

## This is Your Heritage –

### South Gloucestershire Stories of the Indian Community

#### Interview: Prem Sagar Midha Full Interview Audio Transcription (11-11-2021)

Transcription by Bristol Transcription & Translation Services and edited by a member of the South Gloucestershire Museums Group, June 2022.

Interviewer: Halima Malek

Recorder: Hardik Gaurav

Location: At Home Little Stoke, Bristol

#### Participant prefix key:

I: Interviewer

R: Respondent

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#### Transcript begins 00:00

I: Hello, my name is Halima Malek, and I'm here from the Indian Heritage Project. Today is the 11th of November 2021 and I'm sat here with Mr Prem Midha. Hello Mr Prem, could you please introduce yourself and spell your name out for us?

R: Okay. I'm Prem Sagar Midha, Prem, P-r-e-m. My middle name is Sagar, which is S-a-g-a-r, and my surname is Midha, which M-i-d-h-a.

I: Thank you. Mr Prem, could you please let us know where you were born?

R: I was born in a place called Kamalia, which is now in Pakistan, and came to India, which is now India, in 1947.

I: Okay, so you were born in Pakistan and then you migrated to India when the Partition took place in 1947?

R: Yeah.

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I: Do you have any memories that you can share about your move from Pakistan to India at that time?

R: Yeah. But I started much before August. The Partition took place in August 1947. We came to India probably in May, June time, but before that, it all started, I was living in a place and a few, maybe 200 yards away there was a canal, and on the other side of the canal there was a Muslim locality. So they came in their hundreds across the canal to actually butcher us. They had all the weapons and things. And we used to live in a place which was a haveli building which was divided into two different flats. On the haveli there was this balcony type, so I could see everything that was happening, a lot of people are coming in with daggers and swords and things like that. We had somebody in that locality who had a gun, pistol. So he told these guys, 'If you advance any further then I'm going to shoot'. And then one of the guys from Muslim community, he said to the people, he was quite sensible, he says, 'Let's go back'. And that's my last memory. After that we migrated to India.

I: How old were you at that time?

R: About six.

I: Okay. So you left because you had to save your life, or your family's?

R: We were going to come anyway. The idea was the Partition is not going to take place, it's just they are making noises, we're going to come back. So temporarily we'll go back. Our uncle was in Jalandhar. Jalandhar is in India. We'll be with him for some time and when the things are calmed down we'll come back. So we left everything there, we just came to India with the clothes we were wearing and nothing else really. At that time we managed to, we were going there by train, there was no issues about walking or things like that. But it so happened [laughs] Partition did take place and we never went back.

I: Okay, so you left with none or your belongings?

R: Nothing. Nothing.

I: Or anything that was important to you?

R: Yeah.

I: And you left your home and migrated to India to stay with your uncle, thinking you were going to move back. How was India for you as a child of six, how did you feel at that time being away from family and friends?

R: No, no, everybody came with me, the family came. My father didn't come because he was a government servant and he said, 'I'll follow you'. So he came just before Partition. But he was in the government service so he got the protection of the police, there was no problem.

I: Okay. So the movement from Pakistan to India was okay, it was fairly safe?

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: So now you're six years old, Prem, and you're in a new country. How did you feel, how was that for you?

R: As a child you don't, I mean I remember the scene which I described but after that you come and play with these children of the same age, you go to the school, I started going to school, and it was nothing that we had moved. I said, I've come here on holidays, I'll go back sort of thing, that was the idea! [laughs] So back to school as normal and then it progressed from there and we never went back.

I: So it sounds like you had a nice childhood in India?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: And then, how did you then progress to schooling and to your later schooling as a teenager?

R: Okay. I was in a school in India which was, there was somebody called Swami Dayanand. He was very much interested in education, so he built a lot of schools in India. I was in one of those schools. And as a part of that we had to do some religious studies in Sanskrit. So they chose me to do that in a competitive examination at the age of 13. So I had to learn all those Sanskrit verses from Vedas, and I appeared in the examination. I did pass but I got a scholarship. At the age of 13 I got a scholarship, which was quite handy because I could be independent a little bit financially on my own. About that time my father had passed away, so it was useful.

I: Just for our viewers, what's Sanskrit?

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R: Sanskrit is the ancient language of India and all the philosophical texts are written in Sanskrit.

I: Okay, so it's a language?

R: Like Latin.

I: Like Latin?

R: Yeah.

I: It's part of your Hindu religious books as well?

R: Yeah, the ancient books are all written in Sanskrit.

I: Okay, thank you. So now you've got this scholarship and they've obviously recognised that you have talent. So then where did this scholarship take you into your education?

R: Well that was at the age of 13. Then I did my equivalent of GCSE and I was a bright person at that time so again, I appeared in the examination and I got ninth position in the whole of Punjab. Now at that time it was a university examination and there were probably half a million people all over the state appearing. So I was in ninth position in that. So on the basis of that then colleges wanted me to go to their college and they enticed me, they gave me more money! [laughs] To come to their college. So at the age of 16 I had a little salary coming into my house, scholarship from the university plus a lot of money from the college. I was there for two years and did my A Levels, then I went to do my Engineering in a place called Chandigarh, where I spent four years doing my Engineering. Because my father by that time had gone so I had to take some loan plus this scholarship, which saw me through for four years. Very expensive college to study in because we were given servants in our own room, you know, and we were treated like – once I didn't put a tie on and I went to the college. My principal came, he says, 'Where's your tie?' I said, 'In the laundry'. 'No, no, you go and get it. You are going to be the officers of this country tomorrow, and I don't want to see you like that. You should be disciplined'. So I was sent home to get a tie on! [laughs]

I: That obviously left a mark for you, that was the beginning of your career?

R: Yeah.

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I: Just to go back a little bit. You've lost your father, how was life at home for your mother and your family?

R: My father left some pension but not enough. But we are six children at that time and my two older brothers, they had started working by that time. So they were supporting us financially, and it was tight but it was manageable. We had a very good lifestyle when my father was around, but after that it just, you know, we lost his income and that made a lot of difference. But I took on more responsibility in the house, being the older male child, so I helped my mother in various things to run the house, you know.

I: So you became responsible at a very young age?

R: Very young age.

I: As you have younger siblings and the loss of your father, so you had to take on that more responsible role?

R: I'm not the eldest in the family but my eldest sibling had left the house, so I took on that role.

I: Okay. How did you choose which part of engineering you wanted to take part in?

R: Because of my position in my A Levels, which again I did very well, I could go to any college in terms of education in, so I could do medicine or engineering. In those days, engineering was more important because India was coming up and they wanted engineers more than doctors. So I just opted for doing engineering at that time. I got admission into this college. There were only very limited seats, only sixty seats for the whole of Punjab in that college, so I went there and spent four years doing this engineering. Then after that I got a job. I got three jobs after I graduated – I selected one which was a government job, in a company which was making machines for automating mines. In those days people were doing by hand all the mining. So we used to make machines for the automation of the mines. Then after working there for a little while I came to Faridabad, which is near Delhi, to work in a factory which made tractors. They were German tractors but assembled in India, and my job was to Indianise those parts, how to make it in here. So I was doing well. But then, being a young man I was ambitious, I wanted to do something which had got an edge. So I came to this country just to do my post-graduation and also to get some experience. Another reason for coming here was I was just curious how these people have ruled the world, what qualities they have got? I want to see, experience those qualities. So tourism and money didn't bring me to this country, I was doing well financially, good job, everything was fine. But just to do the post-graduation and get some experience and just to experience, see what qualities these people have got is what brought me here.

I: Thank you. If we just go back a little bit, before you came to England. How did you, first of all, find out about the post-graduation schemes in England? And how did you share this news with your mother, to tell her you were now leaving?

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**R:** It was advertised in the national papers by the British Government that they want engineers, doctors and teachers. And they said anybody who wants to come and that person is successful, they will give them a permanent visa. So I applied for that, I got the visa, and they gave me a six months' visa, so my visa was going to expire on the 26th of January. I didn't make up my mind till a week before that, and then I talked to my older brother who said 'You go there. You have been wanting to go abroad. Now you've got the opportunity, don't hesitate. If you come back after a week I don't mind. But otherwise you'll regret all your life that you got a chance and you didn't go there. So you come back if it doesn't work, it doesn't matter, it's just an airfare'. I came there on the last day when my visa was going to expire.

**I:** So your brother had encouraged you to take up this opportunity?

**R:** Yeah, yeah.

**I:** How old were you, what date did you come to England?

**R:** I was 25. I came on the 26th of January 1966, and I'll tell you an interesting story about it. I came by Middle Eastern Airlines and there was a stop in Beirut. So I got down, they had to change the plane or something. I went to buy a magazine and I offered in rupees! [laughs] And he says, 'I can only light a cigarette with your rupees. This is just worthless paper for me, it has no value at all. These rupees have no value to me, can you give me the money in pounds?' I could only bring £3 from that country and this magazine was half a pound, fifty pence. So I'm in a dilemma what to do actually, I'd like to read that magazine. So I gave this person, out of £3, 50p and I was left with £2.50 to come to this country! [laughs]

**I:** That's an amazing story! [laughs] Thank you. So you'd reached Heathrow, tell us about your experience. First of all, was this your first plane ride?

**R:** Yes.

**I:** So can you tell us how you felt to be on an aeroplane?

- R:** Well, it was nice to have that experience. But then this incident in Beirut made me think am I doing the right thing, what is happening? I didn't realise it is so cold in January here. I brought some warm clothes. After getting out of the plane I went to collect my luggage, and my suitcase was not there. After some time they brought a suitcase to me. I opened it and it belonged to a woman, not me. A similar suitcase, and there were saris and this and that, and my warm clothing was not there! [laughs] So I was at Heathrow airport with more or less a jumper. It was snowing outside actually. But it so happened that where I used to work in that place a colleague said, 'I know somebody in London. He may or may not come, but I can ask him'. So I came out of the airport and I started shouting his name. He hadn't seen me, I hadn't seen him, I don't know what he looks like. So I was shouting in desperation and he said, 'Oh, I'm here, I'm here, don't worry'. So he came and he said, 'Where's your coat?' I said, 'I have nothing. This is what I am wearing. My belongings are somewhere else, I don't know where they are and they don't know where it is'. He said, 'You're going to freeze. You take my coat, otherwise you're going to freeze. You're coming from India, you're not used to these cold conditions'. So he lend me his coat and with his coat on we went to his house.
- I:** Okay. So you'd lost all your belongings and you were left with saris, which are no good to you?
- R:** No, I left it at the airport. I had no one.
- I:** So coming out of the airport and seeing snow for the first time as a 24 year-old man, how was that experience for you?
- R:** Very depressing, because when you are in India and you hear about London and a foreign country, you've got a certain image of affluence and this and that, you see the films. And when I came it was cold and also it was not the same image which I'd formed in my mind. So my first impressions were not that good. And then other things happened. I came to this friend's house and he said, 'I've got permission for one night for you to stay, my landlady is very strict'. So he said, 'You have to find a place of your own'. The next day he said, 'I'll come with you'. So we looked at the paper and they said vacancies in this, this house. And whenever we went to anybody's house they looked at my face and said, 'It's gone. Filled up'. All the vacancies written there and they won't give me a place. So we went to three or four places, by that time it was the evening, I had to come back, and he went to his landlady again, he said, 'Unfortunately we can't find a place so he can't go anywhere, so can you allow another night for him to stay?' She reluctantly agreed. The next day also we spent looking for a place. Then fortunately somebody gave me a room.
- I:** Okay. So you came to England with the prospect of getting a job and furthering your education?
- R:** Yes.

- I:** Was there not, as part of the plan, a place for you already?
- R:** No, no, no. Nothing at all. What they said is we can give you social security, which is if you're unemployed for the time being. So I got this place and this friend – not friend, acquaintance – he lent me some money. I was writing maybe half a dozen or more applications every day to find a job, so it took me till the middle of the night or early hours next morning writing. In those days no typewriters, all handwritten things. Once the social security guy came, and I was asleep because I went to bed very late, he came early in the morning. He came the second day, he said, 'Have you come here to sleep in this country or do you want to do something?' I said, 'Look, I've got six applications I wrote last night. I don't want this money, but when you are working till late you can't get up in the morning'. So he understood. So he gave me first social security, it was 7 pounds, 4 shillings and sixpence. Out of that I paid £3.50 for the rent, I was left with about £4 for the whole week. I used to buy bread and butter and make toast on the heater, there was a gas heater, and that's what I was doing to survive till I had something better.
- I:** So in that time that you were here, did you not want to go back home? You're in a strange country, you don't know anybody, the food is different, the weather's different, the temperament of people are so different. Did you at any time regret your decision to come to England?
- R:** I did, but I said once I've taken the step I'm not going to go back, It doesn't matter what happens. And then people who were here, this chap who I stayed with said, 'Look, we all came here with qualifications. We had to wash dishes in restaurants, you'll have to do the same thing unfortunately. Nobody's going to give you a job'. I said, 'Okay, we'll see'. So I asked people, 'Tell me about London, I don't know anything about London, where the factories are?' Somebody said, 'Go to Greenford, there's some factories'. So I took the Tube, went there, and was just moving about. There was a factory that said vacancies for draughtsmen. So I said fine. I went inside, I said, 'I've got the experience and I saw your advertisement outside the factory, I would be interested in this job'. He said 'We haven't got the job, but we've got a sister company who might have'. So they were kind enough to take me in their own car to the other company. I was interviewed, I was offered a job. So I came back and told this guy. It was good money. He said, 'How did you do that?' [laughs] 'We've been here washing these dishes'. He was an M in mathematics. I said, 'There you are, I didn't do anything special, but I just tried and it worked'. Formerly I had draughtsmen working for me in India, I was a level higher, but I was grateful to accept that job because it was in my line.
- I:** So you've found this job and done really well. How were the people around you? Obviously you were in a job place where there's not a lot of Indians, I would imagine, so how was that experience of working?



**R:** I was not happy with that job because I wanted something different, so I still kept applying. Then I got an interview from a car company in Birmingham, it used to be called British Leyland. Now, how to come out of my present job, take a train and go to Birmingham? I can't take leave because I've just joined there. So I made an excuse, I said I've got a very bad tummy, I can't work, and they sent me to the nurse! [laughs] They had a nurse in the workplace, and she examined me. She said, 'There's nothing wrong with you, just take this tablet'. I'd missed the train by that time so I went to my boss, I said, 'Whatever the nurse is saying, I can't bear this, it's terrible'. He was kind, he said 'okay, you go home'. So I ran to the station! [laughs] Took the next train. By the time I reached Birmingham it was half past four, quarter to five, and my interview was at 3 o'clock. So I rang these guys and said, 'I'm here now, I'm late, what do you want to do?' He said, 'okay'. He waited for me. He said, 'Okay, I'll wait for you to come'. So I went, took a bus or something, went to the company and he interviewed me and he offered me a job which was much better than the job I had in London. That's how I ended up working for a car company.

**I:** You had showed so much confidence and bravery Mr Prem, to do that. To travel to another town that you obviously don't know, that was new to you, you keep pushing yourself and taking these opportunities. So you then moved to Birmingham for this new job?

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** How was Birmingham for you – the environment, the culture – was there any Hindu culture at that time?

**R:** Yeah, yeah, there was. I moved to live with a family who were Hindus, a young company, and they were renting out a room in their house, so that was good. I used to eat with them sometimes as well, which was a change! [laughs] I didn't eat any Indian food since I left India. Then at work I got to know some Indian Gujarati people and we became mates and used to go out with them on the weekend for drinking and all that sort of thing. And then I made some other friends, so it was getting better.

**I:** So life was getting better?

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** Your work was getting better, you were progressing.

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** What came next in your life?

**R:** Well, still my primary aim was to educate myself at post graduate level, so I was looking for opportunities. I saw this opportunity in the paper at Loughborough University, they were looking for a research assistant to do some research which was funded by the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council. So I applied for it, they called me for interview and they offered me the job. So within six months I left Birmingham and came to Loughborough. There were hurdles there as well. When I went there they wouldn't register me for a PhD. He said, 'You haven't got a British qualification, we can't register you for a PhD'. So I said, 'Why did you give me a job then? You should have said?' My supervisor said, 'I didn't realise this was going to happen. You'll have to do something to get equal in British qualification'. So I looked around and there was a professional institution, the Institution of Production Engineers, and if I became a member of that, that was equal then to a British degree! [laughs] So I wrote to them. They said, 'You don't have to do all the papers. We exempt you on the basis of what you have done in India. You have to appear on only three papers'. So I said, 'Oh, I'll do it'. So I appeared on those three papers, got the membership of the institution! [laughs] And then they registered me for a PhD. Again, you'll be very surprised on how foolish I was. There was a topic on which I would do the research, and I hadn't done much on that topic in my engineering degree, so I shouldn't have really gone for this! [laughs] But it is that confidence, I'll do it, I'll do it. So initially I struggled, and the supervisor left everything to me. He said, 'You order the machine, you order the equipment, this is what we want to do'. I had no idea about how these things happen, where do you order the machine from? They were going to spend £100,000 on that and if it turns out to be wrong, what will I do, you know? But everything worked out all right.

**I:** So yet again you get through all the obstacles?

**R:** There were a lot of obstacles but this is life, isn't it?

**I:** Every time, every new job, every opportunity you took, you flourished. So now you're part of this new industry, and then where did this research take you?

**R:** The research I did there for four years. Then, because I had some health issues, I was very anaemic. In a PhD you had to really work very hard, you had to study late hours and this and that. I could do the practical work all right, but when it came to really getting into the books and understanding the scientific background and things like that, it was difficult for me to be there for one hour reading all these things. Anyway, somehow I did. And then my supervisor knew somebody in a research place, not a teaching place, a research organisation called Production Engineering Research Association, and he told somebody there and they said, 'Okay, we'll give him a chance'. So I went there and worked for this research organisation. The idea of this was to do research for industry, small companies who cannot afford research engineers. Research is very expensive to do. So they pool all their resources, give it to this company called Birar Production Engineering Research Association, we'll do the research, we'll write reports, only for the companies who have sponsored us. So those reports were not published widely because the sponsors should benefit. I was going very well, seven, eight years worked there but no promotion. This is when I went to my boss. And my work was appreciation, I was good at writing reports, everything, I wrote all those reports. I said, 'I'm doing everything okay here, or do you want me to acquire some new skills if you're not happy with me?' He said 'you're doing fine'. 'Then why are you not promoting me? I'm doing all this responsibility you've given me and I deserve some promotion. Is it because my face doesn't fit? What is it?' He had no words. Within two weeks they gave me a promotion.

**I:** Where were you at this time, where was your job located?

**R:** I was in Melton Mowbray, which is near Leicester, about 16 miles or so from Leicester. It was a very posh place and they built this thing. I think in those days the idea was, if you're doing research you should be in a quiet place, not in a big city or anything like that. Nice surroundings, plants, trees, things like that, your mind is calm. And a very beautiful library, the whole thing was very good. I was doing well there. But then what happened, we had a professor who was leading this organisation. He was from Nottingham. He retired and then they hired somebody, an American young man, and he was a hiring and firing sort of chap. He came into this place, looked at various things, I had to give a presentation on what I was doing and all that. And he was just arbitrarily firing people, so I thought I don't want to stay here, what's the point? For example, he used to move people's desk from one office to another one in the evening so when you go in the next day you don't know where you're going to go! [laughs] That's not good. So I started looking for an alternative job. I thought research and teaching go hand in hand so I started looking for a teaching job, and applied for three places. I got three jobs, one in Wales, one in London, one in Bristol. So I chose the Bristol job and I'm here since then.

**I:** Okay. Before we start your amazing life in Bristol, what was your personal life now? Because obviously you were turning into a very mature young man. Have you been back to India, what was the position, had you settled down, married?

**R:** In the middle of doing the PhD I went to India because I was nearing 30 then and I said I should get married. It was an arranged marriage, they found somebody for me, we got married and then my wife came here as well. And then we had children naturally after marriage. I was going to India – in those days it was quite expensive to go to India – every three or four years. Because my family and my wife’s family, nobody’s here in this country. I’m the only one from them. She was in the same position, so we were going to India whenever we could afford.

**I:** Okay. Share a memory of your wedding day with us?

**R:** The wedding day was at my oldest brother’s. He was quite a guy actually. Very English in the sense that he went to college in Lahore which was based on an English model, and he did his M in English and then he got a job in an English company in Mumbai. And he had the privilege of being given a chauffeur-driven car and given a beautiful house in Delhi. So he hired a posh club for me to get married! [laughs] That was only for the reception. Then I got married in a Hindu temple. You’d got the Koran, you’d got the holy book, which was not mainstream Hinduism but we have a branch of Hinduism which believes in the Koran as well. There are some verses of the Koran written in Hindi, Hindi script, in that book as well. Because the person who started this came to Mecca to study the Koran. It was the time of the Aurangzeb. He wanted to know why Muslim was so different from Hinduism. Why can’t we live together? He said, ‘I must understand what the Koran says’. So he went to study the Koran there, and then he wrote this book. So there are a few chapters which are focused on the Koran. So we have that holy book and we just go seven times around that book and get married, like the traditional way. I got married and then there was a beautiful reception and then we went to – I had only a few days because by that time I was working, I couldn’t get a lot of leave – so I had less than a week. So we went for honey moon in a place called Nainitaal, came back and then I came back to the UK and my wife followed after some time.

**I:** That’s beautiful. Could you name that book for us?

**R:** We call it Kojanstraloop.

**I:** Thank you. So your career is flourishing every way possible. But what was the community like now? Had you made friends, were you part of a local temple here in English, you and your wife and your children? How was that part of your life going?

**R:** Before coming to Bristol I thought I'll see what sort of community is there. So I found a temple in Bristol and I got in touch with the chairperson of the temple. I went to see him, I said, 'I've just moved here, can you suggest where should we live?' He wasn't very forthcoming. But I didn't want to stay very much away from the university. I don't like commuting in the morning. So this was the place and we've never changed since then. They were building some new houses here and we bought this house, which is less than three miles from the university. And then I was going to the temple and getting to know people from there, and it all happened after that. And there's an organisation called Bristol Indian Association, it was then known as, but for some political reason it was taken over by the Sikhs so we started another organisation called the Avon Indian Community Association, and through that I sort of became involved in the community and chairperson and all that sort of thing. I've got to know many people since then.

**I:** So your life in the community was building and you were part of a Hindu Indian community?

**R:** Yeah.

**I:** So now you've moved to Bristol to teach, where was your job?

**R:** University of the West of England. Again, my life is like that. I came here and straight away they lowered my salary. I said, 'Why are you doing that?' In those days it was a polytechnic. The director said 'It's not under our control. It's the local government who's done it'. I said, 'They should have told me before coming here. I've resigned from a job which is paying more than you are paying me when I come here'. 'Sorry, we can't do anything about it'. So I wrote to the MP and everything. The MP said, 'Well, this is wrong but they are the rules'. I said, 'Why can't I see the rules before they offered me a job?' He said 'I can get a letter of apology'. I said 'What should I do with a letter of apology? It's no good to me!' [laughs] So after that it became a university after two years. I went to the Vice Chancellor's office. I said, 'Now it is under your control. What are you going to do?' [laughs] So they gave me all the backdated salary and everything.

**I:** You're at the university now, what is your position at this university?

- R:** I started as a senior lecturer at the top of the salary. My head of department, because I came from the research place, he said – my first name is Prem but I'm known as Sagar – he said 'Sagar, I would advise you to focus on research. You'll enjoy it much more than you do teaching. You do teaching as well but focus your career on research'. So for research you need money, you can't do research without money. I said I should build up something on the basis of which I can apply for some funding. So we got some student from China and he was working as a researcher here under me and my colleagues. So I steered him in a direction which was quite new in those days. Then there was an announcement, they said 'We want people to enter into a competition who are working in this area'. So we entered the competition and my student and myself went along with other universities somewhere, we did a presentation and we got the second prize in the whole of the UK. All this evidence is there now, in those days it was a computer company who sponsored this competition, and then they gave us a lot of computing equipment to go as a prize.
- I:** What was the competition based on, what was the research about?
- R:** The new area was called 'knowledge-based systems'. And this student was working in a technique called grinding, which is used very much in industry, but particularly in aerospace, where you need to position bars. You have two final processes in grinding, but the grinding also depends on people who are experienced. It's a bit of a black art, and if you don't have the experienced people it's difficult. So we thought why not put that experience in a computer, called knowledge-based systems? So if you've got the application you just interrogate the computer, the computer will tell you in which condition to use that. So that was the research, to develop knowledge-based systems in grinding.
- I:** So you have now come second in this competition and worked on grinding, which helps with specialised people in aerospace, in that career, in that space. Are you still now at the university or are you taking a different kind of route through your research?

- R:** No, on the basis of that research then I was looking for funding. The European Commission have a research fund as well, so I went to Brussels and I wrote there on a piece of paper what my research area is and put it on the notice board. It was a sort of conference, they presented which area they wanted to fund and all that. But it is not a mainstream area of research, so as a result of my paper on the board, nobody contacted me. Because we cannot do research until we have partners from Europe, the condition was that three countries must come together to get the funding. So then one day somebody approached me, he said 'We are interested in what you are doing, can we come together and do some research in this area?' They were in Italy and they were polishing stones, you know, these granites and marbles. And they wanted a knowledge-based system for that as well. He said, 'Can you develop that system for us?' Then we had another company from Spain, so we got together, I wrote a research proposal, submitted it to Brussels and then got the funding. That was a three-year project and we did the project and developed whatever we wanted to do. That led to three or four more projects. So I was getting funding from Europe for about ten years or more. It was a good life in the sense that the meetings were taking place sometimes in Bristol, sometimes in Iceland, Finland, Spain, Italy, everywhere, because everybody had to report their progress in a meeting somewhere. So I did less teaching, more research because of this.
- I:** So now you are internationally known as well in your work, you're working with international countries, your research is going amazing, you're getting more and more projects to work in, more and more research in. How did this field then lead you to Airbus?
- R:** Rolls-Royce and Airbus approached the University of the West of England. They said, 'we've got people who've come to us who are not graduates, but now they have worked with us for some time and they're very bright people. We want to formalise their knowledge with some award. So can you design a course for these people and then the university can award a degree based on that?' This was just before I came. We have to write a course document for each course, it's a thick book. You define what the course is, the planning, who's going to teach what subject area, all sorts of things. The document my colleague wrote was not accepted by the university. Then my head of department came, he says, 'Sagar, do you mind rewriting the whole thing, because we want this course and it has been rejected?' I said, 'What can I do?' So I took on the challenge! [laughs] I wrote the whole thing and I was quite new at that time, maybe two, three years. In that book you have to describe who's going to teach which subject. So I had about eight or nine lecturers who were doing different subjects. I was the course leader. But we had to go to a panel which is made up of senior university people and also people from other universities as well. So we had to confront this panel and they were given this course booklet and they asked us questions – quizzed us really. 'How are you doing this?' It took one hour, one and a half hours. I fielded most of the questions. And they approved the course. 'This document is brilliant, you can now offer the course to Rolls-Royce and Airbus. We're satisfied with that'. And then the Deputy Vice Chancellor, he wrote to my boss, he says, 'Sagar was a pillar of strength in that meeting'.

**I:** Could you tell us what that course was titled, this booklet that you created for Rolls-Royce and Airbus?

**R:** 'Advanced Engineering Programme'. Then it came to the point, okay, we have done the graduation part, can we do something at post graduate level? So again my boss comes to me, he says, 'Can you do the same thing for post graduate?' [laughs] I didn't know what the aerospace industry wants, you know, what do they want? My idea was – in those days something was being taught about called 'total technology'. That you not only impart the technical education to these people, you also impart them with management as well, because unless people know about the management they cannot make the right decisions. They have to understand the technology and the economics and the management also. So, based on what I read about this total technology, I designed two courses. One was called 'MSc in Total Technology' and 'MSc in [Technology Management]'. There was more emphasis in man management and technology in the Total Technology and the other was more technology management. Both these courses were approved and we started teaching people both from Rolls-Royce and Airbus. It was in collaboration with Bristol University, not only us. I was the person who was leading this course but we had lecturers from Bristol University and the University of the West of England, sometimes the courses were conducted at Bristol University, sometimes at the University of the West of England.

By that time they'd made me the research leader for the engineering section. Things went on. At those days at the University of the West of England, research was a novelty. Then they encouraged us to establish research centres in different fields. Very tough again. So I wrote a proposal for that. It was approved, so it became a research centre along with some colleagues I was working for, and those colleagues are still working and after I retired they wanted me to be with them. For a few years I've worked with them, I'm still in touch with them and what's going on.

**I:** So how did you end your career, on what foot?



**R:** Well, on the social level I got on very well with my boss, who told me your application should be focused on one thing only. Not only that, I took him to India [laughs] and I made a collaboration with some Indian universities as well. So I said, 'Why don't we design some courses which half of that is taught in India and half in this country? This way the students will not have to pay so much fee and the Indian organisations will get some experience of teaching at that level as well. We will supervise them'. So that happened. We collaborated with two universities and the students came for a number of years and they were doing half the course there, half here. The complaint here was these people are being spoon-fed by their lecturers, they're not independent thinking people. So we had to bring some culture of independent thinking in those institutions, go there and talk to the lecturers about how they can do this, that and the other. But I took my boss to meet various people heading these institutions and do the formal collaboration thing, and he was so pleased to be in India and being given that treatment, you know, they treated him very, very well.

**I:** Now you're retired, Mr Prem. Where is life right now for you?

**R:** My wife expired three and a half years ago. Not expired, she just left us. The options were either to lead a life without my wife or fill it with something. I had been spiritually inclined before as well, but this was the time where I had the time, so I moved towards more spirituality. I'm much more involved in doing my practices in the morning, I mean they take more than three hours, then about an hour in the evening. Because of this, we belong to something called the Isha Foundation, which is being led by somebody who's out of this world, he's my guru now. And there are people who follow this Isha Foundation in Bristol, so some of us meet in my house every Monday, and other things follow. So I'm totally involved. I've got no time for being lonely or anything like that. Then I started learning some music as well. So with God's grace, life is good.

**I:** That's really good. You mentioned music – what kind of music?

**R:** I started learning the harmonium. They run a school in the Isha Foundation called Sanskriti. Sanskriti means culture, culture-based. They take children at a very young age and they mould them into the ancient Indian culture, both music and sometimes these martial arts, kalarippayattu and all those sorts of things. So they are dancing, playing the guitar, the harmonium, singing. Then Sadhguru, who is our guru, he said 'Why don't we give this to the rest of the world as well?' So they are offering now singing courses and kalarippayattu and things like that. They offered the song which I was trying to home, they offered this song, I said I'll do that. It's short, four mornings, one hour each morning, they taught us this song. And they're teaching other things as well. I've been interested in music but never really had the guts or the time to sit down and pursue it. Now I've got the time. I've got a teacher from India now.

- I:** So you're still pushing yourself and still accomplishing. There's two more questions I want to ask you. One is still about your work. When you retired, how was that? Were you recognised in the field that you have helped to develop? How was your whole career celebrated in your work space?
- R:** No. Like many people, when you retire you have a retirement do when all the people get together, they give you presents and things like that, they make various speeches, they recognised in the speeches what I did. But just a common thing, nothing else, you know. Yeah, people got together and we had a lunch on that day, and my boss said some nice words about me! [laughs]
- I:** What's home for you now – England or India?
- R:** Both. I've spent the majority of my life in this country. This country has given me – even though I'm complaining – but it's given me a job, it's given me scope for doing things which I wanted to do. India, because my cultural roots are there and I feel that the West has to learn a lot really to understand what life is all about in any field, whether it's in medicine, psychology, culture. Because their approach is not profound as it should be. They still treat the human body as different parts – ear specialist, nose specialist, heart specialist – they don't understand all these things are working together. We have to treat holistically. The same thing applies in psychology, in mental health and all these things. I think the East has a lot to offer to enrich the life of the individual in the West. So I've got legs in both.
- I:** One last question. Are you Indian-British or British-Indian now?
- R:** British-Indian! [laughs]
- I:** Thank you Mr Prem, thank you so much.
- R:** You're welcome.

**Transcript ends 1:06:48**



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