

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

The Reminiscences of
Puja Batchu

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Puja Batchu conducted by Kathy M. Min on July 3, 2020. This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

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

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Puja Batchu
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	July 3, 2020

00:00:01

Q: Okay. Could you maybe actually try spelling the alphabet again and we'll just test it to see if it's recording?

Batchu: Sure. A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P.

00:00:16

Q: Okay. I think it's a little bit laggy but mostly clear. So maybe we'll just try and stick with this and I might have you repeat certain things if necessary.

Batchu: Okay. Sounds good.

00:00:30

Q: Okay, so I'll start by recording that lead. So today is July 3, 2020. I'm Kathy Min and I'm interviewing Puja Batchu. The interview is taking place remotely over Zoom. We're both calling from our respective places in Boise and the proposed subject of the recording is Asian American oral histories in Idaho from the year 1965 and onwards. So we'll start with the first question. What is your full name?

Batchu: My full name is Puja Batchu.

00:01:09

Q: And when and where were you born?

Batchu: So I was born in Boise, Idaho, on March 30, 2001.

00:01:19

Q: And you're currently a student?

Batchu: Yes, I am a student at the University of Utah.

00:01:27

Q: And what are you studying?

Batchu: I'm studying biology, but I'm going to do pre med, so hopefully eventually go to med school and become a doctor.

00:01:36

Q: Wow, what year are you?

Batchu: I just finished my freshman year.

00:01:41

Q: Okay. And so I think we'll just dovetail to a little bit more about your family. So what are the names of your parents?

Batchu: So my dad's name is Pavan Batchu. My mom's is Kirti Batchu. And I have a younger brother whose name is Shyam Batchu.

00:01:59

Q: And can you spell all their names?

Batchu: Sure. So my dad's name is Pavan Batchu. My mom's name is Kirti Batchu, and her first name is K-I-R-T-I and she has the same last name.

00:02:17

Q: And Shyam?

Batchu: It's spelled S-H-Y-A-M.

00:02:25

Q: And what do your parents do for a living?

Batchu: So both of my parents are with software. I believe my mom is a QA analyst. And my dad also does something similar with another company, but he's not a QA analyst.¹

00:02:43

Q: What is QA?

Batchu: I think it's quantitative analysis, but I'm not exactly sure.²

00:02:51

Q: And where do they work at?

Batchu: So my mom has a job with the government, and it's just for one of the programs that they run. And then my dad has a job with AmerisourceBergen.

Q: Could you say it one more time?

Batchu: AmerisourceBergen.

00:03:10

Q: What's that? I've never heard of it.

Batchu: I think that's the parent company to the company he's working for. And so I think they have a few different branches, but he's just working for one in Boise.

00:03:26

Q: I see. And so for your mom, is it for the state government or for the federal government?

Batchu: I think it's for the state government. She just works for something with the software for one of their programs. Yeah, I'm sorry, I don't know too much.

00:03:41

Q: No, no. Any kind of detail is fine. And what's their educational backgrounds?

Batchu: So my mom, I believe, so she did school in India before coming here. And I believe she has a bachelor's. And I think my dad has a master's and he got that coming to the United States and India, so he had schooling in both.

¹ Puja later clarified that her father is a data architect.

² Puja later clarified that QA stands for quality assurance.

00:04:03

Q: And where did your dad do school in the US?

Batchu: I believe it was in Georgia.³

00:04:11

Q: Oh, no way.

Batchu: I think so. I think they—my parents—definitely moved around a bit before I was born. I'm not totally sure I can—do you want me to ask really quick? I can definitely do that to make sure I'm correct.

00:04:33

Q: You know, I might contact you for a follow up interview at some point.

Batchu: Okay. Sounds good.

Q: It might be nice, just say to keep the interview continuous.

00:04:45

Q: And then maybe tell me a little bit about Shyam. What's he like?

Batchu: Sure. So he's my younger brother, he's in middle school—or no, he just finished middle school, finished his freshman year of high school. Yeah, so he's growing up. We have a four and a half year difference between us. So right now, he's 14. So, yeah.

00:05:09

Q: And yeah, maybe tell me a little bit about the different personalities of your family members, what they're like, what you think of when you think of them.

Batchu: Yeah. So I guess I could start out with my brother, because we were just talking about him. So my brother is super awesome. He's super fun and kind. He's really into playing video games and playing sports and stuff. And so he's been teaching me a lot of video game lingo while I've been back. And yeah, so as he's growing up and stuff, we've gotten closer. We like to hang out, you know, have sibling arguments sometimes. But yeah, I think we genuinely like hanging out with each other and he is very fun to talk to, because he has a lot of opinions and it's really fun to converse with him—just because we had similar backgrounds, you know, like going

³ Puja later clarified that her father went to school in Louisiana, not Georgia.

to the school in the US, but then having friends who are from the US, friends who are not. And just talking about stuff. So it's nice to talk to him about random things.

00:06:24

Q: That's so sweet. Yeah.

Batchu: Okay, so next for my dad, if that's okay.

Q: Yeah.

Batchu: Okay, so he went to the University of New Orleans in Louisiana, so off a bit. I think they lived there at one point in Georgia. That's where he went, so just to clarify that.

00:06:49

Batchu: And then about my dad—my dad's super awesome. He's very passionate and he is very willing to give advice and help anyone out. Like if anyone has a problem, he's willing to step in and help out any way he can, even if it's just encouragement, which I really appreciate and look up to, just because he's a very kind soul. I really like talking to my dad and having deep conversations like when we go on walks and stuff. After a while, sometimes we'll have deep conversations about life in general, or just about different backgrounds or different topics. And it's really nice to talk to him because he has just a really great perspective on the world. And so it's nice to hear about that. And he's always been super supportive.

00:07:41

Q: That's really, really sweet. Yeah, maybe talk a little bit about your mom.

00:07:49

Batchu: Yeah, perfect. So my mom and I are really, really close. I genuinely—like I tell her all the time—sometimes I feel like we're sisters because I just always love talking to her. I talk to her about everything and anything. We have that kind of relationship where when I was at school, I would call her and we just talk for an hour about random stuff. And it was always really nice to get that.

00:08:17

Batchu: She, like my dad—they both give really great advice whenever I need it and they're super supportive. Whenever I have a problem, I can go to them. And it doesn't matter how big or how small the problem is, they're always willing to talk to me about it and give me advice that is not only empathetic but also reasonable and will help with the situation. And so yeah, that's basically the family dynamic

00:08:50

Q: Is there a particular moment that comes to mind of a particular dilemma that you were facing and they were able to help you in some way?

Batchu: Yeah, there's been like quite a few in the past. I mean, on the top of my head, it's probably just been things that I'm stressed about. I'm sure every person who's, when they're deciding to go to college, is stressed about what college they want to go to, especially if they have multiple options that they're not sure about. So I've definitely had multiple conversations with both of them about like when I was trying to figure out what college I wanted to go and what I wanted to do later in life. Yeah, they were super supportive and they honestly were like, "Whatever you decide to do, we will support you." You know, "It's very much your choice. We want you to be happy" kind of.

00:09:47

Batchu: And so it was really nice to have my whole family—even my brother, I talked to him about it—to have such a good place where I can go back to my family to talk about just random things, even if they, you know, seem stressful at the time. But now looking back at it, I laugh because it wasn't that bad. It's just nice to have a bunch of people that you can go to ask advice and, you know, get reassurance.

00:10:16

Q: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I think the other thing I wanted to ask—and again, if your memory is not clear, it's totally fine—but how did you and your family end up in Idaho?

Batchu: So I was born in Idaho, like I said. So my parents, before I was born—so once they got married, they came back to the United States. And basically they lived wherever my dad or mom's work kind of took them. And so since they didn't have kids—because I'm the oldest in my family—they didn't have kids, so it was a lot easier for them to move around. And so they—at one point, they also lived in Tennessee.

00:11:02

Batchu: And so they eventually made it to Idaho. And then once they did, they had me and so they decided to stay in Idaho—and in Boise specifically—because they really liked the community impact. Boise wasn't a huge city then, but it wasn't super tiny either. And so they felt like it was the perfect place to start a family and they both liked the area and the jobs that they had. So I think that's how we ended up staying here.

00:11:31

Q: Yeah, definitely. Lots of follow up questions, I think. Did your parents meet in India?

Batchu: Yeah. So my dad is from a village near Hyderabad. And so that's more of southern India, I guess you could say, like central-southern. And then my mom is from Chandrapur and that's in more western India.

00:12:01

Q: So how'd they meet?

Batchu: So my mom told me, I think they met because one of my mom's aunts—or a family friend of hers, I can't remember what the relationship was—told her that she knew, you know, young boy who is very kind and nice. And so I think they just met up. And, you know, after that, they liked each other and so.

00:12:26

Q: Yeah. So was this around the time of college for both of them?

Batchu: Yeah, I believe so. So I think my dad had went to the US for school. And then he came back to India and then he got married, and then they both came back to the US. So I think my mom had had her bachelor's. And I think she was taking some more classes. And I think my dad was done with his bachelor's and potentially his master's at that point. But yeah, they were both in schools / working when they met.

00:13:03

Q: So I also forgot to ask this earlier, but how old are your parents, and when were they born, if you know?

Batchu: Ooh. I might have to get back to you on that because I don't want to say the wrong thing.

00:13:19

Q: No worries. And so, to be clear, so your dad had done like the equivalent of K-12 education in India, and then he moved for his bachelor's and master's, or he—

Batchu: So he did his bachelor's in India, and I believe he came to the United States to do his masters.

00:13:41

Q: Okay. And so it's around the time that your dad's doing his master's and your mom's finishing up her bachelor's that they get introduced.

Batchu: I believe so, or I'm not sure if my dad had finished his [master's] yet or where they were at, but I know that was around the time.

00:13:57

Q: Yeah, around college age. And then, I also forgot to ask this earlier, but do you know what they majored in?

Batchu: I think my dad did chemical engineering.⁴ I think so. Yeah, I'm not sure about it. I know he did it in some type of engineering. And then my mom did, I think it was like some sort of computer [and/or] science. I'm not sure what her exact major was. Um, yeah. Oh my gosh, I sound like an awful daughter.

00:14:39

Q: No! I feel like parents also don't talk about these sorts of things all the time. Do you know what was the impetus for either of them to study what they did?

Batchu: Yeah, I think so. I know for my mom, we always talk about how when she was younger, she always felt more oriented to math and science. Like she did not like learning—you know, her favorite classes were math and science in school. And so when she—and she really likes problem solving, like even talking to her, you can tell that she's really good at problem solving, and looking at using her skills with math and science to do that. And so I think that's why she chose a more sciency major.

00:15:28

Batchu: And then for my dad, I kind of think it was the same thing. Like he really liked math and science. And I think the school system in India is a little different from the United States. And so I think he had some experience with his major in school and decided to do that because he really liked it.

00:15:52

Q: And then for his master's, was it also in [mechanical] engineering?

Batchu: Yeah, I'm not completely sure on that front. Yeah.

00:16:05

⁴ Puja later clarified that her father majored in mechanical engineering.

Q: Let's see. So you're saying, so some time, maybe in their 20s, they get married. And they got married in the US? Or they got married in India because your dad went back?

Batchu: Right, yes [they were married in India].

Q: And then they went back to the US together?

Batchu: Exactly.

00:16:23

Q: Okay. Did your dad just go back to India for the marriage ceremony or was it like a longer term thing?

Batchu: Yeah, I mean I've never been told that, actually, I never thought about that. I do know that he did go back. They got married in 1995, like December 1995. And then my dad came to the US in 1991 to study. So I guess at some point between then he went back to India and they got married in 1995.

00:17:00

Q: And do you know when they came to the US?

Batchu: Yeah, they came, so right after they got married. So they came in December 1995.

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Q: And, do you know, was it because your dad had a student visa and that's why they came over together?

Batchu: Um, I think so. Now looking back on it, I think he was already working at that point. And so I think it was because, yeah, I think it was because of work, or because he had either job or was almost done with school.

00:17:33

Q: And so, do you know where they went first? Was it New Orleans?

Batchu: Ooh, I am not sure about that. I think I might be mixing up New Orleans with a cousin.⁵ You know, when they first went to the US, they went to New Orleans. Because now that I'm

⁵ Puja later clarified that her parents first came to Detroit after they married, but the first place her father came to the US was New Orleans for school.

thinking about it, I think that's what happened in my brain. So, I'm not super sure where they went first. But I think before Idaho, a big place that they spent a lot of time in was in Tennessee.

00:18:10

Q: Like Nashville?

Batchu: I think so. Or it was close to Nashville.⁶

00:18:16

Q: And, do you know what kinds of work they had before moving to Boise?

Batchu: Yeah, so I think my dad did something similar to what he's doing now. I was talking to him the other day, and he was telling me how he doesn't do as much [mechanical] engineering. I think his thesis in his master's program was focused in the automobile industry and the engineering in that. But I think he changed his career a little bit as time went on to go more to software. Yeah, I don't know the specific names of them, but I know that's what he ended up doing. And so my dad mainly focused on that.

00:19:04

Batchu: And I know my mom, when they were in Tennessee, she did take some classes at a community college. And then I think she eventually—like I'm not sure if she started working then or in Boise—but it was after that point.

00:19:24

Q: And then when they came to Boise, do you know if the jobs that they currently have are the same jobs that they had when they first came to Boise?

Batchu: Yeah, so I think they both switched jobs. My mom had originally worked for a healthcare company and she worked for that company for quite a few years. I think she switched when I was in late elementary school / early middle school, if I remember correctly.

00:19:54

Batchu: And then my dad had a whole bunch of different jobs, you know with HP [Hewlett-Packard] and EnerNOC at SuperValu, so, yeah, he's definitely had a few switches in his career.

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⁶ Puja's parents lived in Memphis, Tennessee.

Q: Do you feel like they both feel more settled in their careers now? Or do you think there could be another change?

Batchu: Um, I don't know. I think it just depends on what they want to do as well, because a lot of the times—I was talking to my dad, and you know, sometimes it's just like you wanted something new to do in your life, and other times it's out of your hands. So I think there's multiple reasons why. But I think they are happy where they are right now. I don't know what the future holds.

00:20:47

Q: Yeah, definitely. Do you know how your grandparents reacted to your mom or dad leaving India for the US?

Batchu: So I think, so for my dad's family, all of his siblings were in India, so he's the only one from his generation in the United States. But then I have cousins who are in the United States. So I think my dad was one of the first. And at that point, I'm sure it was a really big change, you know, especially in those times, to come to the United States. And I think the only people he knew were a few friends. He didn't have family in the United States. And so it definitely was a big decision for him. But I think also, at that point, he felt like he wanted to go to the United States for schooling and he was very passionate about that. And so that's what led him to coming

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Q: And then do you think your grandparents on your dad's side, they were supportive of it? Like, did they help finance anything? I mean, those are kind of more obscure questions, so if you know the answer.

Batchu: So from what I know, I don't think that they were against it. I'm sure his mom felt the same way as my mom did when I went away to college. You know, it's kind of scary, especially for him going overseas. Quite a different experience. I'm sure there was, you know, some pros and cons everyone felt to that. But I think they were happy that he was doing something he wanted to do. And he also had a scholarship, I believe, or a research position at school in Louisiana. And so that was also a big factor, monetary-wise. Yeah, so I think there's just a whole bunch of different things. But it worked out in the end so that he could come.

00:22:57

Q: And then, what's your dad's place in the family, because you mentioned he has a lot of siblings?

Batchu: Right, so he has two older brothers. And then he has one younger brother, and I believe a younger sister.

00:23:14

Q: Okay. And have you met any of your aunts and uncles on your dad's side before?

Batchu: Yeah, I've met all of them multiple times whenever we go to visit India. And so I always get to visit them and now we have a family group chat on WhatsApp. So we have the phone calls to India where we talk to our grandparents and our relatives.

00:23:45

Q: And then—another question, more about your dad's experience. Did he feel comfortable with English? Did he learn English through his schooling in India? How do you think he was prepared language-wise for the US?

Batchu: Yeah, I'm not sure at what point he learned English. But I'm pretty sure he knew English, to some degree, before coming to the US, like it wasn't just a full immersion. I'm pretty sure he did know some English, because I don't know how he would have been able to take classes if he didn't know any English at all. But definitely his English did improve, yeah, he was telling me about.

00:24:28

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. And then a little bit on your mom's side, sort of the same question. How did her family feel about her just leaving with her new husband for a new country?

Batchu: I'm not entirely sure on their side. So, like my dad and his siblings, my mom has a younger brother. That's just them two. But my grandpa has, I think, eight or nine siblings. And so they have a really big family. She has a lot of different cousins and aunts and uncles. I think that she was also like one of the first to come to America out of that side of the family. I'm not sure if she was the first, because she has other family who is in the same generation as her living in the US. But I think that, you know, it was a big change for them too, but my parents were both happy and I think that there was a place for her in the US too, because she could get a job or schooling or whatever she wanted to do. So I don't think they were against it at all, or anything.

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Q: That makes sense. Yeah, and then, again, the same kind of question. Did your mom learn English before coming to the US as well?

Batchu: I think she knew some. I don't know how much she knew when she came. But she definitely did learn some before.

00:26:10

Q: Mhm. But probably like your dad, it improved?

Batchu: Yeah, I definitely do think that. I think both of them, you know, when you move to a new place, obviously your vocabulary will expand and stuff. Just like learning a different language in the US, like, you know, in high school, if you learned a different language, the rules of the language are a lot different from the country it originated from or where it's spoken very often. Because in classes, you learn very formal speaking a lot of the time. And so I think that their English got a lot better once coming to the US, just because they were talking to other people and things like that.

00:26:56

Q: Yeah. And then at home, do they mostly speak in English?

Batchu: Yeah, so we, at home—like right now?

00:27:05

Q: Yeah, or growing up, or whatever.

Batchu: Yeah, so it's really interesting because my dad's family mainly speaks Telugu. And my mom's family mainly speaks Marathi. And so, they're two completely different languages, but they both know Hindi because that's, you know, the more national language or the more common language. And so that's, I think, a big part of it. So I know Hindi and English, so at home, I can speak to them in Hindi or English. But my younger brother doesn't know Hindi, but he understands it. So I think over time we speak more and more English, but we still speak Hindi as well.

00:27:48

Q: That makes sense. And related to that, was your first language English or Hindi?

Batchu: Yeah, that story's really funny, because when I was younger I was babysat. I had a babysitter with a family who spoke Tamil, so it's a completely different dialect. So it's a really funny story that my mom would tell me was, when I was in preschool, the teacher would call my mom to ask her what I was saying, because it wouldn't be in English. And then my mom would talk to me and would realize that I wasn't speaking Hindi; I was speaking Tamil. And so she

would have to call the family that was babysitting me when they were working to translate what I was saying.

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Batchu: So I genuinely don't know what my first, first language was, just because I think I learned all three of them at the same time. But when I do talk to people, I generally say that English was my first language because I can speak it the best. Because my Hindi, I would say it's not as good as a native speaker who speaks. Like I can get by, but a lot of the grammar is not correct when I talk.

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Q: Yeah, I feel that. It sounds like your parents speak like a lot of English at home. But I'm wondering, has there ever been sort of communication barriers, either from language or differing cultural understandings, or anything like that?

Batchu: I wouldn't say necessarily a communication barrier. Like, I think that previous point, we know what each other's trying to say. But I think cultural barriers have definitely happened, just because there's a lot of customs in the US that, you know, that are not in India. So things like homecoming or prom, those are very new. So, you know, we're gonna have to talk about it. I mean, *I* didn't even really know what homecoming was. I was like, asked my friends, and then I would explain it to my parents [sic]. So not really communication barriers, but definitely some cultural or just random things.

00:30:19

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. Let's see, describe a typical family dinner for me.

Batchu: Okay, that's a really good question. So for family dinners, my mom usually cooks them. Sometimes my dad will, sometimes me or my brother will, but it's usually my mom. And for a typical family dinner, we usually eat Indian food, and so it's, you know, some curry with some kind of vegetable or maybe some rice or roti. So when she's making them sometimes she'll call us in to help peel stuff or cut up vegetables or crush garlic or something like that. So, we all kind of help out when, sometimes. Sometimes she does it all by herself and just whips it up. She's an amazing cook who's very quick. But sometimes, we'll jump in and help her out.

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Batchu: And then, after we're done making dinner, so we'll all get our plates and we don't always sit at a table. Sometimes—but we'll sit together. It depends on if it's like a really busy day and if people have to go somewhere or not. But for the most part, especially now since we're all under

quarantine and staying at home, we'll all have dinner together and we usually just talk or just discuss our days—

00:31:57

Q: Sorry, you were saying?

Batchu: Yeah, just a regular dinner.

00:32:02

Q: Are there any meals or specific dishes that stand out to you in your mind or are favorite foods?

Batchu: One, we really like baingan curry. So it's eggplant curry. And my mom makes it with peanut sauce and it is delicious. She makes it and we just all eat so much. And it's something about the way she makes it too. It's not a super—I don't know. It's not like, you know, like when you think of Indian food, you don't think of eggplant curry. It's not the most well known, but she just has a hand for it. It's *so* good when she makes it.

00:32:53

Q: Yeah, that sounds so wonderful. Oh, what was the question I wanted to ask after that? It will come back to me, I hope. Oh, do you know why your mom is so good at cooking?

Batchu: So my aji, so her mom, is also a really good cook, and I think my mom—I think she just has a talent for it. Like whatever she makes, it's always really good. She's like the kind of person when baking—I don't know how she does this—but she doesn't need to necessarily measure. She will just [mix ingredients together without needing to measure], and it's amazing. And I think she's had a lot of practice, but she's also a good cook, and she also, if she tried something that she liked that someone else made she'll definitely ask for the recipe and put her own twist on it. So yeah, I think she's just a really good cook.

00:33:56

Q: Yeah, that sounds so fun. Having good home cooked food, I felt like, is quite a privilege.

Batchu: Oh yeah, I don't even know. It's so funny. One of my brother's friends, when they'll play video games, sometimes they'll ask him what my mom made for dinner. Yeah, it's just really funny.

00:34:19

Q: Are they also—are their parents Indian too, or they're just other kids who also just really like your mom's cooking?

Batchu: The one friend that I'm talking about that asks him, his parents are Indian too. But he definitely plays with people who are Indian and people who aren't.

00:34:41

Q: Oh, I was also going to ask, does your mom ever make non-Indian foods at home or is it pretty much all Indian food?

Batchu: That's a really good question. I think she, yeah, she makes a lot of mixed. You know, she makes burritos or pasta. So our house is definitely not just fully Indian food; we have a lot of other different things that we eat.

00:35:09

Q: That makes sense. I think it's interesting because there's some families I know who are Chinese and will only eat Chinese food.

Batchu: Right.

00:35:17

Q: Yeah, so I always think it's interesting. Let's see. Okay. So I think with this question, you can definitely talk about COVID, but you can also not talk about COVID. So the question is, what world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up, and did any of them affect your family?

Batchu: Yeah, I think COVID just right now, thinking about it, that's *huge*. It's been super big. That has impacted my family. And it kind of, I don't know, I think it's really big, especially because it's a worldwide going-on and especially because we're living in it right now

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Batchu: COVID in America and in the United States has been super different from COVID in India. Because when I talk to my family who is living in India and talk to my mom about it, she's told me, when COVID, the outbreak first happened, they had really strict quarantines in India.

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Batchu: They had it be like, “You can't leave your house, unless you are going to get medicine or getting food.” And they were very, very strict about it. And so I think that they were able to handle it really well at first, because everyone was just in quarantine and they weren't going out

at all. But then I think once it started—there was an outbreak somewhere—and after that kind of spread a little bit more. But that experience from my other family members who've been living in India has been very different from the United States, because I know when COVID first happened we were like, “Oh, it's happening.” But it wasn't really real time. There wasn't really many laws about quarantining and things like that.

00:37:16

Batchu: It was just the first case, and then that kind of thing. And then all the lockdowns in quarantine things happened so quickly. I remember I was at home for spring break at my school when they announced that everyone had to go home. And so, I was at home [in Boise] for spring break, and then I was like, I'm not going back this semester. So that was, I feel like, a very different situation.

00:37:44

Q: Is all your stuff still in Utah then?

Batchu: So I eventually, like right before—I know in Idaho how, or, I think, in Boise, how there was like that quarantine lockdown for like a few days. I think it might have been a month. So a day before that happened, we just went down there [to Utah] and we had masks and gloves and we didn't talk to anyone. It was just me and my dad who drove down there. And then we went to my room. We got everything. And we were out of there within three or four hours. And then came straight back home. Sanitized everything.

00:38:22

Q: So tight. Wow.

Batchu: And I think they had options if you couldn't do that but I definitely had a lot of stuff there that I wanted to bring back home.

00:38:33

Q: Right, makes sense. And it's like, if you didn't go, who knows when you could get it now?

Batchu: Yeah, exactly, it would probably just be in storage.

00:38:42

Q: Following that question on world events, does your family stay in tune with issues that are going on in India, or do you feel personally attuned to those events?

Batchu: Yeah. So my parents definitely follow that much more closely than I do. They have their respective WhatsApp groups or news outlets that they follow more closely. And so when something does happen, though, they always bring it up to me and my brother and we'll talk about it. So things like, you know, the COVID outbreak or things like issues between different countries or current events and those things. For the most part, like we'll talk about it as a family. But they definitely are more in tune to it. Like they actively seek it out.

00:39:44

Q: Make sense. Oh, a little bit on a different tack, but how are holidays, such as birthdays or particular—if it's like a religious sort of celebration—how are holidays celebrated in your family and does your family have special traditions?

Batchu: Yeah, so I feel like for things like birthdays, where it's kind of a more universal concept, it's definitely been a mix of things that my parents do in India and things that they do here. So, for example, when we wake up in the morning, my mom puts utna on our arms and our face. And it's this powder—it smells really good. And she does an aarti⁷ for us because it's our birthday, you know, to wish well wishes and things like that. And so there's Indian customs like that that we'll do for our birthdays. But then, you know, we have cake and ice cream and open presents and parties. So, I think that's kind of—like people do that in India as well. It's like some things sprinkled in there that are very like cultural, whereas others are just birthday celebrations.

00:41:05

Q: Right, right.

Batchu: And then there's holidays like Christmas, where our family's more Hindu, so it's not—we still celebrate it. We still, you know, have stuff like this tiny Christmas tree we bring out every year. And, you know, give each other presents. But it's more for the commercial holiday aspect, I think.

00:41:30

Batchu: And then there's Indian festivals that we'll celebrate really big, like Diwali and Holi. We'll either go to our temple and they'll have a celebration there. Usually they do cultural programs, so there's dances and dramas and plays and things that people will put on. And then we'll all celebrate together. Or it'll be like, we'll go to someone's house, if they're doing a pooja or something. And do prayers there and eat dinner.

⁷ In Puja's family, the birthday aarti is more of a blessing. Generally, aarti is “a form of prayer offered in greeting and thanksgiving to God where devotees are reminded of his glorious presence and providence.” From BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, “Arti,” <http://londonmandir.baps.org/worship/arti/>.

00:42:04

Q: I guess, out of some of the things you mentioned, are there any favorite traditions or holidays for you?

Batchu: So I think I kind of mentioned these already, but some of my favorite holidays—probably Diwali because I love that celebratory atmosphere of lights and just hanging out with the community. I think that's very—for me, Diwali's when you hang, go out, and do things with your community.

00:42:35

Batchu: And in Boise, they have the AID [Association for India's Development] Boise program. And so every Diwali, they usually have this huge event where people come to and they watch like people perform different dances, play instruments, do dramas, and things like that. And it's a really big event. And I usually dance in them, so it's really fun to like practice the dance before and learn new dances with friends or with classes. That's definitely been one of my favorites.

43:08

Batchu: And then another one I would say is Holi, just because it's so fun, because you get to go to this huge festival or just be with your family and throw colors at each other. And yeah, so it's always really fun. I think I gravitate towards like those community festivals, where you're having fun with your friends and family and can celebrate.

00:43:29

Q: Mm, yeah, makes a lot of sense and they all sound really fun. Do you know if there's any kind of special meaning with either your name or your family last name?

Batchu: Yeah. So for my name, Puja means prayer. But the spelling is kind of different, like I think the direct translation is P-O-O-J-A. But my parents spell it P-U-J-A, so it's phonetic. All over, I think, in the world, a lot of people spell it P-U-J-A and some people spell it P-O-O-J-A. It's equal. But I think the proper translation is P-O-O-J-A. But I'm not completely sure.

00:44:18

Batchu: And then our last name. I don't know about if there's any meaning. But something, you know, fun fact, is some of my cousins—so I spell it with B-A-T-C-H-U and some of them spell it B-A-C-H-U. Because I think when they translated it at first, I think it was just phonetically. And so it was like, some people emphasize the T and some people don't.

00:44:45

Q: That makes sense.

Batchu: Yeah, I thought that was really interesting because I'm sure there's a lot of Indian last names or even first names that are really close. Same thing with “Puja”— it's just like, you know, how do you spell it? I guess it's just however it sounds, like whoever put it down first.

00:45:06

Q: Yeah, it was really interesting. Do you know if there's any meaning behind your parents' names or your brother's name?

Batchu: I think so. I know a lot of Indian names—like my mom was telling me that when a child is named, it's a really big thing. And they have a lot of ceremonies, where I think a pundit comes and looks at different things like different events. And they have this book and they see what the meanings are, or what your child should be named.

00:45:57

Batchu: Yeah, so I think all of our names have some kind of meaning. I'm not sure what everyone's is. I think mine is the most common though, because it's just prayer. But I think both of my parents, their names mean something like an adjective or a describing word. I'm not sure exactly what they mean. But then my brother Shyam's name, I think it has a few different meanings, like it can mean a certain color or it can also be taken back to one of the gods and the stories. Like it's one of the versions of one of the gods. And so I think, yeah, there's just a lot of different meanings that come from the names. So yeah, hopefully that answered your question.

00:46:53

Q: Yeah, of course, the questions are all open ended. So we've been talking for almost an hour now. So you can always let me know if you want to take a break. But yeah, do you want to take a break or do you want to just keep going?

Batchu: Yeah, I think I'm okay if you are.

00:47:16

Q: I'm good, too. But always let me know, because I think there's still quite a lot to talk about. So I guess we're kind of moving into my question list. The next section is growing up and childhood. So the question is, how would you describe your experience growing up?

Batchu: Yeah, so I think my experience has been a really great one. I think I've had a wonderful childhood with a lot of different experiences. A random fun fact that whenever someone's like, “What's a fun fact about you?” One of them is when I was younger, I actually went to a Christian school, like a Christian charter school. And it's very interesting because my family's not

Christian. And it was really interesting because there's quite a few people, there's some Indian kids at that school as well who were not Christian when they went there.

00:48:23

Batchu: So there's a handful of us, you know, four or five of us that I remember. But I think that gave me a really interesting perspective, because when I was younger, I was learning about multiple cultures, and also especially the one that's predominantly US-known, the Christian culture. And so I think having a little bit of that background—and I only went there for like two or three years and I think it was just like kindergarten, first grade. Like preschool kindergarten, first grade. But I think just having those experiences kind of changed the way I grew up, because my brother never went to those schools. He never went to a Christian school. And so I think it gave me a different perspective, per se, on a lot of different things like different cultural clashes or just differences like that.

00:49:19

Batchu: I also have described it multiple times when I was younger. I felt like I had, you know, my Indian friends and my school friends, or Indian holidays, school holidays. I think that's the distinction my young mind made. And so it was interesting to see that I felt like I had two different identities, kind of. And then, obviously, growing up and stuff, they've merged and it's become closer to one. But I just thought that was funny when I was younger, I would refer to it as my school friends or my friends to work outside of school and things like that. So I think a lot of little kids will do that where it's like school is different from home.

00:50:09

Batchu: Looking back on it now, it's just an interesting distinction I had. But yeah, during childhood, I think, I had a lot of different experiences with both cultures. I went to India a lot with my family in the summers and we went to visit all of my family, extended family, and go to different temples and just learn more about that. I've also been to a few weddings. And those are so fun, because there's so many different events and traditions that are so different from American weddings. Like, American weddings are typically, you know, just one day. And Indian weddings can last a week and you do a new [activity] every day.

00:50:56

Batchu: There's so many different, you know, aspects of that. So I really enjoyed—I think I really valued that I had an Indian background, but also it was cool to learn about American culture because it just gave me a really interesting perspective that was a bit more open, I feel like.

00:51:17

Q: Yeah, that makes sense.

Batchu: Right, and especially because my parents did not hide anything from me. You know, like growing up, I was taught there's so many different religions and nothing is right or wrong. It's very dependent on the person and their background. And you should learn about different religions, because that's important. And same thing with my temple. They always let a lot of college students or high school students who are studying religion come to service and come experience it. And so I think I was lucky enough to be in a community that really highlighted diversity, but it being good to learn about different people.

00:52:05

Q: Yeah, I think that was all so beautifully put. Some follow up questions from that. Is there a reason why your parents wanted to send you to the Christian school and why they didn't send your brother?

Batchu: Um, I honestly don't think it was anything super, you know, like there wasn't too much behind it. I know that a lot of my parents' family friends, one of their kids was going there. And I kind of talked about this earlier, but the family that babysat me, they had a younger daughter who is the same age as me. So we just both went there.

00:52:42

Batchu: So I think it wasn't as much to do with putting me into a Christian school because it was Christian, but more because it was a really good school. Education was really good. And there were other people who really liked it who weren't [Christian]. So I don't think it was anything, necessarily, because it was Christian. I think it was just at that point in life, it just seemed like a really good place for me to go to school, just because it was a really nice school, good education and that kind of thing. And then I think my brother ended up just going to the school that I was going to. So when I was in elementary school—I think I was in fifth grade—he started kindergarten and so he just went to the school that I was in.

00:53:26

Batchu: So I don't think there was a lot of “we should send him, we shouldn't send him” kind of thing, or why they should send me or that kind of thing. I think it was more just that's where—it was just chance, kind of. No motive.

00:53:43

Q: That makes sense. I think also you were talking a lot about this separation between home and school life. Were there any points where you felt like—not necessarily now but at the time—like,

“oh, one is better than the other”? Or did you feel like you're comfortable in both those spheres of your life? If that makes sense.

Batchu: Yeah, I think, I don't know. I think just at that point, it wasn't even that big of a distinction. It was just a way to categorize it, if that makes sense. So I definitely felt welcome and comfortable in both. And those worlds definitely mixed and stuff. When I had a birthday party, I would invite people from class, but then also family friends and things like that. So it wasn't super “by day she's this and by night she's that.” It wasn't anything like that. It was just when I think back at it—you know, like admissions essays for colleges and things like that, they always have those prompts that talk about childhood. And so I think that's what really spurred me to think about it, like that's how I felt when I was younger.

00:55:00

Batchu: Just because I'm sure, you know, I feel like anyone feels like that. Like if they're on a soccer team, they're like, “These are my soccer friends, but these are my school friends.” So I think it was kind of that distinction. And then I definitely felt like you talked about different topics in both. Like when I was with my friends out of school who were Indian, we would talk about different festivals that we were excited for, or we talked about Indian TV shows. And then in school, you talk about American TV shows and Christmas and things like that. I don't think it was like a super stark difference in my mind. It was just like those are just two groups that I felt like I could identify with.

00:55:50

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. Hm, what do I want to ask next? Have you always lived in the same house or apartment?

Batchu: So, when I was younger, our family lived in an apartment. But then I think I was two or three, when we moved into the house that we're currently living in. So yeah, we've been in Boise the whole time. And then we moved once when I was two or three.

00:56:23

Q: And then, how would you describe the neighborhood that you live in?

Batchu: So my neighborhood's really interesting because it's a neighborhood inside of another neighborhood. But when we first moved here, we were one of the first people who lived in this area. Around us, there's a lot of empty lots of houses being built. But there are definitely some houses that were up before ours.

00:56:54

Batchu: And so we definitely have a lot of friends in our neighborhood. Growing up, some of my most fond memories were, you know, in the summer, where you just go door to door and gather up all your friends and you would just hang out, like, go to the park or just wander around the neighborhood. And then you'd come home later for dinner. So yeah, I feel like my growing up, it was really nice because there's a whole bunch of kids with different backgrounds and we would all play together and, you know, just have a lot of fun together.

00:57:25

Batchu: And then, now I think a lot of kids have grown up and gone to college or they're no longer living here. So there's less kids my age, there's a lot more younger kids or then people who are a bit older living in this neighborhood. So definitely changed, but lots of good memories.

00:57:43

Q: Also, you don't have to answer this, but are you living in Meridian now?

Batchu: So technically my address is in Boise, but I think I live on the line that divides Boise and Meridian. Yeah, it's really strange because I definitely feel like I more live in Meridian per se, because that's the area. I live right next to the Village⁸ in Meridian, but it's technically Boise.

00:58:11

Q: Okay, I see. And then you mentioned that a lot of people in your neighborhood came from different backgrounds. I was wondering if you could just explain a little more about that.

Batchu: From my childhood, we were super close. There were two sisters, one was my age and one was a few years younger. And then they had a bunch of older siblings, but it was mainly us that would play together. They live right next door to us and they were from Bosnia.

00:58:41

Batchu: And so I think their parents also immigrated here from Bosnia and so it was really cool getting to know a little bit about that culture. And I would go to their house and eat Bosnian food and learn more about their culture and that was really cool as a child. And then I just had some different neighbors.

00:59:04

Batchu: I had another neighbor, a few who are also from different parts of India. And a lot of their parents also immigrated here. So I think it was nice that it wasn't just—like I never felt

⁸ An outdoor shopping mall in Meridian, the town adjacent to Boise.

isolated or anything. I always felt like I had a place I belonged to. And I also think that I was able to learn a lot about different families and their background as a young child. It wasn't super like, you know, "I have to stay at home." I went to other people's houses for dinner, my parents would come. We would talk and hang out. Yeah, it was very open.

00:59:42

Q: Sounds like a very idyllic childhood. Did you have a favorite toy or game when you were younger?

Batchu: Ooh, that's a really good question. So I was obsessed with Winnie the Pooh when I was younger and I think I gained even more fondness for it because it was Winnie the Pooh, and I would call it Pooh Bear, and Pooh Bear is like Puja. It kind of sounded the same. So I think I took a liking to that. I totally had a stuffed animal named Winnie the Pooh that, you know, I loved. And it was huge, so I loved it. Yeah, that's really funny thinking back at it. It doesn't really sound like my name, but it did then.

01:00:36

Q: Yeah, I can hear it. And did you have a favorite thing to do for fun when you were younger?

Batchu: A lot of my childhood was also spent—like the summers and stuff—I would go to a babysitter, the family who could speak Tamil who were Tamilian. And so I would spend a lot of my days there and she [the babysitter] was actually a dance instructor as well. And so I started learning dance with her and that has always been a huge hobby of mine. And also, you know we had a lot of fun playing as kids. And so we would play with Barbie dolls or their trampoline or random things like that.

01:01:22

Q: Yeah, I think you brought up dance a few times. What kinds of dance have you learned? Are you still dancing these days? And what does dance mean to you?

Batchu: Yeah, so I primarily learned Bharatanatyam, which is a classical Indian dance form. And that's the type of dance I learned from my babysitter / friend's mom. And so when I was younger, I used to learn a whole bunch of different styles, like I did ballet and tap. And I just, you know, as I wanted to. I did gymnastics as well. But, one thing that stuck with me throughout growing up was Bharatanatyam. And I had different gurus from when I was little to when I was in high school. Middle school, high school, I had a different guru, because my other one, she moved out of town.

01:02:13

Batchu: But yeah, Bharatanatyam was definitely the dance form I was most versed in. Recently, my junior year of high school, I had my arangetram, which is kind of like a graduation / celebration of sorts, and I did it with my friend Anushka, who was in my class with me.⁹ And so it's basically this big program and you prepare for it for more than a year. You learn a bunch of dances and you have to get a venue and set up everything. There's a lot of planning that went with it. And it was basically just me and her and we had live music from India. That was really cool.

Q: Wow.

01:02:52

Batchu: Yeah, they come to the United States, and they do a little tour for people's arangetrams. And so we were lucky enough that they were close enough by and they were friends with my guru. So we asked them if they would come and play and they did. So it was really amazing and it was basically just a celebration where we invited a bunch of family friends and just friends of ours.

01:03:15

Batchu: And we—me and my friend, Anushka—we did like nine or ten total dances. Most of them were together, but a few were solos. And it was really hard, because, you know, we had to dance for an hour, two hours straight, but it was very rewarding to show people what we have learned and how far we have gotten. And I feel like that was a big tradition that I've gotten to do in my life. Because it's a huge part of a dancer's career.

01:03:45

Q: Yeah. That's really, really lovely. Does your mom—or I don't know if men dance as commonly as women—but did your parents ever learn dance as well?

Batchu: So men do Bharatanatyam. I think it's more common, at least in the United States, for women. Like whenever you think Bharatanatyam, you always think of a girl dancing, but there's definitely guys who do it as well. I think it's much more common in India. I'm not really sure. But from my experiences, I've always had classes with girls.

01:04:22

Batchu: I think at one point there was one boy who was taking lessons. But in my experience, it's primarily girls here in the United States. It definitely is different in India, though. But my parents—so my dad did not really dance at all growing up. And then I don't think my mom did

⁹ A link to a video of Puja's arangetram is included in the endnotes.

either. I think she, you know, she might have learned a few steps here and there. But yeah, both of my parents aren't super big into dance. So it was interesting because I got that from another family. That's how I decided I really liked it, so if I hadn't known them, I probably wouldn't be dancing today, probably.

01:05:06

Q: And then with what you're talking about with all the dancers that you know primarily being female, I think that's interesting. Do you feel like those are close friendships for you that you've cultivated? And is there anything particular to you about it being an all-female space?

Batchu: Yeah, definitely. So throughout times, I've been in different groups. So I've gotten to meet a lot of different people through dance. And I think the coolest part about it is that you're meeting people who are passionate about something that you are, so you have that combined interest, but it's also one way that I've always felt that I could connect better with my culture.

01:05:51

Batchu: Because in Bharatanatyam, a lot of the dances are very fast and, you know, focus on footwork and things like that. But also, a lot of them are about telling stories. And so throughout the dance, you're basically doing dance moves and expressions that are telling a story to the audience. And so I felt that learning Bharatanatyam and learning those stories and performing them helped me come closer to my culture. Like that was one way that I could connect with it. And so it was really fun to do that with other girls who were, you know, passionate and wanted to learn about things like that.

01:06:27

Batchu: I think we all became very close friends, because, you know, before practice / during practice and after, you would always chit chat and, you know, talk about school and random things like that. And it just turned out that a lot of my classes, I was in classes with girls who are slightly different ages or went to different schools. So it's really fun to talk to them about their school or their experiences.

01:06:53

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. This is not as related to dance, but you also mentioned childhood trips to India earlier and I was wondering, what are your relationships with your extended family like? Do you have close cousins and how often were those trips?

Batchu: So we definitely went a little bit more—like we went every two or three years growing up and we would go in the summer because we had summer break. But I think we were going to

try to go this summer, but then the pandemic hit and everything so that kind of flew out of the window.

01:07:35

Batchu: But yeah, whenever we go, it's really fun because I stay with my grandparents, so my parents' parents. But we make sure we spend time at both houses, and so we usually divide the trip into half, kind of like that. And so we usually fly in and it's really cool, because one of my dad's, his younger brother, works in Hyderabad. He's a doctor there. And so Hyderabad is a bigger city than where my dad's parents live. They live in a bit of a smaller city compared to Hyderabad. And so whenever we go there, it's always really fun to go shopping, because their malls and stuff are very different from here and obviously they're selling, you know, different clothing and food. And so it's always really fun to go and look around and shop. And, you know, we will shop wherever we go, but in Hyderabad, it's like there's more shops and things like that. So it's always really fun to go there.

01:08:37

Batchu: And then at my grandparents' houses, my dad's dad used to own a rice mill. And I think my dad's brother now works there; he took over it. But it was really cool because they would tell me about how rice was grown and how you have to prepare it and they had all those big machines. So it was really cool to see that, something I would have never seen here.

01:09:05

Batchu: And it's always really fun, because in India—I think it's not as common now—but when I used to go when I was really young, a lot of families would all live together. So the grandparents and all of their kids and their kids would live in the same house a lot of the time. And so at my dad's house they did that too, but at my mom's house, since my grandpa has so many siblings, there's always a lot of cousins to play with. And they lived in this house that was pretty big because it had to, you know, hold all of them.

01:09:39

Batchu: And they had a well in the middle of the house and it was open. So whenever it rained there'd be rain that would come down inside the house, but it wouldn't get into the house, if that makes sense. Like there's an area. And I remember whenever it rained, me and my cousins would go and play in it inside. And they also had a little indoor swing. And so we would play on that. And so it was always super fun going to India because all of my cousins were there and they live with each other, or now they live relatively close, and so there's always someone to like play with or take you somewhere. Whereas, when at home, you know, I only have four people in my family. So it's a very different dynamic, compared to having all your cousins and all your

grandparents. And so whenever we go to India, it's always a party. There's always someone to do something with you.

01:10:35

Q: Yeah, I'm sorry you couldn't go this summer.

Batchu: Yeah. But hopefully next, hopefully next.

01:10:41

Q: Yeah I know. Among other things. Did you ever have any family chores?

Batchu: Sorry, do you mind saying that again?

01:10:53

Q: I don't mind. Did you ever have any family chores?

Batchu: Like things I would have to do around home?

Q: Yeah.

Batchu: Yeah okay. Yeah, that's actually a really good question, because I think growing up a lot of my friends would, you know, they would have specific chores like taking out the trash and things like that. And then they would get—what's the word—they would get paid for it or they would have like an allowance if they did their chores.

01:11:24

Batchu: In my family, it was quite a bit different. I didn't really get an allowance, but I also didn't have to depend on my own money to buy things, if that makes sense. We would help around the house, you know, like take out the trash, make our beds, help make food, sweep the floors. It was kind of expected to help when asked, but then we didn't get an allowance. But if I wanted a new toy or something, I could ask my parents, and they would buy it for me if I was being good and things like that.

01:11:55

Batchu: So it was just a very interesting experience, because especially—it wasn't so much in elementary school—but in middle school, I know a lot of my friends would say like, “Oh, do you want to go shopping or hang out?” And they would say, “Yeah, let me just make sure I have enough money for my allowance” or they would get an allowance. And I never had an allowance, per se, so it was just very interesting. But I think chores are pretty much the same. It

was just a different attitude around them. It wasn't like you had to do chores to get money. It was more like you do chores to help your family and we all did it together. So it never felt like, you know, awful or anything like that, but it was just a different experience.

01:12:40

Q: That makes sense. Okay, another question about childhood. Did you ever experience a particular moment where you—the phrasing is not great—but where you realized that you were Indian or Asian?

Batchu: So I think—and I want to say it was second grade, but it might have been third grade—we had this project in our class where it was about our ancestors. And we had to make a doll that was basically our ancestry, because I think we were talking about the Mayflower, or something like that. And so they're really talking about ancestors and you would have to make an ancestor of whoever immigrated here or something like that. And so, I remember I was kind of confused because a lot of my friends were talking about their ancestors from either the Mayflower or, you know, a long, long time ago.

01:13:49

Batchu: I was like, it was my parents. It was just kind of a little different. And so my mom helped me make a doll. And my doll was a female who was wearing a sari. And so it was really cute. And so I brought it and it looked very different from most of the people in my class, because, you know, all their dolls either had like pants and a shirt or they were wearing—I don't know—dresses with [petticoats] and things like that.

01:14:19

Batchu: My doll was significantly different, because it was bright colors. It was a bright red sari. And, you know, it was just very different and talking about my ancestors and stuff. I was talking about them living in India and then my parents coming. And there was a few other kids who also had more recent family members immigrate. And I remember that because I remember one of my friends was like, “Oh, this doll is my mom or my grandma” or something like that.

01:14:54

Batchu: And so it was such a cool project, but it was also, I think, the moment not necessarily that I realized that I was Indian, but maybe just like how it was unique for my parents who have come just like this last generation compared to other kids who—their families have been living here for decades or centuries, kind of thing.

01:15:22

Q: This is more random, but do you remember what people's reactions were to your doll?

Batchu: I think I remember my teacher saying she thought it was very colorful and she really liked the outfit on the doll. So yeah, I don't know if I quite remember everything about it, but it was definitely like you could tell whose doll was mine.

01:15:53

Batchu: So, yeah, so I think it was just the experience that maybe at the time I didn't reflect as much on it because it was just, you know, an assignment. But, looking back, we definitely had that doll for a few years. My mom put it up because we worked really hard on it and stuff. And so every time we saw it, we were like, "Oh yeah, this" and we remembered my project and how I talked about that.

01:16:20

Q: Yeah. And again, I don't expect you to remember, but do you think you remember feeling embarrassed or anything when you had a doll that just looked a lot different than everyone else's?

Batchu: I don't know if "embarrassed" would be the right word. I definitely did feel a little unique in a sense. I don't think—because I feel like "embarrassed" has a connotation of feeling badly or that kind of thing. And I definitely don't think I felt ashamed or anything like that. I was very proud of my doll. I remember that. It looked good. It was very good-looking.

01:17:00

Batchu: But I definitely did feel different. I think that might be a better way to put it down, because I wasn't scared of showing other people the doll. But I definitely realized that I had different backgrounds and heritages. So I think that that is a better way to put it, because I didn't feel ashamed at all. You know, I was proud of my doll. But, yeah, definitely did feel a difference with that.

01:17:33

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. I think I'm kind of on a different tack. You've also talked a lot about feeling really at home with different communities that you've grown up around. You've talked a lot about, I think, the warmth—if that's a good way to put it—of the temple. And so I was just wondering, are there any particular communities that you identify with?

Batchu: Can you elaborate a little bit? I just want to make sure I'm answering.

01:18:10

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah. “Community” I think is also a pretty vague descriptor. So I have in my notes, in particular, religious, racial, or ethnic communities. But I also think it could be however you choose to define community.

Batchu: Perfect, thank you for that. I think my community—let me take a second to put it together. I think one defining part of my community has definitely been my heritage. So being ethnically Indian, I think that in my life a lot of the events, like how I talked a little bit more about AID Boise for Diwali and things like that. In Boise, there's a pretty strong Indian community that have many events where we can celebrate our heritage and raise money for awareness or schools in India. I think that's what AID does.

01:19:14

Batchu: But I think that I definitely feel like I have a place in that community because I'm very close to—like I have a lot of friends in it. And I also am close to their family members. So really close friends, their parents are very close to me and they're also people in my life that I can go to for advice or just to have reassurance. So I'd feel like that's a strong part of my identity, just that community that I've been involved with. And that would include people that go to my temple or people who I have dance class with in Bharatanatyam. And I think that is a community that I'm very strongly, strongly with and is a huge part of my life.

01:20:01

Batchu: I think another community that I feel very involved with is just—in broad sense—it's just different activities that I'm really involved with, if that makes sense. I feel like people with passions that are similar are a very big part of me, things being for high school, for example, all the different clubs. I felt like those are very strong communities. I was a part of the German club or things like debate. I'm sure you feel the same way. They definitely helped me create an identity.

01:20:38

Batchu: And so I feel that part of my community—of one of my communities—is pretty big. Just people that I've met who are passionate about the same things as I am. And then—let me, hm. I think yeah, just like that. And then—oh, another one that's very community oriented is that I am a volunteer at St. Luke's [Hospital]. And so the reason I say this is because a huge part of their morals or values is community.

01:21:13

Batchu: And so I think I learned a lot about the value of different communities through that experience because it's centered around it and everything that we learn there is community oriented. So I think that I learned that a community can just be people who you feel safe and

valued with. And so I think that's also one my one of my big communities, where it's just people who care about me, and I care about them, that kind of thing. Sending good vibes all around.

01:21:50

Q: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And it's also really nice to hear that there are so many communities that you feel a part of. You've also touched a little bit on religion in your life. I was wondering if you could elaborate more, like do you feel religion is significant to you or your family? Yeah, like that.

Batchu: Yeah, I think so. In my family, we're definitely religious but I wouldn't say we're the most religious people on the planet. We go to the temple, but we don't go every single Sunday, kind of thing. But I also think that culture thing is a little different, because I think in different cultures, like Christian culture, you know, you go every single Sunday. And then, I mean, it might be the same in my religion, but I just feel like it's more—like I feel like the Sunday thing probably came about because of being in the US, for my temple.

01:22:56

Batchu: But I think that for a lot of people—when I think of people who practice Hinduism or are in that religion—I think a lot of it is there's a lot of different prayers and many different events that are a part of that religion where we pray for different different things. Even Holi could be considered a religious holiday. But I think for my family specifically, I feel like it's a lot more internal religion, if that makes sense. It's not super “going to church every Sunday,” but it's about praying and learning values.

01:23:34

Batchu: And for me, specifically, I feel like religion is very self-directed for me. You know, it's not as much of—it's a lot about the culture, but it's also about what I believe in it. I don't know if that makes any sense; it's kind of hard to explain. But we, in my family, we celebrate a lot of the different festivals. And it's interesting because my mom and dad both grew up with some of the same cultural traditions and some of them are different. So in my family, it's kind of a mix of the both.

01:24:11

Batchu: Yeah, and so we'll do both of them and we'll all do the prayer together or eat the food that we're supposed to eat. Some festivals have specific foods that you should eat. In one of them, I think it's the Telugu New Year, but there's a drink with mango. It's not sweet mango, but pieces of cut up mango and it has other things in it that you should drink every time. Or it is nice

to drink. I think it's called “pancham” or something like that.¹⁰ Yeah, I think it's like we're not uber religious but we're also not *not* religious.

01:24:55

Q: Yeah, make sense. Yeah, I think I'm going to jump down to my questions about school, even though you've talked about it. But I think the next couple of questions will feel more focused on school and also your life, I think, going into getting older and kind of leading up to your teenage years. So, first question is, what was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects?

Batchu: Okay, so I think like I've always been the kind of person who really likes school. I know it's kind of weird, but I really enjoyed learning and having classmates and good teachers and everyone learning and, you know, doing things together. That was always a huge thing. Sometimes, you know, obviously you don't feel like going or you're like, “Oh, I wish I didn't have to go to school.” But mainly I feel like I've always really liked school because I really like learning new things and creating connections with people.

01:26:07

Batchu: I would say my best subjects growing up, definitely following my mom and my dad, where it was math and science. I've always liked science. I also like something different from my parents. I really like reading, like just novels and books. I've always been really fascinated by that since the second grade. I love reading books and many different genres, but I'm awful with grammar and writing. Those have always been my worst subjects, I think, just because I just don't have the best grammar. Writing essays and things—that's a place where I had to improve a lot. Growing up, those classes were the ones I always struggled in. Not terribly! Just compared to math and science. Those are the ones, I just did not enjoy them as much, which I think is kind of funny because I love reading. I just don't like writing or grammar or things like that.

01:27:07

Batchu: Yeah, I think, also growing up, specifically in middle school, I feel like I also got more into reading and writing. Before in elementary school, I hated them. I hated doing worksheets that made you fix the grammar of sentences. As I grew up, I started gaining different skills from different classes on how to write or how to have proper grammar. And so that definitely made it a little easier.

01:27:39

Q: Mhm. And where did you attend elementary, middle, and high school?

¹⁰ The drink is called pachadi.

Batchu: Okay, so this is the part where it'll kind of get back to what we talked about earlier. So I went to elementary school until the end of first grade at Calvary Christian School. That was a K-12 school but I only went until first grade, like the end of it. And then I went to Summerwind Elementary School for second and third grade. And then I went to Andrus¹¹ for fourth and fifth. So, kind of jumped around a little bit.

01:28:22

Q: Was there a reason for the school changes?

Batchu: Yeah. So I think for Calvary, I don't know all of the reasons. But I think one of them was, it was just kind of far away from our house. And so my parents would have to drive me kind of far and I think we used to have a carpool with a few of my friends who also went there, but I think they also decided they didn't want to go. And I think there's a few other reasons that I didn't know about the time, but I think I switched to Summerwind. It was a lot closer to my house.

01:28:53

Batchu: And after third grade, at Summerwind going to Andrus, I think they had a GATE [gifted and talented education] program at Andrus that interested my parents. And they also had go-away GATE, where you had to go to a different school for part of it, which is what I did in fourth grade. I think it was one day a week or something where you would go to another school. And then in fifth grade, I was in the GATE at Andrus. And so, yeah, I don't know all of the reasons behind the changes. And then in fifth grade when I was at Andrus, that's when my brother started there. So he got to stay there. All through fifth grade. So he was at one school.

01:29:39

Batchu: And then for middle school, I went to Lowell Scott, but then in eighth grade, I went to TVMSC [Treasure Valley Math and Science Center] and Lowell Scott. And then for high school, I went to Centennial the whole time. But then in 9th and 10th grade. I went to TVMSC, but I didn't in 11th and 12th, so lots of different changes.

01:30:03

Q: Yeah, definitely. I know we've covered a lot of different schools, but how would you describe the different school environments? And did you feel like they were diverse? Did you feel like, were there other Indian American students in the classes as well?

¹¹ Full name is Cecil D. Andrus Elementary School.

Batchu: Yeah, so it was really interesting because from K through 5th, yeah, K through 5th—or I think it was K through 4th—I always had someone who was Indian in my class. And I mean, I feel like that's, you know, kind of wild, because in a class of 20 to 30 kids, there was always someone else. And so I didn't really understand how cool that was until fifth grade on, when there were just less Indians at my school or in my class. So I think when I went to Centennial, when I went to high school, there was only two or three other people who were Indian one of the years I went there. So for me, that was very interesting because it was just very different from elementary school where I always had at least one person who was also Indian. Yeah. I think it just depended on where people were living or what ages people were.

01:31:29

Q: That makes sense. You've touched on this as well. You've mentioned school activities like debate—or extracurriculars as well, like debate, dance, volunteering at St. Luke's. Were there other activities you did in school?

Batchu: Yeah, so growing up, the two sports I was really into—so I did dance, like I said before, and I also did a lot of swimming. And so that was always fun. Learning to swim is very important. I feel like, you know, at least you should know how to swim. My parents, they actually did take a couple lessons, so I was very proud of them for doing that. But yes, those were my two sports activities.

01:32:21

Batchu: And then I think in high school, that's when I really started developing a passion for extracurriculars. Because in middle school, I think a lot of the extracurriculars were more sports-related. And so they didn't really have that many after-school activities, like academic or just non-sport-wise. But in high school, that's when I started doing things like debate, as you know, or getting involved in the German club, or I did mock trial for a while as well. And so I think I kind of just took it as a space where, you know, you can just kind of explore and see things that you like, like environmental club or girls in STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics]. I think I was just involved in things I was passionate about and then I also met other people who were also passionate about it. So it was a good way to make friends [unclear].

01:33:19

Q: Yeah, that definitely resonates with me as well. Let's see, what else did I want to ask? Have you ever encountered stereotypes, either at school or outside of school?

Batchu: Yeah, I think, I was actually talking to my like family about this a few days ago. But I think I read an article or saw a video about how many stereotypes that we see so regularly

everywhere that people don't really say anything until a certain point. But for a long time, they were seen with a blind eye. So I think a lot of Indian stereotypes that I've just heard is, you know, that accent that people will do when they're talking about Indians. Or they compartmentalize Indians to being super, you know, geeky, or they're very categorical about that. And I feel like I've always been very offended by that, just because I feel like, you know, it's just a stereotype, definitely not true for everyone. And it's kind of demeaning sometimes.

01:34:37

Batchu: But I also think a lot of people who I have heard it, they didn't say it to hurt other people. I think it was just to them something normal to say. And so I think recently, a lot of people have been reevaluating the stereotypes that they held that they didn't know were necessarily stereotypes or, you know, they just didn't understand that. I'm sure a lot of people did use stereotypes negatively on purpose, but I think another thing is it's just been so ingrained in our culture.

01:35:10

Batchu: You know, different TV shows, even like *The Big Bang Theory* for things like that, showcase stereotypes in different ways. And so sometimes they get really big, but I think especially recently with all of these movements towards more equality and more understanding, I think it definitely is getting better and people are understanding that stereotypes—you need to realize that you have them and then start taking them away from your ideals and things like that.

01:35:44

Q: Definitely. And yeah, I think you also brought up some really good examples. I was also thinking of Apu from the *Simpsons*.

Batchu: Right. Exactly.

01:35:55

Q: I was wondering, you talk about certain people having those stereotypes. Were those particular people at school or just things you saw online or in pop culture?

Batchu: I think a lot of it was on online and pop culture, just because, you know, that's a readily accessible area nowadays. But I think a lot of it was also at school or with friends. And definitely a lot of the instances, I don't think I felt malice from people towards me or anyone. I think they just genuinely thought it was funny.

01:36:38

Batchu: And so I think a lot of it is just understanding and realizing that it isn't funny. And so I never took it—definitely I felt hurt by some things, sometimes, you know, as anyone would, but I also think it's just a large part of it. So I'm really glad that now people are starting to understand, how stereotypes, they've always been very bad. But I think a lot of people just didn't realize that they had stereotypes. But I think when people reevaluate their opinions and their stereotypes, they realize how hurtful it can be, if that makes sense.

01:37:15

Q: Definitely. Yeah, and I'm really sorry that people would say things and not even know that it was hurtful, because I think that can also, I feel, increase the amount of hurt sometimes. It's like, you don't even know what you're doing is harmful because it's off the radar for you.

Batchu: Yeah, definitely.

01:37:36

Q: Yeah, so I'm sorry to hear that. Kind of a related question is, if you could put it into a sentence or paragraph, what has it been like being Asian / Asian American / Indian / Indian American in Idaho?

Batchu: Yeah, so I think, first of all, just to put it into perspective, I've been really lucky that I grew up in Boise, where there is more diversity than some other places in Idaho. And so I think that really affected my experience, just because, you know, the different cultural backgrounds and things like that. So I think my experience has been genuinely really good, especially because I have strong ties to my culture at home and people in the community who also share the same culture.

01:38:35

Batchu: But I think it's been really unique because I've been introduced to different cultures. And having so many cultures has really been able to diversify my opinions and my ideals. So I think my experience has been a really good one. And I think, whatever I've learned from the past and my childhood and things with my experience has really helped me now in the future just with understanding, because I had such a diverse childhood, where I was open to learning about many different cultures, not just whatever was predominant in the United States, but also in different different backgrounds. Like people who were Bosnian or had any different backgrounds that had some of the same struggles that I had. I think it's really changed my perspective about how I look at issues. And so I've been really grateful that I was able to have that diverse background, instead of just knowing one thing,

01:39:38

Q: Yeah, I think that's also a really mature sort of reflection. Also, I'm looking at the time and so, I know I wanted to have this interview end at 3:30, and we can definitely end at it 3:30, but I would say I have about 20 to 30 minutes of questions left. So I guess I'm just wondering what is best for you.

Batchu: I'm totally fine with 20 to 30 more minutes of questions.

01:40:09

Q: Okay, I'll definitely pull the plug before 4. But yeah, I just wanted to check in. And if you also are like, "This is going too long," you can also cut me off.

Batchu: Okay, sounds good.

01:40:26

Q: I think this is more about friends at school, since you mentioned, it sounds like a lot of your friends who are Indian American or South Asian are outside of school. So I'm just wondering, what would you describe as the ethnicity of your friends, we'll say, in school in Idaho? And how did you get along with them?

Batchu: I think, as I grew up, it was a little bit less about distinction, just because it was a lot easier to have friends from school also hang out with friends from outside of school. I think just the area that I live in, there wasn't as many Indians going to my schools. And also the age groups, there aren't as many kids who are close to age, or that we would be going to the same school in the same grade, just where we lived.

01:41:23

Batchu: But I think in school, a lot of my friends have been predominantly white, just because that's just the population in this area. But I also think that I've had a lot of friends who are also Asian American and also from a ton of different parts of the world and who have a bunch of different backgrounds. I think especially at Centennial—I'm sure that you might have felt this way too—but I felt like we had a little bit of a different degree of diversity than some other schools, just because it was a magnet program for people to come to.

01:42:04

Batchu: And so I think I was lucky enough to have friends from a lot of different backgrounds. And then also different activities I did definitely allowed me to create connections with people who were different from I was and people who were the same as I was. So I think that living in an area that has diversity has really helped with that.

01:42:26

Q: Definitely. And then I think I have kind of a question about interactions with white friends. And I know obviously white people aren't a monolith, but do you feel like there is any difference in the way you interact with your friends who are white, versus friends who aren't white, or any other kind of cleavage?

Batchu: So I think, genuinely, I think it's pretty similar for me now. Because, you know, we can all relate to the same things, especially with media that's so accessible now. It's a lot easier to just talk about things because most people have heard about them. I know going to college, I was able to have friends who are from all different cultures and talking to them in a group was normal. Together, apart, you know, there wasn't really that much of a distinction, just because it was kind of normalized.

01:43:29

Batchu: But I think, yeah, I think definitely if I was hanging out at a friend who didn't have the same background as me, like if I went to their house and stuff, some of their customs were definitely different. I know for me wearing shoes inside of someone's house is just kind of not normal, because at my house we just don't wear shoes inside. And so when I go over to friends' houses, who aren't Asian American or Indian, and they're like, "Oh, just leave your shoes on," it feels really weird.

01:44:01

Batchu: Sometimes I'm just like, "I just have to take them off," or, you know, that kind of thing. Yeah, but I think they've really been little cultural things like that, not necessarily content that we talk about or communication. It's been more like—like I'm vegetarian. And so sometimes when I go over to people's houses, who aren't vegetarian, I feel bad if they made a meal with meat in it because then I could only eat the salad or something like that. And so I feel bad, like they have to make something else, just because I'm vegetarian or something like that. But I think, I mean, those things are just—like they're not necessarily communication differences, they're cultural differences.

01:44:50

Q: Right. I'm also wondering how you feel about the term Asian American. Do you feel that that's a category you feel included in? Yeah, I'm wondering what your takes are on that.

Batchu: Definitely. When I was younger, you know on standardized testing how you have to fill in the bubble sheets before you take the test about, you know, your family and ethnicity and stuff. I always, I don't know—it's kind of weird because I feel like no one really tells you, no one comes up to you and is like, "Okay, you're Asian American," and "You're that." It's just kind of

a known thing. And so I just remember some of the first few times doing that, I was just like, “Am I Asian American?” Because India is, you know, a part of Asia.

01:45:50

Batchu: But I feel like a lot of people, when they say “Asian,” they're not necessarily referring to Indian. So that distinction for me, it's always been a distinction because I think a lot of people, they cut up or they don't have the same definition of that. And so I've always—whenever I see that and I bubble in Asian American—I always think about that. Just because I feel like now, I totally identify as—if someone asked me what my identity was, I would probably say like Indian before Asian American, if that makes sense. But I definitely do identify with Asian American. So I think it's just in the context that it is used, if that makes sense. Yeah, I'm sure not everyone feels like that as well. But I think that's just been with my experiences.

01:46:49

Q: Mhm. That makes sense. And I think—what was I going to ask? Okay, it'll come back to me. Let's see, this is a question that's really far down the line. Also, I don't know if I specified, but this is sort of the “identity” section of my questions.

Batchu: Okay.

01:47:14

Q: Oh! What I was gonna ask, was did you ever feel in school that your histories were represented or who you were felt represented in a school curricula?

Batchu: Yeah, that's a super good question. I remember in middle school—so in elementary school, we did not really learn about other parts of the world, I feel like. At least wherever I was learning history from, we learned a lot about early American history and colonization. But I feel like we didn't really touch on anything too much around the world, unless it was something that I specifically brought up. Like if it was show and tell or something like that. Or if it was something like the project I talked about earlier, which was about your ancestors or culture.

01:48:07

Batchu: But in middle school, I remember there was this unit where we were learning about—it was more like a sub unit—and we were learning about different religions or cultures around the world. And it wasn't very—I remember the unit—it wasn't super long or anything like that. But when they were talking about India, I definitely felt like I could identify with some of the things that we learned, but I also felt like some of the things were slightly incorrect. Nothing was completely wrong, but I just feel like some of the information, I was like, “Really? Wait, is that what it's actually like?”

01:48:46

Batchu: You know, it's nothing awful or anything, but it was just interesting to learn. It's always interesting to learn about your culture from someone else's perspective, I think that's the best way to put it. With anyone's culture they have experienced things in their life that have built up the culture and put it behind their perspective. But then, learning about anything from someone else's perspective is—it'll be different. And so, learning about Hinduism from someone who was not Hindu, it was much more textbook. I think that's a better way to put it. Like when we were learning about it, I was like, “Well, yeah, that is true, but there's so much more.”

01:49:35

Batchu: And since it wasn't a super huge part of the unit, we didn't really cover as much, as I would have been like, “And this and this and this.” And so I think that I totally did wish that we learned more about Hinduism or different parts of the world in history classes. But I definitely think, you know, in middle school and elementary school, the curriculum is a lot less broad just because it's somewhat standardized. Yeah, definitely been like that, I think. Yeah. And it wasn't a bad or a good experience; it was just an interesting one. And the point where it's like, I've never thought of my culture or my identity like that. And so it's interesting to see a new perspective.

01:50:28

Q: Mhm. Yeah, that makes sense. And that really does sound like an interesting experience, to say the least. Let's see. This is a question that's kind of far off from the future. But if you had children, what kinds of traditions would you want to pass on?

01:50:52

Batchu: Ooh, I definitely thought about this before. I definitely want to make sure Indian culture is a big part of their life, because I feel like it's been so influential in mine, and it's so important. I think it's kind of hard because a lot of the rituals that my mom does, I don't really know that much about. Some of them, I do know a lot about, and some of them, I just don't. So I feel like I would want to make sure my kids had some sense of things. I think we would still celebrate all the holidays and we would still go to the temple and stuff.

01:51:29

Batchu: But it's always interesting to think about. I mean, these are questions that are just very hypothetical. But it's kind of like, where are they growing up, who is my partner, where are they going to school, things like that. So I think that, you know, when my parents got married, they probably never thought I was going to go to a Christian school for two years, you know. So I think that there's a lot of uncertainty in things like that, where it's just like I don't think you can plan every little thing. But I definitely want to make sure that Indian culture is a part of their life.

01:52:10

Q: Mhm. Yeah, that makes sense. Do you know if your parents have specific opinions about if you were to get married? Do they have any sort of strong feelings?

Batchu: Um, I don't know. I feel like that's a topic I haven't really talked to my parents about. That would be a very hypothetical situation for me right now. But I think that my parents are just very open. I don't think that they have a list of things that whoever I decide to marry has to meet. I think as long as they're [the future partner] kinda, you know, are good and I love them, I think they would be okay with it.

01:53:06

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. I think I'm in the “looking forward” section of my questions. And so you've talked about how you're studying biology, right?

Batchu: Yeah.

01:53:26

Q: And you're hoping to go to medical school, potentially. What drives you to have these goals? What do you see as some of the intermediate or long term effects of that study?

Batchu: As I said before, I've always been super math and science oriented. But another passion I feel like I've had is I've always wanted to do something that made a difference, and that I could do to help a community or just make the world a better place. And so I've been fascinated with medicine ever since I was really little. I think it's amazing that this knowledge could save people's lives, or even just make their quality of life better. I really like that direct impact of it. And I really like the topics that you can learn about during it.

01:54:25

Batchu: So I think those are a few things that have led me to come to this conclusion of what I want to do. But I think I'm a super community oriented person in the sense where I just want to do good for my community, because as I said before, a lot of who I am is because of all the amazing communities I was a part of. So I want to make sure that I can do something as significant with whatever I end up doing. And so I feel like going into the medical field is just a perfect blend of what I'm passionate about and what are my goals.

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Batchu: And so I think that's how I decided things about my major, because I just really like the subject and the things you could study under it. And then also, because it would help with the

end goal of being a doctor and helping people and making their qualities of life better. And just giving people the thought of having good health, because I think that's so important and that is a topic that stresses out a lot of people

01:55:30

Q: Yeah, I always feel like doctors are very noble. And I think it's really awesome that that's a goal that you have. I think on a slightly different note, we've talked a little bit about current events. And so you've also touched on the ongoing protests. I'm wondering, it sounds like it's caused a lot of change in some of your friend circles. For yourself, has it caused any kind of reflection, and for your family, has it caused any kind of discussion or reflection?

Batchu: In general, a lot of my friends for the most part are very open and they're very in tune with making sure that they—or to put it into better words, a lot of them are activists. And they are very into equality and things like that. But I think something that I really took away from what's happening right now is the fact that, I think anyone, no matter what their background, has a chance to have had hidden biases.

01:56:37

Batchu: So I think something, even from some classes I'm taking right now online, a lot of the discussions that we've had is just about finding your hidden biases. It doesn't matter who you are. It's just really important to make sure that you address them and to make sure that you're understanding where it's coming from. Because I think a lot of people, even if, they are activists or believe in equality or anything like that, no one is perfect. And so it's always really good to take a step aside and just kind of check in with yourself. And see, what are your opinions and what are backing it up and if you have any hidden biases that you need to address or things that you've never thought about. And I think that's what a lot of people, including friends or just people all over the world, are doing, because they're discovering things, even if it's just in society that we might have thought was fine a few years ago. But now looking into the deeper meaning behind it is just unjust [sic], if that makes sense.

01:57:41

Batchu: My friend was telling me about a [drugstore] that she went to.¹² And she said she was just trying to buy shampoo—and she has super curly hair—and all the curly hair products were locked up. And the other products were not, for people who had straight hair. And, you know, this isn't every store. It was just the one that she happened to go to. But I think that she was like, “This is unjust [sic],” and things like that. And a lot of people overlook things like that until it's brought to their attention.

¹² Puja later clarified that she wasn't sure if it was a Walgreens.

01:58:16

Batchu: And so I think that these protests, not only are they for such a good cause and something that really should change, but I think that they have a lot of the material and knowledge that has come to light from these protests, like a lot of different articles about how to check your own bias or how to see your own thoughts. Or specifically the ones that are saying that to be silent is helping the oppressor, things like that. I think they have really helped our opinions and they've really shown us that every single person, in order to make sure this world is a better place, needs to re-check their biases, needs to make sure they are fighting for what's right, and making sure that it's not only your interest that you're thinking about, but every human's.

01:59:11

Q: Right. So I think something that's significant to me about the protests is how it's also, I think, exposing a lot of generational divides. And I mean, I just know more young people, but I think it just feels like a lot more young people are in support. And when I talk to my parents, it feels like I have to do quite a lot of explaining sometimes, which I think has to do for a lot of reasons. So I was just wondering, have you had conversations about the protests with your parents? What does it feel like if you have been talking to them about it?

Batchu: So I definitely have talked to them about it and I think that the generational divide definitely has impacts on opinions and stuff. So talking to my family about it, both of my parents support the reasoning behind the protests. They believe in Black Lives Matter and equality and things like that. But I think some things have definitely come from where we get our information from, because I know that different generations use different types of media.

02:00:25

Batchu: And so a lot of the things, like the literature that I've been finding and reading about hidden biases or things like that, have been on different platforms than that they use. So I feel like the things that we talk a lot about are things like that instead. Because I think we for the most part, believe in the same things when it concerns rights and things like that. But I think a lot of our conversations have to do with other, different platforms and information that we're getting from there.

02:00:57

Batchu: So I think, last week we had a conversation about this movement. And it was really interesting to see, because we all believe in equality and equal rights and trying to tear down those stereotypes. But it's also interesting to see what they had to say about different topics and things like that, like about defunding police and topics like that. Because I think a misconception

that a lot of people have is what exactly it [defunding police] means, if that makes sense, or what it would end up being. So I think a lot of our conversations were about different actions like that.

02:01:46

Q: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Yeah, just to let you know, I really just have two questions left, so I didn't want to go too much overtime. The first question—so the reason why I didn't ask you too much about your college life is just because it's not in Idaho as much. But I'm just wondering, you've gone through a year of college. Has there been any sort of meaningful learning experience for you in that year? Has there been sort of any change just moving from Idaho to Utah?

02:02:26

Batchu: Yeah, for sure. I think that since moving from Boise to Salt Lake, it's like they have a lot of similarities, but there's also a few differences, because Salt Lake is a little bigger than Boise. But I think the different populations there are a little different from Boise, demographic-wise. I think that my experience was a little different than other people, just because I was lucky enough to have roommates that were—we all came from different backgrounds.

02:03:03

Batchu: And it was really nice because there's eight of us in total. And so it was very interesting, because there's a lot of people who had a lot of diverse backgrounds and we were all able to talk about them and talk about different issues that they have faced, I have faced, that the world is facing. And so I think that because of the people that I was able to surround myself with and the classes—like I took an ethics class with some of those people, too, because we all took it together for our learning community. And so I think taking classes that are very thought-provoking and force you to look at your own morals and things like that, with people with super diverse backgrounds, with many amazing different experiences, really helped open my mind to a lot of things going on in the world and how I can be an active citizen.

02:04:01

Batchu: I think that experience really helped with that. Because in high school, it was just a little bit different when we did talk about activism and things like that, because the demographic was different, different classes and it was more school. But living with people of different backgrounds and learning more about their beliefs and values was super valuable to me, because I was able to grow on my perceptions and shape my—the glasses I look at the world, that has to be a little bit more, I don't know, intricate? And it made me—I learned a lot more about life in general.

02:04:42

Q: That makes sense. I guess just one quick follow up. You mentioned that it's a demographic difference between classmates in Idaho, versus roommates and peers in Salt Lake. So I'm just wondering what those demographic differences for you are like?

Batchu: Yeah, for sure. So I think in Salt Lake, at the University of Utah, there's definitely a much stronger LDS [Latter Day Saints] presence than in Boise. At least that's how I felt. It might have just been because I was actively living with people who were also LDS and things like that. But I definitely did feel that difference in demographic. But also in my room there was only two people who are white and the rest of us had a ton of different backgrounds. I think two of them were Latina; another friend, her mom was from the Philippines. And then another one was from South America / a different part of the Latin community also. And so there's a lot of different people who are all living together.

2:05:56

Batchu: And then in our hallway—we lived in a hallway—that was a learning community. And so, there's a lot of diversity in our hallway, where there were people who were, you know, white and LDS, but there was also other people from a bunch of different backgrounds. Bunch of different religions. And, you know, a lot of us took that class together and we learned a lot about different philosophies and backgrounds and religions. So it's really, really cool to take classes like that with a bunch of diverse people with different backgrounds and different ways of life. So I think that changed my perception a little bit.

02:06:37

Q: Okay, okay. Sorry, last, last follow-up. Would you say there's a difference between your high school friend groups and your college friend groups then?

02:06:48

Batchu: I don't know. I feel like my high school friends would definitely get along with my friends in college. I think we're all very similar. I think that in high school, it's kind of like you've known them since, you know, you were little, or you kind of grew up with a lot of friends. Whereas in college, it's different, because you don't know as many people. And so I think the way that we became friends were a bit different in both scenarios. But I think that the two groups' values are very similar; opinions are very similar as well. And so I think that they would definitely get along or be friends.

02:07:32

Q: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Okay, so the final question is, is there anything you want to add to the interview that you feel like we haven't covered and is significant to you?

Batchu: Yeah, I think that, again, I don't know if I said this before or not, but I think I was very lucky to have grown up in an area where my personal beliefs and culture were respected for the most part by other people. And I think that, as I've grown up, I realized how important it is to make sure that you are staying true to yourself and your culture, you know, and at the same time while experiencing different things and learning more about other cultures.

02:08:23

Batchu: I think it's really important, no matter who you are, to be open to learning about backgrounds of other people and making sure that you check in with yourself about, you know, things that you believe in and what you think is right or wrong, especially in your own life, so to help with who you want to be.

Q: Oh, that's so great. I'm gonna stop the recording.

[END OF SESSION]

Endnotes

9. "Puja's Aarangetram Dance." Uploaded November 5, 2017. Filmed by Pavan Batchu.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTUozWTUHyw>.

Works Cited

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir. "Arti." <http://londonmandir.baps.org/worship/arti/>.