

FHS Oral History Project – Surabhi Adesh

Description:

Surabhi Adesh was born in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India, in 1965. Her father received a position with the Indian High Commission to teach Hindi music and culture in the West Indies and report on the broader conditions of the Indian diaspora in that region. As a result, in 1966, when Surabhi was around a year old, the family moved to Trinidad. In 1967, her father established the Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan Institute, also known as the Institute of Indian Knowledge, with a mission to reacquaint the Indian diaspora in Trinidad with Hindi culture through music, philosophy, and history. At eleven years old, Surabhi assisted her father in the Institute, teaching musical classes. In 1981, Surabhi and her family moved to Toronto, Canada, to expand the Institute's reach, highlighting the contributions they made in that region and the similarities and differences encountered while engaging with the Indian community in both areas. Surabhi also discussed her personal experiences through that comparative lens between both places. Financial difficulties prompted Surabhi and her family to relocate from Toronto to Orlando, Florida, in 1999. Upon arrival, Surabhi maintained her father's legacy of teaching Indian music and knowledge through classes she held mainly at her house. Her involvement with the Asian Cultural Association facilitated this educational endeavor. Surabhi discussed her performances throughout Orlando, her teaching methods, her impact on the Indian community in Orlando, and what she learned about Indians and Orlando through her teaching career. Additionally, she highlighted the significance of maintaining Indian culture, both generally and specifically, through her pedagogy, especially in the face of what she called a "dilution" of culture generationally. Lastly, she shared her broader observations about Florida, including the state's continuities and changes over the past quarter-century, as well as the challenges it faces in the contemporary moment (c. 2025).

Transcription:

00;00;04 - 00;00;22

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Surabhi Adesh on May 16th, 2025, at Surabhi's home residence in Orlando, Florida for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project? Can you please restate your name, date of birth and where you were born?

00;00;22 - 00;00;30

SURABHI ADESH: Yeah, my name is Surabhi Adesh. I was born in India on November 23rd, 1965.

00;00;30 - 00;00;50

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So, you were just telling me right before we started recording, how you were born in India, but when you were around one year old, you already left. So my question would be, did your parents ever pass down their stories or their experiences in India?

00;00;50 - 00;01;02

SURABHI ADESH: Oh, yes. Yes, they did. They passed down a lot of stories, which is really important for us to know our history and heritage.

00;01;02 - 00;01;09

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Did your parents experience the Partition in 1947?

00;01;09 - 00;01;11

SURABHI ADESH: Yes. Yes.

00;01;11 - 00;01;14

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Can you share with me a little bit more about that.

00;01;14 - 00;01;57

SURABHI ADESH: Well, they were both kind of young at that time, but they had very vivid memories of protests and rallies and riots and things like that and a lot of unrest. And so, yeah, they shared a lot of those stories. They were actually also part of—just before I was born, 1965, where there was unrest in India like there is now—and they were part of that. And they were actually living in Kashmir. And my mom had to move. She was expecting me. So, yeah, they have shared a lot of stories about those times.

00;01;57 - 00;02;01

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And where specifically were you born? In India?

00;02;01 - 00;02;07

SURABHI ADESH: I was born in Bareilly, in Uttar Pradesh.

00;02;07 - 00;02;15

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And so what were the circumstances that led your family to leave India in 1966?

00;02;15 - 00;04;13

SURABHI ADESH: Okay, so my father, he got a position with the Indian High Commission as—and I do not recall what it started stands for ICC, our Indian cultural relations or something like that—because he was very qualified to come to the West Indies to teach Hindi and music and just kind of report on the situation of the Indian diaspora in that part of the world. So we moved, he, my mother, my father, my brother, myself. We went to Trinidad and what they witness there was a group of people who had held on tenaciously to their culture, and not so much the language, in speaking, but they understood a lot. And they had so much love for India and my parents both being very qualified, they just felt that they need to help them reacquaint themselves, and they decided to work. So, I will just tell you a quick bit about that. So my father established an institution in Trinidad, which is still going fifty eight years later, next year their sixtieth anniversary, in which he taught Hindi, music, philosophy, everything Indian culture, all for free. And so his work—and at that time they had just gotten independence. So people were scattered. They did not have a direction and a purpose. So it was a long history of that. And, yeah, that was why we left India.

00;04;13 - 00;04;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And for you personally, what was it like growing up in Trinidad?

00;04;19 - 00;04;53

SURABHI ADESH: It was great. I did not know any different. And the truth is, our home was India because my parents spoke very high class Hindi. I never heard colloquial Hindi until I went back to India. And they were always in education and teaching. So people came by us to experience India. So I did not feel like anything was different.

00;04;53 - 00;04;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Even in school, when you went to school in Trinidad?

00;04;57 - 00;05;44

SURABHI ADESH: No, it was wonderful because Trinidad has an amazing school system. They have Hindu schools, they have Catholic schools, Islamic schools, all types of schools. So my elementary was at a Hindu school and then I started high school there, I went to a Catholic school. And at the time it was great. People really co-existed well. And our institute was open to everybody, so it was not like a Hindu thing or an Islamic thing or, it was Indian culture. So we had all kinds of people. So it was a great upbringing.

00;05;44 - 00;05;50

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you shared what your father did. What did your mom do specifically within [the institute]?

00;05;50 - 00;06;56

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. So she taught also. In those days, all the ladies would come to her, and she taught them. And then she also had a big hand in spreading Indian food, like Indian recipes and a lot of things that she kind of had to improvise because you moved so far away, and in those days, we did not have all the groceries and all the things. And, so in terms of food, in terms of clothing, because our school—the both of them insisted that people try to wear Indian clothing, so they kind of created a market. So now there are lots of stores and lots of trade centers. So that was kind of my mom's contribution. And she was always supporting him basically.

00;06;56 - 00;07;01

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How long did you stay in Trinidad?

00;07;01 - 00;07;20

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. We moved from Trinidad officially in 1981, but we go back all the time, like every year for activities that our institute has. But physically, in 1981.

00;07;20 - 00;07;44

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And, before kind of going to the next place, you mentioned how the institute that your father created still exists, going on to their sixtieth year, which is impressive. From your perspective, what other contributions did your family make in Trinidad for the Indian diaspora, Indian culture?

00;07;44 - 00;09;02

SURABHI ADESH: Oh, so other than language and music. And then I talked about, like creating a market for Indian products, Indian food, Indian clothing. What they did, which not

specifically for Indians, they really encouraged education. So the first generation that came, a lot of them never had the opportunity to further their education. But with coming to our classes and my father was very big on exams. We did exams from India, Indian institutes from London University. And the encouragement to have the next generation always “educate yourself, educate yourself.” In all different fields. I mean, including Indian knowledge, which was really more for an identity. And later on he taught like from beginners level to masters level, all subjects. So kind of nudging towards just becoming better people.

00;09;02 - 00;09;05

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what was the name of the institute?

00;09;05 - 00;09;11

SURABHI ADESH: Oh, Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan, which means Institute of Indian Knowledge.

00;09;11 - 00;09;35

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Excellent. For the record. And did you ever ask your father, or did he ever express it explicitly, like, why? Like what was his motivation to pursue that, to establish an institute to educate.

00;09;35 - 00;10;29

SURABHI ADESH: Well, back in India, both my parents were very heavily involved in social work, and they were both educators and back to the earlier questions you asked with the situation of unrest that they went through, they were very much into helping people. And then they came all these thousands of miles away and saw these people that were thirsty to learn and to relate back, connect back with India. And that just touched their hearts, and they stayed and then the High Commission kept extending their contract, which is quite unusual. So he worked with them for ten years.

00;10;29 - 00;10;40

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: That is incredible. So you said you left Trinidad in 1981. So where did you go?

00;10;40 - 00;10;43

SURABHI ADESH: We went to Toronto, Canada.

00;10;43 - 00;10;48

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And for you, at this point in your life, you were entering college?

00;10;48 - 00;11;14

SURABHI ADESH: I was in high school. The equivalent would be just like grade eleven. The whole system is different—British system [than] the North American system. So, yeah, when I came to Toronto, I did a combination of grade eleven and grade twelve. And those days there was a grade thirteen too.

00;11;15 - 00;11;22

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Wow. And did your father continue his education mission in Toronto?

00;11;22 - 00;11;45

SURABHI ADESH: Yeah. We started the institute there also. His motto was learn and teach. So anywhere anybody was qualified. So he would say “just teach.” So he had students all over the world. And wherever they went, they would just share what they got.

00;11;45 - 00;11;47

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And your mom as well continued her work?

00;11;47 - 00;11;47;

SURABHI ADESH: Yep. Oh yeah.

00;11;48 - 00;11;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How similar or different was their work in a different location in Toronto?

00;11;57 - 00;12;46

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. That is a very interesting question. It was different in that Toronto or any big city, the population is diffused. It is like all over. And to reach people was a little harder, and you really had to go out to different places, different events or different temples to actually meet people. In Trinidad, there everywhere. It was like a little India basically. But word of mouth works really well.

00;12;46 - 00;12;55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, absolutely. After high school, you entered college? What did you study?

00;12;55 - 00;13;01

SURABHI ADESH: I have a degree in biology, first degree in biology. Yeah.

00;13;01 - 00;13;04

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Why did you select that field?

00;13;04 - 00;13;07

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. It was a precursor to medicine.

00;13;07 - 00;13;09

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah.

00;13;09 - 00;13;57

SURABHI ADESH: And, but I have been in the music and everything that my parents did from like, really since I was born and the syllabus that he had for the bachelors course, I finished that when I was twelve. So when I was eleven, that was in Trinidad, he said, “okay, now you need to start teaching.” So here I was, this little eleven year old kid trying to get all these older people, but they listened because when you talk about music, it was what you can

do rather than how old you are that speaks. But that was his way of pushing me to continue his mission kind of thing.

00;13;57 - 00;14;02

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So while you were studying biology, you still...?

00;14;02 - 00;14;18

SURABHI ADESH: Yeah. Well, we had our school in Toronto. So it was equally, I had to study and teach and then we were performing from very young. So you had to keep up all of that.

00;14;18 - 00;14;20

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what did you perform specifically?

00;14;20 - 00;14;45

SURABHI ADESH: I sing. I play sitar, and I had to learn basically a little bit of everything because my father insisted, if you have to teach, you have to know what you are teaching. And so, the tabla, all the major divisions of music. Because like if he was out of town, we had to run the school.

00;14;45 - 00;14;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was your favorite performance from that time if you recall?

00;14;52 - 00;15;17

SURABHI ADESH: Wow. I would think that when somebody called me to do an entire concert by myself, that was exciting. I was not part of a group presenting. It was me. And I got to choose the music, choose musicians. And it was at York University. I do not remember the year.

00;15;17 - 00;15;18

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: That was going to be my next question.

00;15;19 - 00;15;31

SURABHI ADESH: It would be—okay. I can make a guess. It would be probably around '84. Probably around there. Yeah. So that was exciting.

00;15;31 - 00;15;36

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What university did you attend?

00;15;36 - 00;15;3

SURABHI ADESH: University of Toronto.

00;15;37 - 00;15;43

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Once you graduated from the University of Toronto. What did you do?

00;15;43 - 00;17;01

SURABHI ADESH: Well before I graduated, I got married. I enjoyed life. And I have two sons. They were both born in Toronto. My marriage was an arranged marriage, and my husband's from Trinidad, so my parents knew the family. Actually, I knew the family. Everybody except him. And I trusted my parents implicitly, for whatever checks they did or whatever. So we have been married almost thirty seven years now. And so I had two sons and, we moved to Florida in 1999. So that was about eighteen years in Canada. So I continued the school. I mean, that was what I was doing the same thing teaching, performing. And, by that time my, my father was not in Toronto so much anymore. So I had to try to hold everything together.

00;17;01 - 00;17;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what brought you to Florida?

00;17;08 - 00;17;45

SURABHI ADESH: The weather? Well, no, my father had intended to move to Florida a long time before that. And so we had gotten all our papers for here, and so it was an opportunity to come and resettle and retry—things had gotten difficult in Toronto, like just, financially and we said, “Let's try it here.”

00;17;45 - 00;17;56

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And where some of those struggles in Toronto, like, ethnically or politically?

00;17;56 - 00;18;50

SURABHI ADESH: Well, okay, so interesting that you say that. Yeah, there have been things, you know go up and down sometimes. The communal there was always pulling and tugging and the it comes, and it goes, the time Indira Gandhi was assassinated was a really tense time for years. Things come and go. I mean, it was not as bad as it is now. But that was not a factor in us moving. It was definitely there, and it did affect like where you shopped or where you went basically. But I mean it was manageable.

00;18;50 - 00;18;55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And once you arrived here in Florida in 1999, was it Orlando?

00;18;55 - 00;18;59

SURABHI ADESH: Yes. It was Orlando.

00;18;59 - 00;19;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you did you continue school?

00;19;03 - 00;19;17

SURABHI ADESH: Not immediately. You mean like my studies? No. Not immediately. I came and started to do the same work I have been doing all my life: teaching music.

00;19;17 - 00;19;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And how did you do that specifically in Orlando?

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SURABHI ADESH: Okay, well. My father knows a lot of people, and a lot of people know him. He is a legendary. And he pointed us to some people, and he said, “go talk to them.” And really word of mouth. But my brother had been living here for a while before—my brother and his wife moved—and they were also teaching. But really word of mouth, and then we went to different communities. Turned out a lot of people know my husband's family. They were also very prominent in Trinidad, so that we got to know more people. And even now I do not advertise, it was just really referrals and word of mouth.

00;20;15 - 00;20;1

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And where did you teach your classes?

00;20;19 - 00;21;11

SURABHI ADESH: Mostly at home. And then I would do different temples. There was one in Windermere that I still go to, and I used there temporarily. For a while we did there was a temple out in, East Orlando, close to UCF, actually. But then I found that I could help more people if I just let everybody come to me. So I have had students from just about every temple in Orlando so far, and I feel happy that I could do something.

00;21;11 - 00;21;18

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. And to that point, what impact do you think you have made on that next generation?

00;21;18 - 00;22;12

SURABHI ADESH: Well. I have actually been teaching—this would be my second or third generation of people that I am teaching. So I there are a lot of people who can say that they came to me for some sort of instruction or some sort of awareness. And my sons and I, they are also both musicians. We have done a lot of performances over these last, fifteen years or so just to bring awareness to our culture. And so many schools, so many educational programs, big programs. So I would like to think that we have made some sort of impression.

00;22;12 - 00;22;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. And can you share some specific places and performances that you have done?

00;22;19 - 00;23;45

SURABHI ADESH: Yeah, of course. The city of Orlando does a program called Immerse. In the beginning of the year, we have we have done four or five programs there. They shut off the whole downtown area, and it was a pedestrian, like 100,000 people were there. We were part of the opening of Steinmetz Hall, the opening program. We were there. It was very multicultural. And we were the Indian component. We have done Fusion Fest since it started. We have worked at Disney for a whole season. Jungle Book and two shows every night, 10,000 people, every show. So, I mean, those are like the bigger ones. We have played a lot of places, Timucua House, we have played Winter Garden Theater, Rollins College, UCF. It [has been] twenty five

years of [performances]. And we have worked with Jasbir [Mehta] and we go to the schools and just give an introduction okay. These are Indian instruments. You know a little bit of Indian music, how it works. So we have done a lot of that.

00;23;45 - 00;23;59

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What have you learned about your culture? Not just your culture generally, but specifically in the context of generations, right. Because even within one culture, generations are so different.

00;23;59 - 00;24;00

SURABHI ADESH: Yes.

00;24;00 - 00;24;0

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you are in direct contact with generations through your teachings. So what have you learned about—?

00;24;06 - 00;26;0

SURABHI ADESH: Well, I have learned that things get diluted over generations. Things like, the desire to connect, things like, a lot of kids come to me and my first question is, “Are you here because you want to be here, or your parents have brought you?” So circumstance and location changes a lot of perspective for people. When my parents first went to Trinidad, the people were very eager. And it was brilliant. And as the generations became comfortable because it was easily available and it was part of their psyche, it was not something distant to them. They value it less because it was very comfortable. And the similar thing here, the second and third generations take a lot for granted and do not feel that need to try to reconnect or connect as much as previous generations. I mean, not everybody is like that, but generally, that is what I feel. So my approach changes depending on who the student is. And I try to get them interested about all kinds of stuff whether it is the history of their people or history of music, history of India. So it becomes a little bit, a different approach I have to do for different generations.

00;26;01 - 00;26;23

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You are right. Absolutely. Can you share a specific example? Obviously do not have to name names. You know, some students that you have had to change approaches towards because of this, what we are talking about or generationally.

00;26;23 - 00;27;22

SURABHI ADESH: Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean, some children, if they are not exposed to the culture too much, it is foreign to them. And I have to now show them that, okay, you are not just doing this as a cultural thing, it is good for your brain. Music is good for your brain. And what I do is I try to figure out what kind of music they like and then start with that and get them interested and then try to nudge them towards deeper things. Classical music. But I have to see what gets their attention because these days their attention is so short. I have to adjust the teaching. I do not know if that answers your question.

00;27;22 - 00;27;40

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. You mentioned earlier in one of your answers, sort of the purpose of doing this is to bring awareness to your culture, generally. So I am going to ask a deeper question. Why is it important to bring awareness to your culture?

00;27;41 - 00;29;27

SURABHI ADESH: Well. We all need a sense of belonging somewhere, and that gives us an identity. It gives us a community. That is the big reason. The next reason, though, over the years, like, you asked me about, I did my master's with Nova South, and it was brain based learning. And I found that through this medium of music and language that I could affect or influence people's thought processes and especially the younger kids as they are growing up. So I would tie it into, "okay, when you go to school, you are going to see this. We are doing the same thing here." So it not just the culture and the history and the trying to preserve all of that, but the history is so rich. And, just yesterday, a little girl asked, "Why do we have to do social studies? Why do we have to study history? I want to be a scientist." I go, "Yeah, you need to study history, so you do not make the same mistakes people made before." And I find that with what I am doing, adults, young kids, everybody, I find that the material itself, music, is a brain health and general well-being, and that is why I kind of continue it.

00;29;27 - 00;29;3

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Somewhat transitioning to your Florida timeline.

00;29;31 - 00;29;33

SURABHI ADESH: Okay.

00;29;33 - 00;29;5

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So you arrived here in '99 . I am curious, especially since I have talked to other Indians who have expressed this, I am curious if you had a similar experience. 9/11 happens, and there was a shift in how this country generally views brown people.

00;29;55 - 00;29;56

SURABHI ADESH: Yes.

00;29;56 - 00;30;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Did you feel that shift?

00;30;00 - 00;30;3

SURABHI ADESH: Yes. But it was not overt. I think undertones and very subtle, but it made me want to rethink going out in these ethnic clothes late at night or where would I go where—it was very subtle. Yeah, there was a shift, and you try to be aware but ignore at the same time.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right.

00;30;33 - 00;30;38

SURABHI ADESH: But yeah, definitely.

00;30;38 - 00;32;51

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You have been in Florida now for a quarter century. You know, twenty five years is a very long time. How has Orlando changed since you have been here?

00;30;53 - 00;32;06

SURABHI ADESH: Oh. The change is immense. When I first came, they had two Indian groceries that were forty minutes from here. I mean, I cried because coming from Toronto, where there was something on every street corner, [but] you learn to deal with it. But over time, generally, in terms of commerce, I mean, Indian groceries, restaurants, it has become like more of a world place. I mean, we have visitors, and we can tell them, okay, name a country and we can go get food from there. You can get products from everywhere. And I like it. It is very comfortable. Most people are happy. It is easygoing. And, I mean, too many trees are being cut down, but in terms of the change, it has been immense. And people are more aware of different cultures, much more than they were when we first got here. And not just Indian culture, so many world cultures. And that has been really nice.

00;32;06 - 00;32;24

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And compared to your experience in Toronto and even Trinidad in what ways is Orlando different and or similar?

00;32;24 - 00;33;13

SURABHI ADESH: The pace of life here is nice. Piece of life was nice in Trinidad. Now it is pretty fast. It is actually not very safe there. Toronto is super-fast paced, and I like the pace of life here. And I think because we are so tourist industry-driven, people are generally nicer than in other cities. And I like that. Now back to the question you just asked me. We have so many more people and so many more events and so many more things. There is a lot more connection here now. So, I like here now.

00;33;13 - 00;33;24

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: To that point, have you seen an increasing presence in Indians specifically since you have been here in Orlando?

00;33;24 - 00;33;28

SURABHI ADESH: Oh, yes. Yes, a lot more.

00;33;28 - 00;33;36

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And how have—through your work specifically, but just generally—how has that changed?

00;33;36 - 00;34;0

SURABHI ADESH: Like, well, with my work, yeah, I got students from all different Indian groups. I mean with the Indian people also they have the Gujaratis, the Bengalis, the Punjabis. So I try to stay neutral. That is why I do most of my teaching here. So I have students from all the different groups and, it is, great South Indians.

00;34;08 - 00;34;13

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What challenges does Orlando face today?

00;34;13 - 00;34;19

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. In terms of?

00;34;19 - 00;34;23

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: However way you want to take you.

00;34;23 - 00;35;55

SURABHI ADESH: I think because we are so tourist driven, that is a potential issue because if that fails or if we have issues there, the rest of the economy is in trouble. There is so much of that. Even though I said that I have students from all over, there is still a lot of division. Even if you look, within the West Indian community, the Guyanese, the Trinidadians, the Surinamese, and look out of Indian, you have the Fijians, the Samoans. Then among the Indians, you have all of this. So it is still a little bit of division and even when we go into other communities, you have different Latin communities. And they rarely connect. And so some of these programs that the city of Orlando does, like Fusion Fest and trying to bring everybody together, they are awesome. But it is still—not that I want everybody to melt and become one. But I think we all need more awareness of everybody else's history and culture. So that might be a place that we could get better.

00;35;55 - 00;36;21

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I am glad you emphasized how Indians are not a monolith, a monolithic culture. So I just want you to elaborate a little bit more about those differences. You know, you grew up in the West Indies, not in mainland India, compared to someone from the Fiji Islands. So just talk to me about the differences and similarities.

00;36;21 - 00;38;02

SURABHI ADESH: Okay, so I grew up, my parents, like I said, my home was India. If anyone ever asked my dad where he was from, he would say, I am from India, I am not from X state or anywhere. To me, India is one. So we served all Indians. It was not until I got to Toronto. In Trinidad, we had no clue everybody was one. And in being a smaller place, a smaller population, even people who visited from India, everybody kind of got along and it was fine. It was not until I got to Toronto that I realized, “Oh, wait, this community sticks to itself and that community sticks to itself.” Mind you, my father had no problem. He broke through all of that. But even here, we would hear of events after the fact, like if an artist visited and I would go, “Oh man, I would have loved to do that.” But then you realize it was an X community and they kind of stick to themselves. Part of it is language. I think you will find that is one common denominator among them, language and certain customs and stuff. And what Jasbir is trying to do with ACA is trying to cut through all of that. And so we would have artists from all different groups to try to bring people together. So I work with her as part of that. And it was unfortunate, but I realize it happens in many countries.

00;38;02 - 00;38;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. From your perspective, how will Orlando change the next twenty five years?

00;38;11 - 00;39;49

SURABHI ADESH: That is a hard question because we have so many people moving in and out of the state. We also have what we talked about earlier the dilution of interest and drive. So I do not know, successive generations have to work harder to give their children any kind of identity, even if they want to give them an American identity, they have to work for that. Because we have so many new people, it is hopeful, but I think it will be a struggle. It will be more of a struggle. And any child these days, whether Indian, American, Spanish, anything, there are so many demands on them just to survive. Just to live. All of this stuff feels, superficial, so, I do not know. Fingers crossed. Hopefully some generations really study their history and some we have to push them. But with so many people coming, maybe they will have more events, more awareness. That is what I can hope.

00;39;49 - 00;40;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You mentioned American identity. You have been for twenty five years. How have you navigated, of course your Indianness, but then this American identity experiment?

00;40;04 - 00;42;29

SURABHI ADESH: Well, okay. So it was different from my parents because they never went to school out of India. So going to school in Trinidad was not like anything different because everybody was the same. Going to school in Toronto was a culture shock for me, initially. I think I learned to, but I was pretty strong in myself before I got there, so I knew who I was, and I knew what I wanted what choices I should make. When I think of my sons. So what they faced and a lot of people faces, you are in a different situation outside the home, and in a different situation inside the home. What my husband and I tried to do was kind of make that transition easier. So it was not like two different worlds. We were kind of Indians in America. Try to give them that sense of identity so that they did not, I hope, they did not struggle as much as I see some other kids struggling. And part of it is that we have grown up in the West. I mean, I look at the same shows my kids at, even now. So when they were younger, we would only look at age appropriate shows, but we would look at it with them. So we have the same references, and we can make the same jokes that the kids at school made. And we did at home. So it was not two separate countries that were existing in. I guess that that would be what we tried to do and how I navigated in, because I love the home stuff. So it was not hard. So that is what I try to do with the kids that I teach is to find a common ground like, “No, it is not two different things. It is not like you are two different people. You are the same person. Just you have a different history.” And that is what we tried.

00;42;29 - 00;42;37

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, absolutely. In what other ways did you try to create that “Indians in America” environment for your family?

00;42;37 - 00;44;02

SURABHI ADESH: For my family? Well, having the classes at home was a big thing. I did not force my sons to learn. But I had people in here all the time, and so they learned a lot through absorption. And they would learn, sometimes under duress. But then I took them to Trinidad,

where we have an annual event, and they performed and they saw the other kids there, and they go, “Wait a second. We really do not know anything. We need to up our game.” And then they worked really hard. And the next year I went back, and they really excelled. Now the other kids go, “Wait a second, if they can do this, we can do this.” And this went on for a few years. So like we have a group of really, really talented musicians in Trinidad. And my sons, I mean they really excelled. But it was not like I forced them to do it. I just it was like you know, my father used to say, “if you go into a fragrance shop, you will come out smelling nice.” So you create that. I just did it at home and it was just natural for them. So that is what we tried.

00;44;02- 00;44;17

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: We have discussed this throughout our conversation, but I always ask it explicitly, how has your Indian heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in Orlando specifically?

00;44;17 - 00;45;16

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. How has it affected me generally in life? I think it has given me a perspective of, live and let live, basically, and understanding that every single human being is different. They see things differently; they understand the universe differently. And I just need to navigate best as I can. So with that type of perspective, in Orlando, when we meet all different types of people, it becomes easier to be open to seeing how they are—I do not have any predetermined opinions. “Oh, they are going to be like this or.” It has made me very open to learning and appreciating other people.

00;45;16 - 00;45;2

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: If someone is listening to this recording fifty or a hundred years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;45;26 - 00;46;3

SURABHI ADESH: Okay. About the culture. It is very ancient culture and based on a lot of logic and science. Now, culture and traditions are two different things. So we are not talking traditions, but the culture itself is a way of life which fosters respect for everybody, even from starting when we say “*namaste*” which means “the goodness in me sees the goodness in you.” The culture is something—the way it was been handed down over time—it is one of universal love. It basically accept people for what they are and who they are. But we have what we do, our cultural history to keep us, keep our psyches sane in this crazy world. And what was the second part?

00;46;38 - 00;46;38

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: The state of Florida.

00;46;38 - 00;47;52

SURABHI ADESH: The state of Florida, I have found it was a wonderful place because you can experience the world here, and you can drive out one hour or one and half hour in any direction and reach a beach and see different kinds of people, different types of communities. I mean, from high rises to spread out farms and acres. And that is what it is now. Our experience here has been wonderful in that it is, basically what we have experienced is everybody kind of

lives their own life. They do not bother us too much. Nobody bothers anybody else too much. And it is a great place. We are finding more and more pockets of wonderful stuff all through the state.

00:47:52 - 00:48:00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Surabhi, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day to share your life story. I really appreciate.

00:48:00 - 00:48:11

SURABHI ADESH: Well, thank you so much. I am glad that that people will have a chance to see different histories and different perspectives. That is very nice. Thank you so much.

00:48:11 - 00:48:11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely.