



Oral Histories of South Asian Immigrants in the United States

A Presentation at the Forbes Library in
Northampton, MA
on March Sunday the 11th at 2 pm.
Reception to Follow

Asians along with Latinos are the fastest growing immigrant population in the country. South Asians come from one of the most populace regions comprised of the countries of Bangladesh, Bhuttan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This region is also rich with different languages, religions, health practices like of Yoga and Ayurveda, cultures, spices and also has vast disparities of economic development and most of them were colonized. The immigrants from these countries come from one of the most collectivist cultures to work to live and must adjust to one of the most individualist country. In the United States there is wide spread public and media representation that South Asians are mostly computer experts, doctors or engineers. South Asian Voices, a collective, designed an Oral History Project in collaboration with the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. The aim was to capture their immigrant journeys, how they create communities in the host country and to dispel the stereotypes about South Asians living in the United States.

The 14 stories from this project are compiled in a book. Most of the interviews were conducted in the native languages of the immigrants which include Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Sariaki. These interviews were translated into English and then transcribed. All the interview tapes are archived at the Southern Oral History Project at UNC, Chapel Hill, NC. The stories invite us to listen to the voices who have navigated their lives across continents, cultures and provide us a glimpse of struggles and joys which the new immigrants face. Even though these oral histories come from the Southern U.S., a careful listening of them will remind us of the stories of those who are living here in the Pioneer Valley.

In the light of post 9/11 events, there has been a backlash against Middle Eastern looking immigrants which includes South Asian from all religions. As a matter of fact, one of the first victims of this backlash was Balbir Singh, a Sikh gas station owner from Mesa Arizona who was shot dead. You are invited to come and hear the stories of recent immigrants who make up part of our society.

The event is free and open to the public. Forbes Library is accessible. No registration is required. But in order to arrange for the snacks please confirm your participation via email or phone to Dr. Andrew Jilani, bilojil@hotmail.com (413-586-6408) or show up at the event. Books from this project will be on sale during the reception.