

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SUDHIR PARIKH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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HIGHLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY

FEBRUARY 20, 2025

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. Sudhir Parikh on February 20, 2025, in Highland Park, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here. I really appreciate it.

Sudhir Parikh: Sure.

SI: Can you begin by telling me where and when you were born?

SP: I was born in Gujarat, India, and the name of the town was Petlad, P-E-T-L-A-D. I was born in 1946, December 28th. We were born in the family of my father, who was a sales tax officer. That's a kind of government position.

We were five brothers and sisters. So, I have one older, elder sister and two younger sisters and one younger brother. We all are [well-educated]. Out of five, four are doctors and one is an engineer. So, our parents had given us a great education back home in India, in those days, in [the] '40s, '50s or '60s, whatever you call it.

Then, I graduated from the medical school, BJ Medical College of Ahmedabad. From there, after becoming MBBS [Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery], I did my post-graduation there in the subject of pediatrics.

Then, in '71, I left India to go to [the] UK. I had my (E-7?) ready to come to the US directly, but I chose to go to [the] UK because I had some nostalgic feeling about the English Empire ruling India for two hundred years. I wanted to go and see and experience [it for] myself.

Luckily, [at] that time, when a WHO [World Health Organization] consultant came to our medical school when I was doing my residency, we worked together with him about some children's vaccination and immunization subject. He was very impressed with me.

He offered me that, if I want to come to England, he will make sure that I will be in one of the best hospital positions. So, I went there. Luckily, with his help--Dr. Brown, his name was Dr. Brown, his help--I got a residency in St. Bartholemew Hospital in London.

St. Bart's was founded [in the] eleventh century by Henry II [(1154-1189)]. So, it was very historical, very prestigious. It's like even more than Harvard, because Harvard has only two hundred years or three hundred years of history, while this one has eleven hundred years of history and is the world's oldest and best medical school and hospital.

In that time, out of six hundred doctors who were working there, including residents and attending, and so forth, consultants, I was the only Asian doctor, was given the position to work there. So, I felt that I'm very privileged and very lucky and very humble. Really, I enjoyed it.

Then, from there, in '75, I came to [the] USA. Then, because I was at St. Bart's, St. Bartholemew Hospital in London, I was sent here [to] a Columbia-affiliated hospital called St. Luke's Hospital in New York City directly.

Usually, when the doctor comes from the outside, they all had to start from year one, but I got year two because of their appreciation about me, where I am coming from, England. So, then, I did two years of residency instead of three years at St. Luke's.

Then, I did my fellowship in asthma, allergy and immunology at New York Medical College, Metropolitan Hospital, in New York City again. I became an allergist.

SI: Why the switch from pediatrics?

SP: No, because allergy is a subspecialty--asthma, allergy and immunology. It's not only allergy, but we are specialized in lung disease, allergy, related allergies, skin allergies, lung allergies, sinus allergy, and immunology, where all the disease starts. That's [the] immunological background.

Because of that background, we are, even right now, a research facility, in [my] Manhattan office. In this office, we do the phase two and phase three study of the [medicines] for all the major drug companies, including we did it with COVID, too, when the COVID vaccine came out, [the] first Moderna vaccine.

So, anyway, I started my private practice in 1980 from Hoboken. [At] that time, in [the] whole [of] Hudson County, I was the only qualified asthma, allergy, immunology specialist. So, I got busy in no time. Then, I thought that, "I want something more than that."

So, I wrote cold letters to sixty-five and above (older), elderly allergists in the State of New Jersey and New York--say about twelve of them, number was twelve of them, I pulled it out from our directory--and said that, "I'm interested in expanding my activities into your area. I would like to acquire your practice, but, after selling, you can continue working as long as you want, as little as you want. The rest of the management and everything, I will do it."

I bought--this is the first practice, where we are sitting, here. This was Dr. Sidney Smith's practice. He was one of the original pioneers in this subject of asthma, allergy and immunology. He was also President of the New Jersey Allergy Society at that time. I'm talking about 1980. Also, he was a well-respected allergist in the whole State of New Jersey.

So, I took over his practice. Then, I took over. Then, I took over another practice in Millburn. That allergist was even [better], another credit to his [talents], that Mrs. Eisenhower, First Lady [Mary "Mamie" Eisenhower], was our patient in that office. So, I took over that practice and, after that, the rest [is] history.

Right now, I own twenty-four practices in New York and New Jersey together, about sixteen [in New Jersey]. I mean, actually, we had eighteen practices, but we combined a couple of practices because of the location. So, right now, we have sixteen practices in the State of New Jersey and [the] remaining in the State of New York, including Manhattan, Long Island, Queens and Westchester.

So, we are the largest asthma, allergy and immunology group in the East Coast owned by one person, one owner. Usually, this kind of a large group, there is more than one partner and owner. I have about 350 doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners, PAs, and other managerial staff, administrative staff, billing staff and all those things. Including all, there are 350 employees under my medical umbrella.

Then, well, you want to ask any questions? Go ahead.

SI: Let me go back to the beginning. Your parents, you said, encouraged you and your brother and sisters to get their degrees and be very active educationally. How far did they go with their educations?

SP: They all became doctors and they all are here.

SI: I meant your parents.

SP: How much they were educated?

SI: Yes.

SP: Okay. My father was an attorney, of course, but, in India, at that time, it [was] easy to get a government position. So, he was working for the government. He was like a sales tax (in charge of the kind of sales tax) commissioner kind of thing, equivalent. So, he was in that position.

He was well-educated at that time. I mean, he was born in 1920. So, when we were born, he was already an attorney and working for the government in a very--what do you call it--executive position.

SI: Had his family always lived in that area?

SP: Yes. His family always lived in that area. His brothers are also all well-educated. One was chairman (regional director, regional chairman) of the bank called (Ecobank?). Then, the other one was also manager of another bank. Then, one brother was in business, personal--I mean private business, by himself. So, the whole family was well-educated and relatively kind of an upper middle-class family.

SI: Did they ever tell you if they were affected by India's independence movement?

SP: Yes. Actually, my one uncle, my father's youngest brother, he's a certified independence freedom fighter, because he took part in the freedom fighting, and then, went to jail for a few months and all those things. There's another, my uncle also, they were part of the freedom fighters. So, they're politically very active.

SI: Was your father involved at all?

SP: Father [was] involved, but indirectly, because he was government, working for [the] government, right. It was the English Government [at] that time. So, he had some restrictions and limitations [on] how much, politically, he can be involved in.

SI: What about your mother's side of the family? What do you know about them?

SP: Yes, my mother is also [well-educated], I mean, at that time. She is still alive. She's 101 years old right now.

SI: Oh, wow.

SP: She lives with me. At that time, she was matriculated. It means (what we call it here) high school, a high school graduate. It [was] something at that time; I'm talking about 1924 and 1920s time in India, not in the USA, in India.

SI: Even in the USA, that was rare.

SP: Yes, it was a big thing. She was also very encouraging [of] us to study hard and be hardworking, be honest. I mean, all this good, whatever, character we have personally came from Father and Mother, obviously. What else? My mother's father was also an attorney. He was not only an attorney, but he was the mayor of the town I was born, Petlad, Gujarat.

He was mayor for twenty years, consecutively. So, he was politically very active and in the community service. So, both sides, our parents and grandparents, they were involved in serving, giving back to the community. That's how, automatically, I learned that.

That's how I acquired the media, and there is a story for that. When I turned sixty, I had a big birthday bash. A lot of Senators, including Frank Pallone and other Congressmen, from New York, Gary Ackerman, and all those people came to my birthday party. Then, also, some gurus, like Pramukh Swami of this--you know the famous temple we have here?

[Editor's Note: Democrat Frank J. Pallone, Jr. (1951-) has represented New Jersey's 6th District in the US House of Representatives since 1993, having previously represented the 3rd District from 1988 to 1993. Democrat Gary L. Ackerman (1942-) represented New York's 5th District in the US House of Representatives from 1993 to 2013, having previously represented the 7th District from 1983 to 1993.]

SI: Yes.

SP: Founder of that temple. Then, there is one guy called Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. He's a big yoga guru from home--I mean from India. He also came on the video and all those people, our prime minister and our president, Prime Minister also sent me the messages, because, by then, that time--this was in 2006--I already was honored by the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

Also, I was honored by the Government of India [with the] NRI Award, Non-Resident Indian Award. Then, after that, of course, I got Padma Shri, which is the highest civilian award in

India, given by the President of India. I was knighted by the King of Malta and with the blessing of the Pope, as you can see in this picture.

[Editor's Note: The Padma Shri was awarded to Dr. Parikh in 2010 by the President of India, Pratibha Patil. In 2012, Dr. Parikh was knighted by the King of Malta into the Ecumenical Hospitaller Order of St. John Knights of Malta.]

SI: Pope Benedict [XVI (2005-13)], yes.

SP: So, all this for my philanthropic work. Can I talk about philanthropy now?

SI: Yes, please.

SP: So, what I was saying then, during that birthday, it was [my] sixtieth birthday, I asked everybody, because I was one of the founding members of the American Association of Physicians from India, called AAPI--also, now, I'm an incoming President of the Global Physicians of Indian Origin.

There are 1.4 million of them outside India, those who studied in India and came out, like me. I'm not counting my children, who are doctors, because they're American graduates. So, I'm leading the 1.4 million Indian doctors outside India in fifty-seven different countries.

Then, also, I kind of donated a lot of philanthropic work to build--just like Robbinsville has a temple, there's another big temple in the Poconos, which is maybe two hundred acres [of] land and everything. I'm the great, grand benefactor of that temple.

Also, I started this Federation of Indian Associations' India Parade in Manhattan forty-two years ago. We started with a small scale and, now, it's the largest India Day parade, to celebrate India's independence, outside India. Usually, it happens on Madison Avenue every third Sunday of the year. Usually, about a couple of hundred thousand people come to watch that parade. That's a real showcase of our Indian culture, heritage, education, our nostalgic past as well as our very bright futures.

As you know, India has forty-five percent young population (below age thirty-five). As we know, even our USA IT companies are really run by (a majority of them) Indians. There are six Indians [that] are CEOs of the very large corporations, as you know, Google and Microsoft and those things.

So, from that birthday party, everybody who came, all these Congressmen, Senators, they all said that I should embrace [the] young generation, Indian American young generation, second generation. So, [the] only way to do [that] is to acquire the media.

In [the] same thing, our Prime Minister back home, Narendra Modi, Mr. Modi also told me the same thing, that, "Acquire media, so [that] we can keep our Government of India's voice and narration to the Western World," because, sometimes, there's a lot of misunderstanding between what's happening in India and how major news outlets interpret here.

[Editor's Note: Narendra Modi (1950-) has served as the Prime Minister of India since 2014. Previously, he held office as the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014.]

So, that was a great service. So, I'm giving great service to not only [the] community here, I'm now only the largest media, called Parikh Worldwide Media. We have a twenty-four/seven regular channel called ITV Gold. We have a TV production studio in Edison.

Also, we have four newspapers, three in English every week; we are in print as well as in a digital version. We also have one [in] Gujarati, in our own mother tongue. This is very popular in North America. Our TV has almost thirty million viewers. So, it's really successful.

This is purely my philanthropic work to the community, give back to the community and connect the young generation to India and Indian cultures. So, they can have not only food and tradition of India, but they should have a love for India, so [that] they can help India, [the] Motherland, in the future. Shall I go ahead, continue?

SI: Yes, please.

SP: So, in the '80s, '90s and 2000s, I was very much involved in the US-India relation. I was the one who was a driving force, because, at that time, I was leading one organization called Indo-American Forum for Political Education. Its main goal was to empower [the] young generation to [join] the government, working here.

So, we used to give an internship, with our own money, of mine, a few of my friends, and put them in a summer internship in the Congressman and Senator's offices. Now, with that kind of internship, we have 350 Indian American children (I mean second generation) working as staff in Capitol Hill. So, it's a great contribution.

Because of all this contribution, Frank Pallone, and there was another Congressman, Gary Akerman, Congressman Ackerman from Queens, we convinced them to start the India Caucus in Capitol Hill, in the US Congress.

Because, [at] that time, in the '80s, I mean, India was not a very favorable country for the US-India relation. So, we turned around everything, with the help of the community and the community fundraising, and so forth. They started in '92, [the] India Caucus in [the] US Congress, and, now, is the second-largest caucus in US Congress next to the Black Caucus.

So, that shows that whatever little seats, whatever we did, in early '90s, because of the India Caucus, now, you can see that we have over 180 to 200 Congressmen. They're members of the India Caucus.

So, it's a great help to the Government of India, because [if] any resolution (any concern) comes between the US and India, either with economic trade or it could be social trade or it could be a geopolitical problem, those 180 people are very sympathetic to us, because they understand the

reality--what's India, what India wants to do, what is the strength of India and what is the power of India. So, I feel that I did a great service to the country back home and the community here.

Now, as you know, we are the highest-per-capita income community--we even surpassed the Jewish community. That shows that our brothers and sisters are really very hardworking, very sincere, well-educated and ready to deliver wherever they're working. Even though they are from India, I'm from India, but USA is my--what do you call that? We call it *Karma Bhoomi*. It means, "Is where I live, I work and I raise my family."

So, my loyalty and my commitment has to be [to the] betterment of the USA and, also, secondary, [to] help the US-India relation. That way, my mother country also gets some advantage of me being [American] and my contribution here. So, that's my philosophy.

SI: It all started with the Forum.

SP: Forum, yes, [Indian]-American Forum for Political Education.

SI: What was the impetus for that?

SP: What was the agenda?

SI: How did the original idea come about?

SP: Original idea, because, [at] that time, there was a lot of [dissatisfaction]. Our community felt that they were kind of a little short-handed. I mean, they had a little--not discrimination, but not favoritism--whenever they went for a job or they went for something, because people here didn't know them well, the culture. They didn't know all these things, right. So, that's why they were kind of [discontented].

So, [we wanted] to help them, to educate them, that the education is most important. Once you have education, how to approach them when you go for an interview or when you go for some government work, that was our main thing.

Then, empower the second generation, young generation--that's why we started that internship. That internship, which turned out to be a lot of [success], as I said, about over three hundred people, young generation now, even today's date, they're working in Capitol Hill at different levels, including the President's Office. As you can see, that Ramaswamy was part of Trump's [circle], that MAGA group.

[Editor's Note: Vivek Ramaswamy, founder of Roivant Sciences, ran as a Republican candidate for President in the 2024 race before withdrawing and endorsing Donald Trump. He was running for Governor of Ohio at the time of the interview.]

SI: Oh, yes.

SP: That, to cut back the [government spending]...

SI: The DOGE [Department of Government Efficiency].

SP: Yes, right, right. So, I mean, he's a second generation. He's only fifty, in [his] forties or fifties, I think. He's not that old. He happens to be the son-in-law of my very close physician friend, Dr. [Ash] Tewari. So, this is what our whole goal was, that.

Then, [the] second thing, I have another NGO called Life Global. Life Global, we have built, in the last fifteen years, 108 primary schools in India, in the rural part of India--not one, two, but 108--by raising the funds here from our community.

They're very successful businessmen, doctors or engineers, but they want to now give some memories to their own hometown back home. So, they donate. Then, whatever they donate, we match one-to-one dollar from our NGO and build the schools there. We did 108 schools in the last fifteen years and, still, we are continuing [to] do that.

Of course, as a physician, through our American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, as well as, right now, I'm the incoming President of the Global Physicians of Indian Origin, which has 1.4 million Indian doctors, we are doing the continuing medical education, twice a month, every month, for the last fifteen years. Almost all the doctors, young doctors from India as well as outside India, they come online to learn new developments in the different subjects of medicine.

Of course, during COVID time, we sent a lot of help to India, like oxygen concentrate, ventilators, even physically--doctors went there, under our banner, and helped the people [in] the COVID pandemic. So, these are the things our Global Physicians of Indian Origin is doing. Of course, we also make sure that we protect all of our Indian doctors' interest in the USA.

SI: One of the things we want to do is get a sense of the culture you grew up in, but, also, learn what you want to pass on to the next generation. Could you tell me a little bit about--you grew up in a Gujarati household--what that means, in terms of what holidays you celebrate, and so on?

SP: Yes. It means, obviously, when I was growing up, I would say fifty years, sixty years ago, when I was a child (I mean a young fellow), Gujarati culture is a very close-knit family culture. We always respect our elders, our uncles, aunts. We always help each other.

Our faith is [the] Hindu faith. So, we were always told to go to the temple at least once a week, or even more, take part in the temple activities, both religious as well as philanthropic activities. That's how, I think, I learned, from those teachings when I was in high school or school.

Still, I'm doing it, after I came here. I left India in '71 and today is 2025, so, it's almost seventy-five years and I'm still active. That's why I started my media group, to empower my second generation. Both the children are doctors.

My daughter is with me as an asthma, allergy, immunology [specialist] and she administers all my New York (ten offices) practices. My son is a retinal specialist. He's in Manhattan. He's

also a Harvard graduate. My daughter is a graduate from the Cleveland Clinic. So, they both are well-educated, followed me; I'm sure they followed watching me, what I'm doing [with] it. They're also very active, involved, not only in medicine, but in the philanthropic work, too.

SI: I was curious why you left India in 1971.

SP: No, because I became an MD in 1969--one minute.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SP: Say it again--okay, yes, why '71? Because I'd just, at that time, graduated from the medical school. Then, I did three years of residency. That was finished in '71, because, in that time, my thinking was very clear, that I want to go out and help my country, mother country, either coming back or indirectly, as I'm doing right now, through my Global Physicians of Indian Origin as well as the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, and so forth.

So, '71, I finished training there and that's why it's '71 I left. [At] that time, luckily, I met that consultant, Dr. Brown from England, WHO consultant who came to our Ahmedabad City. He was very impressed with my work with him [over] one year. He was there for one year, for this immunization project in Gujarat.

So, I got an opportunity. So, I let go of coming to the USA first and I went to England. There, also, I [was] really lucky to be in St. Bartholemew's Hospital as a resident, and then, stayed there until '75. Then, in '75, I came here.

SI: It sounds like you were able to hit the ground running when you came to the US, in terms of your work and, eventually, building up your many practices.

SP: Right.

SI: Do you think there was anything in your background that enabled you to do that?

SP: Yes, yes. I mean, I started my practice myself in Hoboken, first practice. After that, at that time--these private equities are acquiring practices now, in the last ten, fifteen, twenty years--but I started acquiring practices in '80, forty-five years ago. [At] that time, I'm not an MBA, nobody taught me or advised me how to do acquisitions and mergers, right.

Then, this is my own idea, because, once I got so busy in Hoboken, I thought, "Now, what am I going to do? I have to do something more," because, otherwise, I mean, of course, you make a good living and everything, but you are not growing. That's why this idea came [to me].

I acquired all these practices without even borrowing any money from the bank, just signing a personal guarantee on everything, of course, one practice after another practice. When somebody [retires], even today, people are calling me to acquire their practices, because I have forty-five years of history of acquiring practices and running [them] very ethically and very

successfully. That creates a big reputation in our community--I mean the allergy community, not only our community, but allergy community.

Also, I was honored to be a member of the State Board of Medical Examiners, which is a New Jersey licensing board for doctors.

SI: Yes.

SP: I was appointed by Christie Whitman, Governor Christie Whitman, from '93 to '97 and, again, by Governor Chris Christie in 2003 to 2007. So, I was honored twice to be a member of the licensing board. The first time when I was on, in '93, when Christie Whitman appointed me, I was the first Indian American to become a member of a state board of medical examiners. I think it's a great honor.

[Editor's Note: Christine "Christie" Todd Whitman (1946-), a Republican, served as Governor of New Jersey from 1994 to 2001. Christopher James "Chris" Christie (1962-), a Republican, served as Governor of New Jersey from 2010 to 2018.]

SI: What are the challenges in taking on that kind of responsibility?

SP: Well, of course, the time, because, [at] that time, I was in the very thick of my own practice and acquiring more practices, seeing the patients, working forty-five, fifty hours a week. Then, out of that, I had to take out sometimes a whole day to go to Trenton and help them to [decide issues].

We have ([as] one of the sixteen board members) all the complaints, all the good doing or bad doing of the doctors or their practices. We have to resolve that, [provide] a solution--complaints, other unethical things or illegal things some doctors are doing--so that all those things, we are doing.

So, there's a lot of homework, too, to read those things and [focus on] this problem to solve--and, at the height of the practice, to take out one full day to go to Trenton for a board meeting. So, all the time involved and energy involved, but it was very, very fulfilling, very rewarding. I felt very honored.

SI: A similar question--how were you able to maintain your practice while also starting these media companies?

SP: Yes, because, see, I started a media company in 2008 when I acquired some media company (a TV channel as well as newspapers) from the previous owner. I just took all their staff with me. Those are dedicated people; still, they're working for me. We have almost eighteen hundred people working for [our] media.

Of course, I have to [manage things]. I mean, just now, I was talking, while you're here, it was a question about media. So, I was answering that. So, I'm very good at doing multitasking and I always believe that there is always time. It doesn't matter how busy you are.

So, right now, I have these twenty-four practices, 350 medical employees working for me, seeing a lot of patients. We see, every day almost, between all the offices, over a thousand patients every day, though I don't see [them] myself, but I'm monitoring them and watching them and doing their administrative work, right, billing and their HR work and all those things.

I have good help and I always believe in good help. Luckily, I'm blessed, because most of my help is here over twenty, twenty-five years, they're with me. That shows that I always have very good, respectable interpersonal relations with all my employees, including doctors.

SI: What has been the biggest challenge with the media?

SP: Yes, my biggest challenge right now is, as you know, that media thing is changing. A lot of people are going on to [some] kind of digital media, a lot of streaming media, right--what do you call it?

SI: Streaming.

SP: Yes, streaming media, but we are now up-to-date with our time. We are the only media left. Before COVID, we had a few other media [competitors], but they all shut down because of the COVID. They could not survive. I survived because I pumped my medical profit into the media, in order to keep my media going, because I believe that that's the only way to empower the second generation.

If I stop my media, then, our Indian community of five million people, the young generation, does not have any idea what is [there], because [my] media not only delivers political viewpoint or information, but, also, gives cultural information, celebration of the different holidays and how to be part of the celebration of the other faiths, celebrate holidays.

I mean, our media always encouraged Indian Jewish holidays, Indian Christian holidays. So, our children should know that all religions are as equal and we should be part of celebrating all the holidays wherever you can. That gives you a lot of social and cultural education about everybody.

SI: What about your newspapers, since newspapers have been folding generally in the US?

SP: Newspaper is a very challenging thing, but, still, we are surviving from 2008 to now. So, it means almost, what, fifteen to seventeen years? I mean, I survived because I'm putting my own money into [it], the monetary backing of my medical income.

I believe that, see, you cannot leave a legacy just as a good doctor only, because, once you stop practicing, people forget you, eventually. This kind of community service, to highlight the community, highlight the community culture, highlight the community interactions and highlight the community's interaction with the other communities and their growth, that's the legacy.

There's two different things. Being a successful doctor, personally, is one thing and [to] leave the legacy for our community is the second thing. So, even if I'm gone, after I'm gone, I'm sure my media will be remembered, because it is a perpetual kind of service to the community. Now, because of my media, we have a studio here in Edison in Oak Tree Road. We have a production studio, we have an auditorium there, three-hundred-seater.

Everyone, even from India, Hollywood, Bollywood, all the actresses, singers, they all come to our studio, because they want to get exposed to the Indian community or South Asian community--not only Indian, South Asian community, because the South Asians are our clients, not only Indian, but Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Caribbeans, because they all were Indian origin originally. So, it's a great service. That's why we have this kind of big viewership.

Even Government of India, we have an MOU [memorandum of understanding] with them that, every day, we are showing Government of India [news]. There's a national channel called Doordarshan and Doordarshan's English news and Hindi news [airs] every day here. So, at least the Western World should have a good education about Indian Government narration, what they're doing, why they're doing [it] and whatnot, to have a better understanding between the East and West.

I think media is challenging, but I think I feel very, very honored and privileged to serve my community through the media. Now, not only do we have print media, but we have digital media, too. Every week, we have four e-papers. Each newspaper we have, three English and one Gujarati, they all have a full e-paper. You can flip the pages.

We have, of course, our portal and we have our cameramen all over the Tri-State area and even from other parts of the country. They feed us all the [news], what's happening in the Indian community or their community there in Atlanta, California, everywhere. So, I think I feel very lucky that I started this thing.

I can really [see a] very tangible thing I'm giving back to [the] community, on top of my 108 primary schools. I did it in India. As President of the Global Physicians of Indian Origin, I'm helping the young doctors in India and here. We are taking, almost every year, two to three times, a delegation to India with the doctors [to] do free service there in India, surgery and everything, like ophthalmic surgery, orthotic surgery. We are doing those kinds of things.

Plus, we are encouraging even medical tourism to India, where people who are not well-to-do here in our community, who do not have good insurance coverage, they can go to India and get (more or less) similar treatment to what they get here with one-tenth of the expense. That's what we are helping them to find, identify good doctors back home, because we are [able to] through our Global Physicians of Indian Origin platform.

So, then, what else? Also, I was part of the US-India nuclear deal. I was helping one of the Indian American leaders [in] our embassy here and government to make the deal happen, because this was during President George Bush's time [2001-2009]. In 2008, we did it, this

thing, [made it a] reality, the US-India nuclear deal. For that, I was given all this national and international recognition from my Government of India.

[Editor's Note: The US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement began with a 2005 framework in which India agreed to separate its civilian and military nuclear programs and place civilian facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency oversight in exchange for US support for full civil nuclear cooperation. The pact became law with the signing of the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Non-proliferation Enhancement Act in October 2008.]

In Ellis Island here, I got the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2005 for my philanthropy activity. At that time, they selected five names, because that was the silver jubilee year, 2005, for the renovation of the Ellis Island by [then Chairman of the Chrysler Corporation] Lee Iacocca, if you remember.

SI: Yes.

SP: So, they selected five names out of that year; it was ninety already. Those names went into the entrance of the museum there, the immigration museum. My name is there. I was lucky; my name, out of ninety, it came out. So, that name is there. That's a real honor to my community and it'll stay there forever, as long as Ellis Island is there.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit more about your work with the Bush Administration?

SP: Yes, Bush Administration, at that time, we had this Indo-American Forum for Political Education, was very active. We were involved in voter registration, getting people to vote and [getting] people to be politically active, because I always believe that unless you [are] a part of the mainstream politics--I mean political involvement, not politics, is not a good word, but political involvement--you cannot claim your piece of pie.

So, to me, you have to be part of wherever you are living and part of that political process and get involved in it. Then, you can get what you aspire for or what you are expecting from that country. We had a lot of examples from the Africa/Idi Amin time. He expelled a lot of Indian businessmen from Africa, right. They all came here. I went a couple of times, a few places.

[Editor's Note: In August 1972, Ugandan President Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of the country's Indian minority, initially targeting British subjects of South Asian origin before expanding it to include citizens of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and even some Ugandan citizens of South Asian descent. The move, affecting around eighty thousand people, was justified by Amin as a way to return Uganda to ethnic Ugandans amid rising anti-Indian sentiment and accusations of disloyalty and economic dominance.]

So, that's why our main goal is to empower this young generation, that, "Don't just come here and work and make a little money, but the whole idea is to get involved in the community, involved in the country's political process. Then, you can be [a participant] and helpful to them. Then, you will be recognized properly." That was our goal of the whole thing.

Then, during [the] Bush time, myself and other of my friends, those who were [of the] Republican kind of thinking, we started the Indo-American National Republican Council to support the Republican philosophy or thinking (or whatever we call it). Then, of course, during the George Bush time, we did that US-India nuclear deal in 2008. Then, I traveled with President Obama twice to India as a delegate.

[My] first time, his visit in [the] year 2000, where [it was] the first time President Clinton went to India as the President; I was there because I was a part of the community leaders. Then, again, I went with President Clinton to India when there was a big earthquake [that] happened in our state, Gujarat, in 2003 [January 26, 2001], about an eight [on the] Richter scale, very bad.

So, with the President, Clinton came with us to the Gujarat. Under his chairmanship leadership, we raised fifty million dollars at that time, from Silicon Valley, from the New York area and everything, and gave it to the State of Gujarat. I mean, I had the privilege to spend time with him for at least four days total in Gujarat. We went to the earthquake-ridden areas and everything with President Clinton.

Second time, I went as a delegate with President Obama. So, in 2010, President Obama went to India because, at that time, he wanted to open up the Indian consumer market for US goods. That was the main agenda at that time in 2010.

I feel myself very privileged and lucky to be traveling with two Presidents, not one, and helping the two Democratic Presidents and one Republican President. So, really, without any differentiation of whether [they were] Democrat or Republican, I helped three Presidents directly or indirectly, in small form.

SI: Do you find that most of the issues you try to deal with have a lot of bipartisan support?

SP: Yes, yes. That's the whole idea. I mean, our first thinking when we convinced Congressman Frank Pallone and Gary Ackerman of New York to start the India Caucus, that was the whole idea, because we thought that [it would help] in order to get our community a better atmosphere to grow here, as well as to help our motherland, because in the '70s and '80s was different.

So, we experienced that twenty years [of negative images]. That's how we started convincing these Congressmen to form the caucus, where they can get together and help us, our country and our community.

SI: I know, in the '70s and '80s, there was even physical violence against Indian Americans.

SP: Yes, that, and, also, there was a lack of better education about India. See, everybody doesn't know everything, right--only a few people know everything, worldwide. [laughter] So, I think [it was] because of lack of education, lack of awareness--not education, but awareness.

We used to go to *The New York Times*' editorial office, a few times, because, [at] that time, they were showing India with a [photo of a] poor lady sleeping on the sidewalk, with the cows next to it, something like that. I mean, I'm just giving you one example.

We'd always say, at that time, to even the entire board of [*The*] *New York Times*, that, "India is not what you are showing here. India has a lot of very great culture, great education. There's a lot of well-educated people." Even Nobel Prize people, in the old days, were there. So, Rabindranath Tagore, he got his Nobel Prize in the '30s, 1930s sometime.

[Editor's Note: Rabindranath Tagore earned the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature.]

So, India, we had to educate people about India (or any other country), because, sometimes, we have the wrong impression because we don't know about that country.

SI: Let me just pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SP: You just ask me a question, whatever remaining questions you have.

SI: I want to know about your work with the Hospitallers of Malta. How did that come about?

SP: Which one?

SI: Your work with the--I forget the name of the saint--but the Maltese...

SP: The Malta?

SI: Yes.

SP: Oh, Malta. I think you know that, in the world, only two people can give the knighthood; one is the King of England or the King of Malta, because Malta, as you know, in the eleventh century, they were very active in helping during the Crusades in Europe, Western Europe.

SI: Yes.

SP: Jerusalem and everything was involved at that time. So, somebody must have nominated my name by looking at my philanthropic work, because, at that time, we were rehabilitating the people in India, the poorest of the poor, those who used to live in the small huts. A hut didn't have even an aluminum roof, is all made out of some tree thing. The five, six kids are with the family, living in very poor conditions.

So, I tried to help some, [with] a couple of NGOs in India, to rehabilitate them into the permanent residence. [Because of that] and, plus, other of my philanthropy activity, I got selected by the King of Malta to be knighted. Of course, that was in 2012.

So, I would like to give you that book. So, that will give you a complete idea of the whole thing, of fifty years of work.

SI: What have you found most rewarding in your life and your philanthropy?

SP: I think the most rewarding is, I always believe that because I came from a very humble background myself--when I came to this country, I came with only eight dollars in pocket because, [at] that time, the Government of India did not have a foreign reserve. Well, of course, I had an MD, medical degree. That was a plus to me, myself, but I've found that, always, everybody should never forget their past, never forget who helped you, always respect.

While going up, there are so many people [that] helped me, even personally. For example, Dr. Brown, I mean, he didn't know me from anywhere. He came to my medical school and I worked with him. He [was] impressed and he just offered me to come to England. So, that's a kind of luck, in a sense, or not luck only, but my good work and luck.

Then, from there, when I came here, instead of starting from the internship, they gave me a second-year residency at Columbia. So, that shows--that is also because I worked at St. Bartholomew Hospital--how the one thing takes to the other thing.

Then, when I started my practice, I did not have any economics background, I didn't have any MBA degree, there's no advisor to me, I had no money. I'm the only resource of money myself, whatever practice I have. I created the largest allergy/immunology practice in the country, owned by one person.

So, I always believe that, "Always remember where you came from, what kind of humble background you came from, how many people helped you to come up. Never forget those people who helped you, doesn't matter how successful you are."

Then, you must try to give back to the society in different ways. As you can see, I built the temple here, the village temple in the Poconos. Then, I started this FIA parade, just to give Indian culture a boost, right. Then, also, [I am] part of the senior advisors to the American Association of the Physicians of Indian Origin, AAPI; now, I'm an incoming President of GAPIO, Global Physicians of Indian Origin, which is an umbrella organization in fifty-seven different countries.

So, medically, plus, we built 108 schools through our NGO and, plus, the media. [At] my own expense, I maintain and sustain that media, because I strongly believe that if you don't empower your second generation, that community cannot thrive in the future.

SI: Very good, thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

SP: Thank you, all right.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/12/2025
Reviewed by Sudhir Parikh 5/20/2025