experiences and activities, hobbies, schooling?

AC: Alright, I will tell you. I was about eight years old when Partition took place. So, my father didn't teach me, he didn't put me in a regular school and all that, no. He said, "Nothing to do it." He had his own way of schooling which he did. You will be surprised what he did, other parents can never do. They cannot do it rather. He taught me, I am eldest in the family among the brothers, and my younger brother and he sent to me regular school when we were fifth class or sixth class.

MA: What was school like at this time?

AC: That was a public school, a very good school. We were in Delhi at that time. So that was a very good school. Father would not allow us to go to Tom Dick and Harry village school and all that, no.

MA: So your father did not let you go to the English run schools?

AC: No, no, rather he put us in English run schools.

MA: Okay. I just want to get back to Wazirabad just for a little bit. What was it like living there? What were your surroundings like? Did you have friends you played with?

AC: Now you are talking these things. Look, Mohammad my memory is alright. I will put it like that. I was born in Wazirabad. I remember that particular place where I was born, the house, and the two, three houses, and the street from where people were coming and going. I remember all that. Not only that, where my uncles would study, that particular school, I think I can even go now if things have not changed. If things have not changed, mind you. I have got vivid memories, do you understand? Not only that, if you ask me, we did not live in Wazirabad, because my father was in Lahore. He was going from a number of places to places. We have been to this Lyallpur. Do you know where Lyallpur is? Now it is Faisalabad. You know why it is Faisalabad? Do you know the reason?

MA: Can you say it for the record for those who do not know?

AC: All right. See, that was a big city. That was a big city. That was the city where college of agriculture was there, whereas all the rest of the colleges were located in Lahore. That was truly a big city. That I remember. That I know. They tried to decide--that's what I vaguely remember now. The cricket series was decided there. That is why it was known as Faisalabad. From Lyallpur, it was now known--people do not know Lyallpur. People know it as Faisalabad. I moved to that place (Khamokhi?). I remember those times very well. Those people with whom I played, I remember them. Then, I went to Mandi Bahauddin I remember. I stayed there for one and a half months or so. I have got good memories. At that time there in Mandi Bahauddin Jai Prakash Narayan was supposed to come. You have heard the name? I do not know.

MA: Can you say for the record for those who do not know?

AC: See he was freedom fighter. A very great freedom fighter, he was. It was burning hot and people, I remember that very well, in large numbers had gathered, in cycles they came, and they had gathered there, and unfortunately he could not come. Anyway, that is all history now.  
[laughter]

MA: You mentioned Lahore and it is not that too far from where you lived at this time. Did you go there a lot?

AC: Lahore, yes I remember that. We were there.

MA: Can you describe maybe one experience you had there? Just how it was back then? How the city was?

AC: Now I'll tell you. Regarding the city, I don't have memories. But the place where we lived, that was Christianagar, Lahore, and very near that was a college building ground. Probably it was--which college it was, I do not know. It is FC College, ST College? I have no idea. I have no idea what they called it, but it was a college with big grounds and all that. If you ask about the other places, I can tell, but not the city.

MA: So you moved to Delhi very early on and you had schooling there. The Cambridge School I think you listed it as?

AC: Just a minute. We were in Lyallpur when Partition took place. We came in 1947, early '47 I think. It may be January or February. We came to Ayarpur. It is near Jalandhar. It was a small village. We came there and we saw this, as I told you the Partition. We came to Delhi, in between we came from Ayarpur to Shahbad, in Shahbad we stayed about four or five months. In June 1948 we came to Delhi.

MA: Okay so you came to Delhi after the Partition?

AC: No, after the partition we were in Ayarpur.

MA: Okay and then from there you moved to Delhi. I wanted to ask you a lot about the Partition. You must have been very young, I think maybe ten years old?

AC: No. I was eight years.

MA: Eight years, okay. What do you remember about that time?

AC: It is unpleasant to talk about it. I'll tell you why. For almost six months we did not get regular vegetables. No vegetables, absolutely nothing [for] almost six months. You will be surprised about those things. My mother would make dalia. Do you know what is dalia?

MA: Can you say it for the record?

AC: Broken wheat. Broken wheat is called dalia. She was making that dalia in water and in salt, not even sugar. Sugar was not there. See, if you go through those times it is very unpleasant to talk about it. I'll tell you.

MA: If you do not feel comfortable talking about it you do not have to.

AC: Just a minute, I will tell you. In 1947 in the month of August, Partition took place on the 15th of August, and then, for almost ten days there was no sun. There was rain, rain, rain, rain.

One and a half lakh [150,000] Muslims were prepared to go to Pakistan. Now look what happened and nobody is going to tell you. No book, all these books that you read, for me, is rubbish. I am honest toward that. This man writes history, but they are wrong. That is all political angle they give. But nobody tells that one and a half lakhs, those people gathered near the river or some stream, and the flood was so much, they all drowned there. What tragedy took place? Nobody is going to write [this] in history. Nobody. All these historians, all these useless historians, they have no idea what really took place. Now I tell you, I was very small at that time. What the people told me, I remember that, and then, there are hundreds of other major incidents which I have no idea. Sometimes I love history I will tell you as far as I'm concerned. I love history, but then what I say, what is the use of reading this history? Two things, one is whoever writes is a biased person. Right? He's a biased person. And secondly, he doesn't have the proper data. He has not seen it. What is the use of writing such history? No, this is all rubbish. I am telling for you also. Whatever you read, oh, this man was great. This man was great. Very recently, some things are coming out. I don't like to name them. In our own times we called this man very great. Now we came to know those people are very cheap people. They were at the helm of these affairs and they controlled the media, and then, we were given wrong pictures. What is the use of writing such books? And who is writing those books? I'll tell you honestly, there's no use of even writing history. That is all rubbish. I want to call it rubbish. [laughter] No, no I am honest toward that.

MA: That is okay.

AC: That morning comes that lady, she talks of history, but what is the use of that history? Until and unless people who have seen--unfortunately with me, I was small at that time. My memory is good. I have got vivid memories. It is true. I can speak, but what about other people? People forget. They would like to forget and that is not history. [laughter]

MA: You talked about some of the food shortages you had. You did not have sugar, you did not have vegetables.

AC: No vegetables for six months.

MA: Did you have any other shortages, maybe clothing, school supplies, or anything like that?

AC: In the village, where is the school and supplies and other things? See, these become secondary things. First of all a man should be able to survive. That is the first thing. School was there, it is true. School was there. The regular school was there in that village. People were writing and reading; that is all right. But at the same time, the bare necessities were rather difficult.

MA: Now your village, was it mostly Hindus? Was it a mix of Muslim and Hindu people?

AC: Which place are you talking about? Tell me. Are you talking of Pakistan? Are you talking of India now?

MA: Before the Partition.

AC: Usually, people were living together. That's what I remember and they were living very nicely. Mohammad, you will be surprised. Now you see the difference between Hindus and Muslims, Pakistan vs. India. What I was told shockingly for you in particular. Janmashtmi you know? What is Janmashtmi?

MA: I am not sure. Could you say for the record?

AC: Janmashtmi is celebrated in India on a large scale, because Lord Krishna was born on that day. Hindus and Muslims were celebrating in every village together in India. Nobody is going to tell you this thing. I want to tell you. Nobody is going to tell you.

MA: So, at least for you, there was not this tension, there was not fighting among villages?

AC: No, I am telling you everything before 1946.

MA: Yes, exactly.

AC: Who was creating the problem? Do you have any idea? Who is going to tell you? You are reading everything in English. Who is going to tell you? Nobody is going to tell you Mohammad, people like you. These English people have divided us. They have created Pakistan. Do you know that or not?

MA: Yes.

AC: They were the people who were growing seeds of discord, nobody else. They were living together peacefully. Then, these people come and create problems, who come from four thousand miles [away], mind you. You must write this in the record also. [laughter]

MA: I was going to ask you about what life was like. Before the partition, India was very much under British rule. So, I was going to ask you what that was like for you.

AC: Look, I'll tell you as far as I'm concerned, and what I've heard from others. What I've heard from others, that I remember. The tension, whatever that was, that was negligible. The British people have created everything; the discord, everything they have created. Now they say Pakistan, they say India, and the people are fighting.

MA: So this feeling you are talking about towards the British, it probably was not just common to you. There were a lot of people, probably, in the villages and in your surroundings who also thought this way.

AC: Mohammad, there are unpleasant things to talk now here, for you. They have divided us. It is true. It is a reality, whatever the method they have done. I know a lot. I'll tell you. I've read a lot. [laughter] The British I see as people. What they were doing? They were paid for these things. You got the point now? They were told to do these things and they were faithfully doing it.

MA: So that year or two years when Partition talks were happening, what do you remember about that specific time, '47, '48?

AC: I was told in 1946 the problem had started. The problem had started. '46, about six, seven months earlier. That part is true. That had started. As far as Pakistan is concerned, I have not seen tension between Hindus and Muslims. I don't remember that. No. There was no tension.

MA: So do you remember having to think about possibly moving? When they were talking about partition they were talking about two countries.

AC: Oh, wait. Fortunately, we had come earlier. But other people, you know what they did? They never thought that they would not be able to come back. They never thought. They thought we will come back. What they did, they hid the gold and many valuables underground. We are coming back after some time and we'll be living here. They had no idea they were thrown out from that place.

MA: So people thought there would be some tension and then things would quiet down?

AC: Oh, yes, that was true. One hundred percent true. They had no idea that they could not go back.

MA: From what you have heard of the time and maybe what you know of now even, what did you think about what was happening, the dealings between Nehru and Jinnah?

AC: See, other things is what I have read, or what I know. I will tell you. This Nehru was going from camp to camp, and then, there was an old Sardarji in the camp, and Nehru was talking to have patience. He said only one thing. If invaders come and kidnap your daughter Indira Gandhi, what will happen to you? Nehru ran away from that camp. He ran away. He couldn't stand these things. *Ye he Nehruji. Is ko hum Nehruji khete hai.* [He is Nehruji. We call him Nehruji.]

MA: Do you remember anyone coming into the village and saying we need to separate from the Muslims or we need to move to our own country?

AC: When?

MA: At the time.

AC: Tell me the timing. Pakistan or India?

MA: When it was still India.

AC: Before '47?

MA: Yes, before '47.

AC: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

MA: And then afterwards?

AC: See at that time there was no talk. See in 1947, we were in India. In 1946, nobody was talking about it.

Govinda Rajan: What made your family to move?

AC: Oh, father got the job. My father came here for job purposes.

MA: Okay. So you did not move necessarily because of the Partition?

AC: Not me, but my grandfather, they had to leave everything and come here. My uncles, they had to come here. Similarly, my mamajis on the mother's side, they had to leave everything. They had to come to India. I remember that.

MA: Now you are in India, Partition's happened. We are in '48, '49. What do you remember about making the transition? You were once living in your home in Waizrabad and now you are coming to India.

AC: Mohammad, that problem is for the parents. You got the point? They have to look. They have to find out the job. They have to find out where to work. I can tell you one incident right now. In Delhi, the year is 1950. That man must be fifty-five, about fifty definitely, maybe fifty-five. Do you know what he was doing in order to earn money? He had kept sticks. This stick, twelve dollars, *bara nhe* [not big]. This stick one rupee, one and a quarter, one and a half rupee, two rupees, depending upon the thickness, and they would break here before everyone and would earn money. I'll tell you. Now, see you have brought a very touching topic. How people have managed. I remember--this year must be 1949 or 1950. I was told these Punjabis; they had to compete with the local people. All Punjabis from Punjab, they did not settle in Punjab. You know that? They came to Delhi and moved onwards. *Bara masedar cheez he*. [It's an interesting thing.] It's very interesting things. Now because competition with the local people was there, they would buy that sack of sugar, wheat, whatever it was worth, and they would buy it, and they would get the price of that sack only, for less, in those days, of that empty sack. You got the point? Other people were getting a lot of money, but these people had to compete. They would get only that profit of only four annas. If I tell you, I can tell you many stories like that.

MA: If you have any stories just share them. It is good that you are recollecting all these stories.

AC: All right, I'll tell you one, which I've read. That man was H. M. Patel. He was the only star of India during Janata Party '77 to '80. [Editor's Note: Haribhai Mulljibhai Patel served as India's Finance Minister in the period referred to above. During the Partition of India, Patel served in the Emergency Committee in charge of Delhi and headed the effort to rehabilitate millions of Sikhs and Hindus in the city.] Do you remember that? I'm talking about that. He says, "I had a big bungalow near Connaught Place." People, the refugees, we were called refugees, they came, one family came. "If you allow us to be in your servant quarters, we'll be very happy. Please give us." He said, "I had many servant quarters. I gave them. Then, I was told by my people that their light is always on at night. What are they doing? We do not know, people told him, but the light is on. Then, I was told, that girls and that lady of the family, they were working all night. They were sewing these woolen garments [and] trying to sell [them] outside. And the boys and men, they were working in the daytime, working as (kulis?), or whatever they were. They had to earn, they had to struggle. He says after four or five months I was shocked when I came to know that their son is studying in St. Columbus where my son was going. And after a couple of days, they came to us, they thanked us very much. They said thank you very much, you have helped us in need. Now we are on our own. We are going to another place. Govindaji, you will be surprised, you will be thrilled to know these stories. You will be thrilled. Have you seen Birla Mandar in Delhi? [Editor's Note: Birla Mandir refers to different Hindu temples built by the Birla family in various cities.] Adjoining was my butler school, (Hawkwa?) Butler School. I studied there. That person who was selling these chocolates and all, he had a tough time, that poor fellow, but he would not speak anything. He would sell and be happy. Mohammad, it is something to be admired. And who benefitted there? The people who were educated, who came and settled, they were at much more advantage than the people who were illiterate. So, these stories are plenty.

MA: You talked about various people who had to do various things in order to live. Did you actually see these people or was it just more stories you have heard? When you were in Delhi, did you see these people on the street trying to sell things?

AC: No, that chocolate person, I have seen myself. And the other person, he was near the school. The Cambridge School was there and below that he would sell those things, poor fellow. I remember that year, 1949, '50, '51. He was selling those things and he was having a tough time. But then, they have done well in life. I have seen also.

MA: So talk about this school in Delhi you attended, Cambridge School. What was it like for you?

AC: Do you know of Qutab Minar? [Editor's Note: Qutab Minar is the tallest brick minaret in the world at a height of about 239 feet located in Delhi. Construction began in the thirteenth century under Qutb al-Din Aibak.]

MA: I do not.

AC: Qutab Minar in Delhi? Have you heard about it?

MA: I have not, no.

AC: Oh my goodness, you have not read Indian history?

MA: Not too much.

AC: You have got to. Otherwise there is hardly anybody who doesn't know about Qutab Minar. Hardly anybody I tell you. Built in the thirteenth century it is 275 feet high or something like that, maybe 226 feet or 275, something like that. We were living near there and my school, Cambridge School, I am talking about the year 1949, I went to fifth or sixth grade to Cambridge School. That Cambridge School was very nice. All teachers were very good and everything was very nice I would say.

MA: Do you remember any favorite subjects you had in school?

AC: There is hardly anything which I don't remember. [laughter] I was good at English. I was good at Math. I was among the top. Out of one hundred people I was among the first ten. You can think like that. So, I was a good student if you think of my record.

MA: What did you do for fun at this time after school?

AC: We would play.

MA: Were there specific games that were common?

AC: Now you are bringing another topic. See, I am eldest in the family. We are four brothers, that's all. Two and half years younger was my brother. He was very much close to me, very much attached to me. We were always together. Think yourself, Mohammad, what I am going to tell you, you will find very few examples like that, what I'm going to tell you now about my brother. His name is Sushil. He did his M.Sc. in Physics. He was in IIT Delhi. He was teaching there, physics, came into Indian Administrative Service, he got retired. Now he is in Delhi. That person, my own brother Sushil, what he would do, he started telling me stories, original, when he was about eight years old. Govinda surprising for you, for anybody. I am elder. He would read a lot and he would make his own stories. He was extremely imaginative. I would say, Mohammad, there are very few examples like that you are going to come across, probably none. I have so much confidence in talking these things. He would tell me stories and we two are laying and he's going to tell me one long continuous story, six hours, during the vacation. Six, seven, eight hours a day he's telling. In the evening we would go out to play in the garden, and then, the next day, the story continues. All vacation goes like that. This went on for '49, '50, '51, '52, '53, '54, '55, '56, '57, '58, '59, and '60 also. I don't remember. Almost twelve

years it went. When I was in M.Sc.--you do not know some things about me. I was doing my PhD in Chemistry. After three years I stopped it, and then, I took up the job. I wanted to listen to those stories from him. What I read, Einstein is genius and rightly so. For me my brother is a genius, whatever you may say. Hitler was genius, let us say. That man Napoleon was genius, or if you have heard the name (Buehler?) or (Ghose?), mathematicians, they are supposed to be very great geniuses. Shakespeare was genius. I do not know those things. For me my brother is genius and now he has published one book also. His novel has come out. There are others. They may come out also. So, that's how time was being passed. We would go out in the evenings to play and with him; I was playing chess, carom, table tennis. In Carom, in doubles, when we two are there, it was difficult for anybody to beat us, very strong combination we had. We had to separate, in any game; he had to be on the other side in order to balance the whole thing. So with my own brother things are different.

MA: Before you get to college, you are a teenager at that time. What did you think about doing at that time? Did you know you were going to go to college? Did you know you were going to do Chemistry?

AC: I thought I would be taking Physics honors and somehow my marks were not good enough. Sixty percent I had got in those days. It was very difficult to get sixty percent in those days. Sixty percent means you are a first class person, A+. See what is now ninety percent and above, it used to be that in those days. So, then the option was chemistry, which I liked actually. I like chemistry and I drowned myself in chemistry in the university. Our classes were held, not in college, no. In Chemistry Department University of Delhi, they were held there. It was a really prestigious thing.

MA: Did your brothers also go to college? Were you the first one to go?

AC: First one, I am the eldest so naturally I am the first one. All the others too.

MA: All of them went too?

AC: All of them. The second brother I tell you, Physics honors. The third, he is a medical doctor. The fourth, he did his MA English. He followed his father's profession, my father's profession.

MA: I remember something I wanted to talk to you about from the Partition period. After the Partition, there was also a war that Pakistan and India fought. I was wondering if you had any recollection of that or that time.

AC: What do you want to know?

MA: If it affected you in any way, if you remember hearing about it or reading about it in the news?

AC: I was in Bombay at that time. I remember almost everything. There is hardly anything which I do not know. [laughter]

MA: You have a very good memory.

AC: Yes, I remember everything. But what do you want to know?

MA: Whatever you remember about it,

GR: How it affected you.

AC: Naturally, see, we are Indians. I'll be on the Indian side. See that's very natural and all those places where the attack was there, and all those places I knew very well, on the Pakistan side, on this side. I had a very good idea.

MA: So you were aware of what was going on and where it was going on?

AC: Much more than the other people. [laughter]

MA: I want to talk more about your time at the University of Delhi. Maybe perhaps go into your first year there. How was it like to go to college at this time?

AC: No, no I didn't get you.

MA: What was it like to be at University of Delhi at that time?

AC: Oh, I think the Chemistry Department was very prestigious, I tell you, no. It was a good time we had. And my father was in the university.

MA: Your father taught there.

AC: *Ha*. [Yes] He was teaching there. So, I would say everything was excellent from a student's point of view.

MA: Is there any incident or funny event or an anecdote that you remember from your time there?

AC: If it was funny, I don't remember.

MA: Any stories you have that you remember.

AC: Right now, nothing is coming to my mind. Stories--I don't remember any. There must been many, but nothing is coming to my mind. It will come probably after you leave, maybe. [laughter] Right now Mohammad nothing.

MA: In terms of the course work, doing this chemistry work, did you find it particularly difficult? Did it come easy to you?

AC: I enjoyed my chemistry. All these years I've been working in chemistry. All these years, here also. I've been, by the way, I have not told you my background. I was from Bombay when I came here. I was in Bombay. I worked for about thirty years in Bhabha Atomic Research Center. A very prestigious place and by the way, I'm a nuclear chemist.

MA: Oh, okay.

AC: I'm a nuclear chemist which very few people deal in. Even in Bhabha Atomic Research Center, very few people deal directly like that which I have done.

MA: Before you mentioned you were doing a PhD. What got you thinking you would do a PhD in Chemistry?

AC: I am very ambitious actually. Not only ambitious, I am a very, very ambitious person. I was I should say. I should put it like that. I thought I will do some outstanding work in Chemistry, but somehow it didn't click. [laughter] I tried a bit of that. Then, the pressure from the house was there that you should settle soon. All these things come into picture.

MA: What year was this? I just want to get the chronology correct. This was around the 1960s?

AC: Yes, '60s. I am M.Sc. 1961. You can understand my age now by this time. '39 means I've already crossed seventy-six. So in '61 I did my M.Sc.

MA: I wanted to talk to you about one thing. Throughout the '60's and '70's there was still a lot of tension between India and Pakistan. From what I researched there were two more wars in that period of time.

AC: No, there was only one, 1965. That's all, nothing more than that.

MA: I have read in places there was also one in 1971.

AC: '71 was Bangladesh, not in '60s then. That is '70s. That was December 1971.

MA: Do you have any recollections of that period, that event?

AC: Yes. [laughter] Yes I recall.

MA: Any stories to share, maybe one incident?

AC: In that way if you talk of stories, war was there, is it true. It is true that man, what is the name of that name of that man, Faisal Haq? What was the name of that general?

MA: I'm forgetting also, but we can always put it in.

AC: Ashraf Khan, he was there at that time. After Ayub Khan then this man had come. I don't remember. Do you know Mallika Pokhraj? In what connection have you heard Mallika Pokhraj?

MA: I think I have heard of her. I cannot recall right now.

AC: She was a great singer in her time. So, there was a love affair between--hi-fi society she was. So all these things were there. [laughter]

MA: So, during this of period of time you were working. So tell us a little bit about your career starting out from college?

AC: I'll sum up like this for you. I'm not a very practical person. No, I'm not a practical person. In terms of practicality, I'm a dreamer type, very ambitious. I was rather. This is all in past tense. I'll sum up like this. Yes, one paper in chemistry. I'm a research person. I love research. Even now I love research. Even at this time. I love research. That appeals to my mind. One good paper has come out and I am satisfied with that paper. Another one or two I have written. I put it here all alone, nobody knows about it. I would not like to talk about those things. In life, I'm a satisfied soul. You got the point? [laughter] And it is better. See, at this stage why should we be not satisfied? Right or wrong does not matter. One should be satisfied with oneself.

MA: So, you listed that you worked at the BARC [Bhabha Atomic Research Center], the acronym you labelled. You worked as a scientific officer there.

AC: Yes.

MA: Can you talk about that a little? What you did there and your responsibilities?

AC: We were working. That's why publication of papers comes into play.

MA: You were primarily doing research and writing papers.

AC: Oh, only that. Interested in research. I love research. That's what I said.

MA: Were you doing other things beside research or was it just primarily the research aspect?

AC: I'll tell you now. This is another aspect of the whole thing. I was very keen for working for the poor people somehow, and then, what happened, we were so keen, a group was made of about twelve people. We wanted to do something; the twelve people wondered what we should

do. Then, somebody suggested--everything was done in my house actually. What we would do, Govindaji, we would take out those old magazines and we would go to the hospital. Are you from Bombay?

GR: No.

AC: There is one government hospital. One ward was given to us and we would distribute the old magazines to them, and they would read. We would take them and give them other old magazines. That continued for about four or five years. Then, another group continued for four, five years. For ten years it lasted. After that what happened, I have no idea. I don't have any idea. So, in other words, I am very keen on this subject, that man should not waste his energies. If he is able to do something for the poor people, for society, if he does, that is better. Even now if you ask me I would love to do that. Now, of course, my energy is limited from the previous years, but still, I love that.

MA: Around this period you were married.

AC: Yes, I was married with two children when I was doing these things.

MA: I was wondering if you would like to speak about your family, your wife, your children.

AC: She is not here right now. I tell you very impressive. Beautiful lady, she was. Now age is taking its toll on her. Not only beautiful, very beautiful. From physical appearance and from her heart. Always trying to help the people. What more I should say?

MA: Maybe how you met? How you met her the first time?

AC: During the engagement I met her for only thirty minutes or so, even less, and then, Mohammad, I do not know what the system is there in Pakistan now. Previously in our times, marriage was usually arranged. Parents would look the girl for the boy. Now things have changed. In India, they have changed, I do not know in Pakistan.

MA: In Pakistan it is kind of the same too.

AC: So, usually the parents would look for the girl and that's what happened in my case. Now the younger two, they have broken that tradition, and so, all that tradition is broken once and for all. Good enough I would say. Let the people choose their own partners.

MA: And what about your children? I know one is here at Rutgers or graduated from Rutgers.

AC: Yes. He's in Goldman Sachs for the last fifteen years or so. He is well placed. He's doing well. That's what I think. My daughter is a therapist. She is in Michigan settled with her family. She has been working throughout. When I talk about her afterwards after you finish I will tell you how we came here and all that.

MA: You said in the survey that you were doing research for AFM. Is that when you came to America or was the before?

AC: Which one?

MA: You were doing research with AFM, that was the acronym.

AC: Oh, who told you AFM?

MA: It was in your survey.

AC: I have written AFM? It was here. Normally I don't write about AFM.

GR: What is AFM?

AC: Atomic Field Microscope. Magnification, electron microscope magnification, its magnification is another thousand times. It's wonderful actually.

MA: So maybe talk about that a little bit, how the Atomic Field Microscope changed some of your work and your research.

AC: No it did not change. That was for some time unfortunately. Had it been for more time I would have loved it. That was Church and White. Do you know Church and White? The people that sell detergents and what not. Baking Soda is their favorite and that baking soda is for the past 150 years, they have been selling. So I was in their company and I was working on AFM.

MA: So why don't we go into you coming to America. When did you think about possibly coming over to America from India?

AC: Now it's a long story. I'll tell you why. In 1957, one of my father's colleagues came here. He spent four years, did his PhD, came back to Delhi. I was inspired that I would also go to USA. That thing clicked on. Somehow the things did not materialize for coming here. I applied for USA in 1970, got everything ready to come in 1974, something like that, almost everything, because these people wanted scientists in those days. Then, my wife said "No, it is not a good time to go there." So that project was dropped, but somehow that file was with the U.S. Embassy, the Consulate rather in Bombay, and then, in 1986 I think, something like that, I got the call from them that everything is ready, just go to the doctor, get yourself medically checked, and I could have come easily. It's very interesting, Govindaji, this is a story by itself. Then, in 1988, something like that, it was my daughter's birthday. She came and on that day I had got that letter. This is your last chance and you have to explain why you did not move out earlier and all that. Then, I gave them the valid reason that my son and daughter were studying and they had not completed their education. Now my daughter has completed. She had completed

therapy by that time. No, it was in 1990 I think. It was 1990 and she came, she said, "Papa, many people are coming from USA. The agents are coming and they are asking the therapists. Why don't we go?" She had seen that letter. "Papa we'll all go." All right. Then, we decided to come and finally if you remember I'm in a government colony there. It was a residential colony, a very good colony. I was on the sixth floor out of the sixteenth story building and anybody--I had resigned and people were surprised. "Why you are leaving?" Why? I am working, my wife was teacher there, she's teaching. Everybody was like why are you going there, and above all, when I went to the doctor, Breach Candy in Bombay, where Amitabh Bachan was treated. [Editor's Note: Amitabh Bachan is one of the most famous and influential Indian actors in the history of Indian cinema.] So there that doctor said, "Things are bad there right now. Why are you leaving this place? This BRC, why are you leaving?" Then, I told him I have decided to go. Look at my age. I was fifty-three. See, it is not easy to come, and then, responsibilities, everything is mine.

MA: So this offer you got from America, they were going to take care of immigration?

AC: They would take care of immigration. I was coming on immigration visa.

MA: Okay. So talk about that process of immigration and trying to get over to America.

AC: All right. Let me see what I have written, if I remember correctly. Then, what happened in 1 October, 1991, the rules changed. They said they are not valid, those rules. Somebody has to sponsor you. Then, my brother-in-law was there, good enough, in California. He helped me out.

MA: So you had family already in the United States?

AC: My brother-in-law was there. Only one brother-in-law and none from my side. From my wife's side, her brother is there, and nobody on this side.

MA: So you needed this sponsorship to get in and he was the one to sponsor you.

AC: He sponsored me. He was willing to and very happy to sponsor. More people should come to USA. That was a very good feeling, excellent person. Now he's no more. So, I'll tell you something more. In BRC, you can't say, at that time we could not say that you are going to USA. That's a government place, because there was some sensitive information and it gets leaked and all that. That is rightly so. I don't have anything very sensitive. [laughter] I was not working on very sensitive issues and all that. Good enough I would say. Then, in June 1992, we came here. We landed up in California. We were under the impression that my daughter, she got the job on the phone. On the phone she got the job during this process. I thought her case is prepared and all that. But what happened, things didn't go the way we had thought. It didn't go. We were thinking that she will be reaching earlier and we will be joining afterwards, but what happened, her case was delayed, whatever the reason may be. She came in August. You look at our--we are dependent upon somebody. We are dependent upon our brother-in-law. That feeling was not good. Secondly, my wife and I had reached in California and my children are

left back. What a feeling I had. Oh my goodness. That is the first time in lifetime, the first time in my life, I felt helpless without them. That was the first time.

MA: So you came over by yourself first and then they followed you?

AC: Yes. See then my daughter came to Little Rock, Arkansas. She came in August, the first week of August she came. We are happily enjoying, we two at brother's place and this girl has come and good enough. I tell you look at the goodness of the local people here. That Stan Harris was her boss who took her interview. What he did, Mohammad, he kept her in their own house. See, nobody is going to do the way he did. They took full care of her, and then, she told that my mother and father will come. He told her frankly, "Don't worry." Excellent person he was, very good person he was, and his wife was very good. She was also a therapist. The couple were both therapists. Anyway, they took full care of us. Not only that, when my daughter reached there, after that we landed. After two weeks we reached there. After fifteen days we reached there. All furniture, phone, everything, he co-signed everywhere. He was the person who co-signed everything for us. Who is going to do that? Come on tell me? Mohammad, I am all praise for the people here. All praise for these people, wonderful people. Can we forget them? No. I can't forget them.

GR: And your son?

AC: My son. His case was still more delayed. That's what the chance happens. When I had applied in 1970 he was not born. When I applied, no, he was not born, and then, his passport, they came later, and he landed on October 1, 1992. Some sort of history you know now. History, now it is history in real life.

GR: So at the time he arrived, what was his age?

AC: Oh, he was nineteen plus. He was going to be twenty after four months. He worked very hard Govinda. He worked very, very hard. If you ask me how he managed I do not know. He was always on his own. He went to Little Rock, University of Little Rock, Arkansas. There he was working in the beginning as a busboy in a four star hotel. Easily one of the best hotels there. He was working there. After six months he joined that university and started doing courses there. My wife, now I will tell you a problem here in Little Rock. My wife tried and I also tried somewhere else for work in small places, though we were very much qualified. So, when we started there, we were under the impression that you work anything you'll get the job easily. But when we landed up in Arkansas it was not so. It was not so. The only person in the beginning was my daughter who was aiding the family.

GR: She was the breadwinner of the family.

AC: She was the breadwinner of the family, rightly so. Wonderful she proved to be. And some things now I'll tell you happened here. Where she was working, she was working overtime and she had no idea about it. One of her colleagues fought with the management, "What you are

doing with her? Why don't you pay her what she's working?" That lady fought with the management. See, look. Then, she started getting things. Then, my wife asked her, "How these bills are coming now? How are these checks coming now?" Then, she told her, I myself had no idea about these things, "This lady fought for me." That's what happens. We were trying our best for job. We were not getting it.

MA: Were you not finding a job because there were not many jobs at the time?

AC: Oh, yes. Up to '92 end, until Clinton came, job situation was bad, very bad. After Clinton came and tried to settle himself, after that the economy started moving forward. Otherwise things were very bad here because of senior Bush, Bush's father. So things were very bad at that time.

MA: Did you ever face any discrimination while you were here?

AC: In Arkansas we faced it. I'll tell you. I had almost got the job. I was very much qualified I'll tell you. Not only qualified, very much qualified in chemistry. Coming here, there were problems here. The same thing happened here. See, I was not taken in a company. He said, "Already two Indians are there. There will be a third Indian which I don't want." My wife tried in K-Mart. Now in K-Mart she tried. She could not get. We had no car also at that time in the beginning. For four months we didn't have a car. We were trying. We were going all of us, going to K-Mart, getting things, and we had to carry things.

MA: When did you move from California to Arkansas?

AC: Oh, after two and a half months.

MA: Okay. I just had a question about your flight over. What was that like? That must have been a long flight.

AC: About the flight I'll tell you. The first flight which we took by Air India, we came to Japan, Tokyo. We came there. We were there, we landed there about 11:30 or so, or something like 11:30. We two were there, myself and my wife. Her name is Usha. We two were there. From 11:30 to I think 8:30, or eight o'clock, something like that, we were given some dollars and whatever the food we were getting, that was all non veg. Now we are vegetarians both of us. We had a bad time. Anyway, we came by that Northwest. Northwest Airlines is there. Now probably it doesn't exist, Northwest. It came to San Francisco. Whatever food was given to us at nine o'clock, that's what I vaguely remember, nine o'clock. That was cold. All food was cold, whatever was given to us. [laughter] We had a very bad experience. The opposite of what we had in Air India. In Air India you had very good food and piping hot. This was the opposite.

MA: How long were stopped over in Japan for?

AC: For almost nine hours. It was a good experience. It was something like a small test in life. There are so many tests that come and all that.

MA: I mean what was that like? You were in a Japanese airport.

AC: No, we had a bad time actually, because you cannot talk in English to them. They know Japanese only. A couple of passengers like us were there from Air India, a couple of passengers, not many. You can talk to them or something like that. Otherwise, everything is foreign to you. You cannot talk to them even. That's slightly not a very pleasant thing. [laughter]

MA: When you first landed in America, I mean obviously there is a big culture difference between American culture and Indian culture. How did you adjust?

AC: In that way, while doing the job there were some problems, not much, because we knew English pretty well, we could speak. As far as food is concerned, we were getting home cooked food. My wife was making fresh food and all that. So, if you talk of the culture shock, yes, I will tell you a few incidents now. See, there is no job. For four months we were without job and finally we got a job in a motel, both of us. My son got the job as soon as he landed in Arkansas, in Little Rock, after a week or even less than that. He started working as a busboy in that hotel. Two weeks, something like that maybe. He started working and we are without job. We were feeling bad, particularly me, the person who is responsible for bringing all the family here and he is not doing anything. He is the most useless person on earth. You get a very unpleasant feeling at that time. Anyway, we got the job in a motel and she was a house supervisor, my wife, and I was working at the desk at night from seven to seven.

GR: So you were provided accommodation in the motel?

AC: No, we were living separately. So anyway, and look, I am a research scientist and one or two times I had to call the police. One day I found--in that motel many black people, they were smuggler types. They were connected with this opium, heroin, and other things. They were coming there in that motel, plenty of them. That's what I found and one day I found there was some problem. I called the police. The police came with loaded pistols. [laughter] They asked me which is the room. I told them this is the room. Then, that lady told me, one man, one woman. She was black, the man was also black. They are gone. You know what I was doing interestingly? I was saying, "Why don't we see?" "Come on, forget it. They are gone. They cannot be here. They have so much confidence, they cannot hide anywhere. They are gone." Look at their confidence. So, what I was telling you, I had to deal with this department. [laughter] If I could help them, anybody, I would love to help them. That I did also. I tried.

MA: Were there any other incidents maybe where this kind of culture shock played into it? For example, maybe there was some norm or term you did not know?

AC: Huh?

MA: Some kind of cultural thing in America that you had to learn?

AC: Mohammad there are many, but why to talk of unpleasant things?

MA: So, this job you had at the motel, how long did that last?

AC: Oh, this lasted for about nine months I think. After that I took a course on instrumental analysis. I took it for three months or four months, whatever it was. Then, I was working in accounts in that hotel where my son was there. I was working side by side there.

GR: It was a day job?

AC: Day job. That was a day job.

MA: When you were in Arkansas, maybe even California, were you able to find other Indian immigrants who you could talk to and have friendships with?

AC: Not in California. We didn't get any opportunity, but here, yes. In Little Rock, yes. I would say many people were there. Now just think, in K-Mart we were looking up on things. One Indian family we saw. Then, we started talking here and there. Then, we came to know that man was working in Railways, and then, my wife said, "Do you know that gentleman?" He said, "Who doesn't know him?" Then, she said, "He is my brother. He is my brother and he is in California." He had a good position in Railways, my brother-in-law. So, there were many people. Now you are talking of immigrants. Mohammad listen to us. See all therapists, when they come from India directly to Little Rock, they ask if there is any Indian family, particularly girls. They would say yes there is one family and that was our family. They would come and meet us on the same day or the next day or whatever, and we have seen good times also, because of these therapists and other people.

MA: So it sounds like you formed your own community.

AC: Yes. Ah, now I will give you another example. Now this word community or whatever you may say, what happened was more than one month had passed and we didn't have any friends, nobody even to talk to. In that complex, there were I think more than three hundred flats were there, but we didn't find any Indians. That's beside the point. After one month you know what I did? I took up the directory, looking up our Indian friends to be honest. I contacted many and three people gave the reply. Four, five, one said--I gave my background of BRC and all that. See, I had to tell it otherwise, you know. One was working as a professor in ULR. He said, "Come and meet me." All right that's fine. Another person was an engineer, Mr. Rao. He said, "I'm inviting five or six families. Why don't you join us?" He invited us. He invited us in that way, and then, we said, "We don't have any car to reach your place." He said, "Don't worry. We'll come and pick you." Look at the goodness of those people. We will come and pick you. They came, two people we found, one short and one long. That tall fellow was laughing. He says, "I am Dr. Manjunath and the other one, he is Mr. Rao your host." What happened then,

another person said, "I'm calling you all. Why don't you join us?" Then, we called all those people. So, that's how our group started. So seven, eight people, we came like that, and regarding those therapists, the young boys and girls, they became so much attached to us. They were living seventy miles away from us. One of them told my wife, "We are remembering our mummy. Can we come to you?" We said, "You are most welcome, come on, you come." That's how we have spent our time with these people. In Arkansas we spent good time with these children. Bahut acha, really good.

GR: In California did you have any Hindu temple?

AC: There must be, but somehow we didn't have any opportunity to go there, no.

GR: And in Arkansas?

AC: At Arkansas, no, there was none, not to my knowledge.

MA: So there was not much opportunity to practice your religion?

AC: Religion, by the way Mohammad, you please have a look. Religion is one individual's affair, not to gather. No. You have to conquer yourself. You have to conquer yourself. You what Mandir means? I'll tell you. You know mosque?

MA: Yes.

AC: You know Temple? Temple we call in Hindi Mandir. Mandir means what? I'll tell you. *Mann ke andar*. [Inside oneself] *Theek hai?* [All right?] *Mann ke andar jao*. [Look inside oneself] You listen to me. *Mann ke andar jao*. When you are going you have to conquer that. You have to control that. That is what is Mandir. Mandir is inside, not outside. Outside, you put it, why? With the reason that environment, as soon as you reach there, that environment is created. Good environment is there, that's all, nothing more than that.

MA: How long were in you in Arkansas for?

AC: One and half years. I'll tell you. We came in August. I came in '92 and in 1994 March I came to New Jersey. My son came in August, July or August he came here. My son and my wife also came with him and my daughter, she went to Mississippi. So all these things happened. We were distributed at so many places. My wife and son in Arkansas, my daughter in Mississippi, and myself in New Jersey.

GR: What prompted you to come to New Jersey?

AC: Oh, what happened, I was unhappy there, working in the motel and other places. One of my friends, colleague, old person whom I had known very well from Delhi University, he had his own--he had opened his own company in analysis of asbestos and other things. He offered

me. I called him, "Do you have anything?" He said, "Yes, come." So, I came from there here. He was so good to me Mohammad. He allowed me to stay in his house for fifteen days. *Koi karta hai?* [Does anyone do this?] People don't do it normally, but he did it. I knew him, only at a distance I knew him. I was not very close to him, no. He was two years junior to me, but good enough. He has helped me in need. I can't forget him.

MA: Which area in New Jersey did you come to?

AC: I was in Edison.

MA: Edison, okay.

AC: I came to Edison and in this Edison area I came in '94. From '94 now I think this is that area only, even Monroe, is only fifteen, twenty miles away from Edison, that's all.

MA: So, what was your time like in Edison when you were living there? You were also working, but just in general.

AC: Nine to five I was working. Then, I met other colleagues in the lab, good people, all of them, and one of them I still have contacts with that girl who is well known to us, very good girl, Gujarati girl, very good girl. Here the problem was my wife did that medical assistant course in Arkansas. That company was prepared to give the job there in Arkansas, but we had moved here. Here wherever she would go for a job they would say, "You don't have experience. How can we give you a job?" Wherever she would try, so it was very difficult for us to get that. Then, she had to work in a warehouse. She had to work in the warehouse lifting those [things] which were quite heavy for her. Anyway, she has passed that time now. My son has struggled a lot here, Govindaji. When he was in regular work, studying hours, he was doing that newspaper work in the mornings, pizza delivery, what he was not doing, and during the vacation period, he was working where my wife was working. One small incident I'll tell you. My wife told, "I think that boy must be eighteen years, tall hefty fellow, strong fellow." She said, "Why you don't you help me in putting here to here." He said, "No, I'm tired." And at that time, my son listened to him, listened to her. He left everything there, came running, helped his mother, and took her and went away. Then, my wife said to him, "He is also working, he is not tired. You are tired, fine. He is not tired." These things have happened actually. Then, I'll tell you more interestingly, she worked for a couple of months and after that my son and manger's son, they were studying together in computers. They were studying together and she found out about my son and all that. Then, that manager called her. She was also a lady. She called my wife and said, "What were you doing before in India?" She said, "I was teaching." It means you can do computer work very well. She said, "Yes, I would love to." As soon as she said I would love to, she said, "You come next day in the computer office," and then, she started picking up there, chordiya iska, this was left. Then, she started. The chance was my son's contact with her son and all. See that's what, Mohammad, chance is there in life.

GR: When did you retire here?

AC: All right. 1971, December.

GR: In New Jersey?

AC: Yes.

GR: When did you come here?

AC: '92. Oh, I'm sorry, 2011. I'm sorry. I'm confusing with other thing.

GR: So you worked for nine years here.

AC: From '93, '92 to 2011, you can think how many.

MA: It is about nine years.

AC: How?

GR: '92 to 2001

MA: Yes.

AC: No, 2011.

GR: 2011.

MA: Oh, okay. 2011.

GR: So nine plus ten, nineteen years.

MA: You said were living at this person's house for fifteen days. When were you able to move into your own home?

AC: Then, he, with the help of his own person and other person, got me a small room there, very near his house in Wood Avenue. You know Wood Avenue?

GR: Edison.

MA: In Edison.

AC: Edison, I was living there. Then, as soon as we all came, we moved to a new place. Then, we rented an apartment and all that.

GR: When did you buy your own home?

AC: Oh, that was '97. That was in Finnegan's Lane, Finnegan's Lane. There we got it. That is because of my son, thanks to him. Mohammad, my children have helped me a lot and it is your duty also. You don't mind what I say?

MA: No. Okay, so let us get into the community here at Rossmoor and how you found out about it, how you came here?

AC: Oh, that we were looking for the house. See, what happened, we have been living together with my son. First my daughter took care of us up to '94. '94 she was married. My son-in-law is an Andhra person.

GR: Was it a love marriage?

AC: That story is--I'll talk to you later. No, I'll tell you afterwards.

GR: That's fine.

AC: It's a separate story. We'll talk later.

GR: '94 she got married.

AC: She got married, and then, my son has taken care of me and my wife. Father and mother entirely, we have been always together. Then, in 2013, two years back, the children were growing up, grandchildren. So then we moved here. Then, we were looking for adult center, adult community, and we were looking here, here, here. We looked many places. Then, we found Rossmoor is very good. We stuck here. It was reasonable, it was everything. We came here and settled.

MA: Can you speak a little bit about the community here, some of your experiences with some of the other people maybe?

AC: I would say very good people. We didn't have any bad experience. Very good people here, local people, very good people here. I play table tennis with them. I enjoy with them. I find very good people, and then, when the association was formed, and then, nothing like it. Indian association has been formed.

GR: Indian-American Club.

MA: That was founded by this community here?

GR: No, by the Indians in the community.

AC: By the Indians, yes.

MA: Okay. I guess you have been here for around two years now, maybe going on to three years.

AC: Two and a half.

MA: Two and a half. It's a short time, but how have you seen the community change, people leaving, new people coming in?

AC: Yes, people come and go, it is all right, but it doesn't have any impact on us. What happens, when Indians go to whom we are close, we are affected. Right Govinda? See with whom you are close. If I am close to somebody here, then I am affected.

MA: Okay. That is all my questions for Rossmoor and retirement life. If you have any more questions Govinda?

GR: Your experience with Bhabha Atomic Research Center. Were you proud that you belonged to that institution?

AC: Yes. See what happens, all intellectuals come to one place, irrespective of any promise, irrespective of any other thing.

GR: No regional difference?

AC: No regional, no region, nothing. All people are coming to there. Then, you can talk on excellent topics, what you like, whatever your field is there. For example, see in my own building, one of my friends was there. He wanted to learn painting and what happened was one Maharashtrian in the same building, in our building, he found a Maharashtrian who tried to help him, how to draw, how to paint and everything. He learnt and became a good painter. Sculpture also the same way. Then music, there were places where you could learn music like anything. All intellectual people were together, intellectual, really intellectual.

MA: And how was the environment when you came to Edison and worked here?

AC: It was good. It was my own friend so.

MA: How important was religion to you in your life, when you were young and maybe now?

AC: Why do you ask this?

MA: Just a question.

AC: No, no, this is not a good topic too. I'll tell you why. Mohammad, I may differ from you. You may be having your set views and if they are in contrast you may not like it. See actually, what religion means and what it is meant for, that is the basic question. See in our religion, that religion word is not there. You know that? Dharma is there. That is your responsibilities, duties, they are more important for you. So that'll be different. See, because dharma for me is very good word, and that dharma is an individual duty. He has to perform himself. He has to be a better person and that comes for the masses also, slowly goes to the masses. It will be a different topic.

MA: Okay. Well, that is all I have for my questions, but if you have anything you want to add, something we forgot, maybe we did not talk about enough?

GR: A review about your life

AC: Oh my goodness.

MA: Maybe we missed something?

AC: I have seen many ups and downs in my career. I'll tell you, ups and downs. But my family life has been excellent because of my wife and children. I've been lucky. I've been lucky because of my father and my mother and brothers have been very good. And I came across many people. If I put on the whole, I am a satisfied soul. I am a very lucky person. That's how I'll put it for myself.

MA: Okay, well if there are no other questions I'll conclude the interview. Thank you again for inviting me to your home and participating in the interview.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

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