

## **Desis of Silicon Valley Speak: An Oral History**

### **Bhaskar Ghosh Interview**

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Interviewer (I) Okay. Good afternoon, Mr. Ghosh. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview,

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(I) for the Desis of Silicon Valley Speak: An Oral History at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library of San Jose State University.

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(I) Thank you for your time.

Bhaskar Ghosh (B.G) You are welcome.

(I) So I'll start with the first question.

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(I) That is, tell us a bit about yourself and describe your journey up until now, in Silicon Valley.

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(B.G) Rolling back many years and I was born and brought up in the outskirts of Calcutta,

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(B.G) came to the U.S. to do my PhD, went to grad school at Rutgers and Yale and got the PhD in CS (computer science) from Yale.

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(B.G) That was back; and then my wife and I, she also did a PhD at Yale in cell bio. We moved in 1995 from New Haven to the San Francisco Bay Area and we've stayed here.

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(B.G) So it's been almost 30 years now, it's going to be 30 years in 2025.

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(B.G) And spent, you know, spent just like any other Silicon Valley professional, spent about 20 years in industry, in various companies,

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(B.G) building software, building teams, building products at Oracle and Yahoo and LinkedIn and a small company called NerdWallet.

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(B.G) And then I actually retired, I was going to go work in Hillary Clinton's administration to do something on data privacy. That didn't work out,

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(B.G) so, you know, around 2016-17, when I was retired, started spending more time on investing and on nonprofits,

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(B.G) and then accidentally came and joined this firm called 8VC

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(B.G) which is a venture capital firm in San Francisco. And then, you know, became the partner doing investments in enterprise software,

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(B.G) focusing on data, AI, and cloud. So full time investor and company builder

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(B.G) now. I also start companies, but the background is in Silicon Valley, so all things software and engineering.

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(I) Okay thank you. So what does Silicon Valley mean to you?

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(B.G) I feel I have to prepare for this interview. I think Silicon Valley, I would say that at least two things.

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(B.G) I think obviously it's a place and time. It's you know, this is where a lot of us who were lucky to come here, I mean,

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(B.G) when I came here in '95 it was, literally the Internet had just been started back in '95.

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(B.G) It was when everything kinda exploded. I would say this location with the two great schools, research schools,

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(B.G) and then the history of innovation and tech, and the optimism, and the propensity towards building stuff.

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(B.G) I would say the physical location is one with the universities and the companies and the culture of innovation. And the other is kind of the...spirit.

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(B.G) It's a state of mind. You know, there's a, so I would say in typical techie speak, the build oriented mentality, the optimism,

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(B.G) the acceptance of this area to take failure and to back people who try to build stuff and think out of the box.

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(B.G) Really, really, those are the two things which stand out in my mind as to what Silicon Valley means.

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(I) Thank you. So do you identify yourself as a Desi of Silicon Valley?

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(I) And what does that mean to you?

(B.G) That's a rather hard question.

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(B.G) I mean obviously, given my birth and ethnicity and skin color and accent.

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(B.G) Obviously, I am Desi. I mean my wife is also Indian, but of, but she's of Indian origin.

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(B.G) But we were born and brought up in the U.S.

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(B.G) I don't know. This is a tricky question to answer.

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(B.G) I think my networks are fairly well divided between Indians/Desi and, you know, all things other American.

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(B.G) So, so many of my interests, whether it's in music or literature or film, and you know, religions, everything comes from India.

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(B.G) But I would say I identify as a Desi at some level, but also as an American at some deeper levels.

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(I) Okay, and do you think that the Desi identity and the American identity that you

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(I) see within yourself or in your; do you think they speak to each other

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(I) well, they balance each other well?

(B.G) It's an evolution.

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(B.G) You know, the beauty of America is the deeper you dig in to America, the more interesting it; I mean,

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(B.G) obviously for land that is based on conflict, you know, the Native Americans

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(B.G) were there, of course there's the history of slavery, the history of the French and British occupation and the liberation.

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(B.G) I think the USA itself is also a set of ideas, right, and a set of processes and structures and platforms built with,

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(B.G) you know, with around governance and, and an aspirational nature of trying to provide a platform for everybody.

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(B.G) It's a highly imperfect society. But the beauty of the U.S. is that it creates the impression, I would say rightly, that it's a work in progress.

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(B.G) And the other beauty of the U.S. is that, at least for us immigrants on the coasts, I don't know what the center or the south of the country,

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(B.G) I wouldn't say we are being discriminated against in any active way.

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(B.G) I think there is a platform, a level playing field for, you know, building your, building your career,

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(B.G) building stuff, starting businesses, starting a family without the fear of persecution. Fair enough.

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(B.G) So I say I have found the true identity.

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(B.G) And, you know, I have become in a way more interested in India and my Indian identity after coming here,

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(B.G) because here you can't take anything for granted. You're having to define yourself,

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(B.G) and initially the definitions academic for me, then the definition is professional and economic.

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(B.G) And at this phase of my life, you know, when my son is rather grown up, you start defining what does home look like here.

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(B.G) And I think you're absolutely right, the two sides feed off of each other.

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(B.G) And I think what is healthy is the spirit of exploration that the U.S. gives to you, U.S. gives to you a sense of redefining yourself.

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(B.G) And I have become more and more interested in questions of identity in India,

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(B.G) after coming here, I've started reading much more about India, about different parts of India and learning.

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(B.G) My wife is Tamil American. So I learned a lot about South India from my wife and her family and her extended community.

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(B.G) I think sense of identity and exploration is something that I absolutely enjoy, between my American sides and my Indian sides.

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(B.G) And, you know, that is another reason why, whether it's in music or whether it's in the nonprofit,

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(B.G) in the nonprofit work, in the nonprofit work, I do that

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(B.G) I find myself wanting to relate to, build in, and give back. Or rather give it forward, rather than back, to both India and the U.S.

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(B.G) So I would say this is the probably the happiest part of my life.

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(B.G) This, this place of exploration where USA and Indian history, culture, sense of, sense of evolution, depth and richness really has helped me.

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(B.G) And I would you know, I'm really happy to be sitting in the center.

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(B.G) But that said, it requires constant work. Things are changing in India.

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(B.G) The India that I grew up in is not the India that we have now. And the USA that I came here 30 years ago is not the same USA now.

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(B.G) So you have to be brave and resourceful and always try to figure out where do you look at yourself.

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(B.G) And, you know, that is I think the most exciting part of living in this, in the...center of the, of these two identities.

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(I) Great. Thank you. So one thing I will say is, you know, after I moved to the West Coast and when I started off with this project at the library,

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(I) and I think why I started this project was because,

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(I) you know like, you know Indians for example, you know they're Desis, they are, they live in all different parts of this country.

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(I) And, you know, it's a reasonably well-to-do, very well educated community of people.

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(I) And, you know, they, they are very committed to continuing and cultivating their cultures.

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(I) Right you know, whether it's music, it's food, you know other things. Education continues to be very, very important for this entire community,

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(I) right. But what I really noticed is after coming to the West Coast is that whatever we identify as Desi culture, you know,

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(I) from whether it is, you know, on one extreme if it's Bollywood, the other extreme it's very high quality Carnatic music, right.

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(I) You know. So that wide range, you know, including food and clothes and everything, festivals.

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(I) And the different kinds of, like you know, theater groups, film groups, you know all these kinds of, nonprofit work.

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(I) It's at a level, not only in number, but also a quality that is probably not matched by any other region in this country.

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(I) Why, why is Desi culture...?

(B.G) I a hundred percent agree with you.

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(B.G) I don't even know if it's matched by anywhere else in the world.

(I) Yes.

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(I) Why is it so vibrant in the Silicon Valley, Desi culture, why is it so vibrant?

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(B.G) Um, how much time do we have?

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(B.G) If I know the answer, I'll tell you. I'll tell you one other thing that we should all think about.

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(B.G) I think there's a sense of renaissance and optimism in California that is very otherworldly.

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(B.G) Nowhere else in the U.S. do you find this sense of optimism.

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(B.G) Maybe it's the weather, maybe it's the history of Silicon Valley.

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(B.G) Maybe it's the racial, ethnic, cultural diversity that is very, nobody's hitting you over the head with it,

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(B.G) it's just there. Right? And let's not forget, there was tremendous amount of persecution.

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(B.G) 150 years back. Look at the history of immigration of Sikhs here.

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(B.G) Chinese here, Japanese here. We can talk about that.

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(B.G) But I think California is a state of mind.

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(B.G) And, you know, there is this frontier mentality in a positive way of allowing people to reinvent themselves.

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(B.G) And the build mentality I talked about, look at this group called Naatak,

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(B.G) I mean, you've also interviewed Sujit.

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(B.G) What an amazing group, what kind of work they're doing for 30 years almost now.

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(B.G) And it'll be really be hard pressed to find a group like that anywhere else in the U.S. or even any expat Indian community all over the world.

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(B.G) My wife and I, through a nonprofit, are sponsoring back in New York in Brooklyn,

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(B.G) a rather large 24-hour music festival called Ragas Live, which is pure Indian classical,

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(B.G) Hindustani and Carnatic, but also fusion Indian and jazz,

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(B.G) and also a lot of Sufi, Baul spiritual music coming out from North Africa, West Africa, Pakistan, India, so on and so forth.

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(B.G) I think the fact that we can even participate in that, forget about the donations and the grants and the stuff we are doing. Just morally,

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(B.G) spiritually, intellectually, the fact that we are excited by it is very much a gift of California.

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(B.G) You know, it's a really integrative culture. It's, it's more a melting pot than a salad, you know, if you think of Canada versus U.S.

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(B.G) So, of course, we have one benefit or drawback.

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(B.G) If you go to New York and New Jersey, the various waves of immigration of Indians from the 60s onwards

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(B.G) and you'll find people who are shopkeepers, taxi drivers,

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(B.G) you'll find people who directly came here to work.

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(B.G) Bay Area, now that you are here and you've only been here what, five, surely less than ten years, right?

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(B.G) Bay Area from '95 when we came here,

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(B.G) the Indians coming here are all from the, I would say, mostly privileged strata of India in terms of, I wouldn't say a caste or economic,

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(B.G) but the education they're bringing from India and from the top U.S. universities to here is unmatched anywhere else on the planet.

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(B.G) I mean, I don't even know in the heyday of Cambridge or Oxford, you had something at this scale.

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(B.G) So firstly you're getting this creme de la creme, highly driven,

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(B.G) highly educated technical professionals coming to basically this 35-mile zone off Route 101,

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(B.G) right. So highly packed, number one. Number two, I think the optimal, the cultural optimism,

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(B.G) the cultural diversity and the growth of the network of supporting arts has grown rather rapidly compared to 1995.

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(B.G) Right? When you interviewed the lady behind India, India Currents, no?

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(I) Yes. (B.G) That was pretty much the only thing available when we came here.

(I) Yeah. (B.G) There was a South Indian,

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(B.G) there was a Carnatic classical group called SIFA. There was a North Indian classical group called Basant Bahar.

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(B.G) That's about it, there was not much more.

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(I) Why has it grown, why has it grown so much?

(B.G) I think it has to do with two things.

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(B.G) One is very talented young professionals coming in and making families here,

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(B.G) from the top universities of the U.S., who already were good at what they did,

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(B.G) not just in studies but in culture

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(B.G) also. There's a strong correlation with, you know, some of the top students also, you know, having backgrounds in the arts.

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(B.G) Number two, last 20 years is when Silicon Valley has just exploded.

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(B.G) The number of companies whether it's...post Oracle and Salesforce, which is Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Yahoo,

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(B.G) are essentially controlling, and then the third wave which is, you know, Airbnb, Pinterest, Twitter, Lyft, Uber.

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(B.G) Look at the number of Indian and related professions.

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(B.G) It's huge. These 10 or 12 companies are essentially controlling the planet now.

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(B.G) Right? Think of Facebook and WhatsApp. Think of how much,

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(B.G) and YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Think of how much time people on the planet spend on it. Guess where they were built.

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(B.G) They're building this tiny, I would say, a five-mile zone in Mountain View and Palo Alto.

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(B.G) Literally all three things that I mentioned to you.

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(B.G) So what has happened is, this economic horsepower that has come, the Indian community that I just mentioned is central to it.

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(B.G) They have benefited from it, they have contributed to it. So the network effects around supporting arts has grown.

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(B.G) That's what I feel. If you look at, if you look at a theater group like...Naatak, or you know,

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(B.G) a Bengali theater group called ENAD, which was there earlier before you guys came here.

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(B.G) Look at the people in these groups,

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(B.G) they're all highly successful professionals, who are also enjoying giving time outside of work, and outside of families to this.

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(B.G) So I would say the intersection of the highly trained professionals who are culturally curious and supportive, number one.

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(B.G) And number two is their interaction with the huge economic flywheel that has been created here.

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(B.G) There's just so much disposable income. There is so much sense of optimism, right?

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(B.G) I would say those are at least two things. And yeah, fascinating observation though.

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(B.G) I mean, you just brought up something I had not thought about much, as to how different the Silicon

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(B.G) Valley culture around Indians is today in 2023, compared to 1995 when we came here.

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(B.G) I'm guessing for the Bangladeshi and the Pakistani community, it's similar, but I can't quote things as rapidly about them.

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(B.G) But I'm guessing you'll see very similar patterns there. Right?

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(I) Yeah. So, and you know, given your work like you know, not only the engineering life,

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(I) engineer's life that you have led or the busy life that you lead, but also the you know, your music festival or your nonprofit work, right.

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(I) Do you think, and also I think in your mainstream everyday work, do you think being Desi helps you succeed in your work?

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(B.G) I, look, I don't know being Desi is the issue,

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(B.G) but surely some of us who are privileged to go to great schools and colleges in India from which we and our fundamentals in science,

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(B.G) computer science, math, tech is extremely strong. Our work ethic is strong.

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(B.G) People like us who didn't have a home here and a bank balance here,

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(B.G) we also are driven by ambition and...insecurity, right.

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(B.G) So I would say, all of them kind of play, play with each other

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(B.G) and I, now, I'm trying to do some reverse migration stuff.

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(B.G) You know, I've started investing back in India through my 8VC entity, through my partnership.

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(B.G) And now it's funnily, I am looking, I go back at least twice a year to primarily to Bangalore and Madras.

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(B.G) So, only later in my career

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(B.G) now I'm actively looking in the Desi theme, about how do we do more in India, about the whole build in India selling the U.S. theme, right?

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(B.G) So I don't know if my "Desi identity" has helped me. I have never found myself making use of my Desi network only for prof-

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(B.G) I would say I have made relentless use of my Desi network for the cultural and the nonprofit side,

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(B.G) but I haven't found myself making use of it actively for my professional side.

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(B.G) Only now am I actively getting more interested in the professional side around investing in Indian software tech companies.

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(B.G) So that's, that's kind of a semi-answer to your question.

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(I) No, this is great. So in your nonprofit work, and of course the music that you describe, right the South Asian

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(I) I think broadly speaking, South Asian styles of music that you look at. I mean that obviously has to come from your being an Indian and then

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(I) you know, having, having had that kind of exposure to that music, and you know of course, and you're learning about it as you have grown.

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(I) But in your nonprofit work, can you say a little bit about how being Desi probably informs that work?

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(B.G) My life is very strange and unstructured, but you know, I am from the city that a very interesting lady named

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(B.G) named Mother Teresa is from, so I had the opportunity to work with her for a fairly long time

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(B.G) and I knew her well. And you know, my grad school days you know, I went through a fairly strong phase where I worked with Catholics very closely.

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(B.G) So even during grad school, I worked in Catholic soup kitchens literally for all five years at Yale, something that my wife continues to this day.

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(B.G) And she works in a Catholic soup kitchen in Menlo Park.

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(B.G) And I would say...spirit of service, you know, coming from urban literate Bengal is always there somewhere.

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(B.G) Right, I mean you are made aware of the inequities in society and that you've got to do something about it.

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(B.G) Now, whether you join politics and do it or whether you're doing it through charity or through, you know,

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(B.G) kind of social service. These differ based on the phase of your life and the way your values evolve,

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(B.G) right? So I would say, my time at Yale and then my time in, and before that my time in Jadavpur all informed.

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(B.G) And, you know, my own parents and what I saw, how they behaved and how they helped everybody around them.

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(B.G) We found out later my dad literally put like 12 kids through college without even, you know,

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(B.G) telling my mom. These are all kids of jute farmers in the suburbs of Bengal.

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(B.G) We found out that after my dad passed away in 2010, they all showed up at the Shraddho (last rites), right.

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(B.G) So I think, that all of this I think played a role.

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(B.G) It's very hard to separate these strands out to give you a very, I mean

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(B.G) I generally hate talking about my nonprofit or charity work, but I would say that then my initial time in the Bay Area,

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(B.G) I got to spend a lot of time with Catholic priests who were also highly politically active through a group called School of Americas Watch.

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(B.G) And what better place than like San Francisco to be in?

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(B.G) It is like the center of activism where, you know, religion is not thrown out.

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(B.G) And that is the one beautiful thing. If you mix with this certain segment of Catholic progressives,

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(B.G) I have found them to be the most interesting and spiritual and kind of humanist people that I've ever met,

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(B.G) whether they were working on the antinuclear movement or working on Latin American stuff.

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(B.G) I would say my...so I would say my journey is a little bit strange that way.

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(B.G) I think a lot of my inspiration came to me about after I came to the U.S. Of course,

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(B.G) I have been in very close touch with the nonprofit sector and particularly political sector of India.

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(B.G) Even now, I'm in very close touch.

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(B.G) We do a fair amount of donations and grants, but I would say a lot of my view on kind of optimistic social ideology,

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(B.G) how do you do service and how do you, how do you invest your time even in giving with a spirit of building stuff?

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(B.G) How do you build better systems? So I would say the cultural side, obviously, I think your question was about the influences.

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(B.G) I would say Desi has only partly informed us. You know, obviously when you go back and you read deeply about Tagore and you read deeply about Vivekananda,

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(B.G) you read deeply about other people, all of that is playing out in the subconscious.

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(B.G) So it's very hard for me to give you a linear narrative of how was this garden kind of planted, what was there below?

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(B.G) I surely know about my parents and my family.

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(B.G) I surely know about the, about the common background you and I come from, you know, which is you know, literate Bengal.

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(B.G) And but the unique thing I want to point out, point out to you is USA and the milieus I have been in,

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(B.G) I have been, I'm so grateful the people I've met here, I've sought out I've sought out.

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(B.G) They have played a very strong role in how I look at the world.

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(B.G) So one of the things that we would like to do is, you know, we want to make sure while we surely support South Asian causes in Pakistan,

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(B.G) Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India, and in this U.S.-South Asia corridor we support women's and children's causes in India,

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(B.G) we support climate change issues in India, we support culture in India.

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(B.G) We will also significantly support the historically black colleges in...the southern

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(B.G) part of the U.S. for both social as well as technical entrepreneurship, right.

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(B.G) I mean, anything I do where I could add personal value is of the some sense of technical build there.

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(B.G) Otherwise I don't have anything, you know, really not much value to add.

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(B.G) So I would say the part that, you know look, I remember when I came to this country and when blues was my favorite music, not Bollywood.

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(B.G) I was crazy about blues and jazz. I was crazy about American pop music.

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(B.G) And I would say USA, if you look at the music scene and the, you know folk scene is very, has deeply,

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(B.G) deeply, deeply influenced my values, not just my, you know listening habits.

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(B.G) Right. So the fact that if someday we can go support the historically black colleges in Mississippi, Alabama.

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(B.G) Remember, that the blues came, came from, came from Mississippi.

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(B.G) And, you know, probably some of the greatest music ever created by human beings came from there, in utter despair and suffering, which is amazing

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(B.G) right. And...we want to make sure there's some significant support from our family foundation that goes to historically black colleges.

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(B.G) How does that relate to me being a Desi? I don't know.

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(B.G) I think that, so fundamentally, it's a exploration of a dual tool identity maybe.

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(B.G) But, you know, I'm not an intellectual. I'm not, you know, not a very you know, I don't know anything about this. I don't know how to put a structure around it.

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(B.G) But to end it, the Desi part has played some role, not a full role.

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(B.G) Second is, as you get older, you want to work with people that you enjoy being with,

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(B.G) especially in the social service side. And whose imagination and creativity about what sort of a world they can imagine,

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(B.G) you can relate too, right. I don't think that has to be Desi.

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(B.G) I think that's a much larger canvas

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(B.G) and, you know, as for the remaining years that I have left in my life, and I'd love to play in that canvas and find friends like you also, right.

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(B.G) I think, I think your and my discussions are not purely Desi discussions, right.

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(B.G) I think the frameworks are much larger. And that was a long monologue, I'll hand the mic back to you.

(I) No, that was great! No, no, no, no.

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(I) It's fine. And you know I think, I think that is what we are trying to get to,

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(I) that what is it about, you know,

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(I) the fact that you are not necessarily being able to put your finger on what makes you Desi as you engage in all these, you know, relationships.

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(I) Right. But the fact that you, you will always be perceived as this Desi great imaginative guy who's doing all this work.

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(I) You know, that is probably how it will always be viewed. But, and I think that's what I'm trying to get at.

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(I) And I don't think we get this kind of thinking, like you said in different parts of the country.

(B.G) You know, I'll tell you Mantra something.

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(B.G) You know, I'll be, I'll be honest with you. Now that every time that you know, people ask me about India, they'll ask me to give talks,

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(B.G) India is so hard to categorize. There are so many

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(B.G) Indias. There are hundreds, if not thousands of multitudes, like the whole Walt Whitman thing,

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(B.G) right? India has so many multitudes. That's one thing,

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(B.G) right. The second I mean, India is not just about yoga and, you know not just about, you know, dosas or whatever.

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(B.G) It doesn't give itself easily to oversimplification. Mhm.

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(B.G) So I think as we get older and our brains become more static and we are closer to retirement and we become morally and intellectually lazy,

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(B.G) we have to oversimplify our identities.

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(B.G) I haven't reached that phase yet, but I'm sure if you interview me in 10 to 12 years, I'll give you radically different answers.

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(B.G) But I think we should take a lot of pride in something. We should take a lot of pride.

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(B.G) If we're curious about India and we're curious about where we come from, and we're open and honest about it,

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(B.G) and we don't try to build political stereotypes, which is not tearing India apart at a certain level.

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(B.G) It's great that we are from India, man. It is like you don't want to be from anywhere else, because that

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(B.G) is the, one of the most vast canvases of human civilization you can think of, with everything in it,

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(B.G) with suffering and joy and sorrow and invasions and exploitation and human creativity.

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(B.G) And I think being a Desi, being a curious Desi, gives us enormous opportunity like no other civilization to be

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(B.G) an amazing part of the forward thinking part of the USA. To me curious, compassionate, exploratory

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(B.G) Desis are the best gift India can give to the USA. These are the people

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(B.G) who I think can build an even better USA, which is always giving itself up to reinvention.

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(B.G) Right? So in a way, I consider myself so fortunate that, about that part of my life, that there is this gift of aspiration India has given us. Anyway,

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(B.G) sorry, I think I just interrupted you, but I wanted to get that off my chest.

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(I) No, sure. Absolutely. This is great. So, you know, I'm coming down to the kind of last structured questions that I have.

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(I) So one is, when you look back at your journey, how does Silicon Valley influence your identity as say, as a Desi.

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(I) And you have already talked a bit about that, but how do you think Silicon Valley has influenced your identity?

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(B.G) By Silicon Valley, do you mean more the industry in the corporate and the company side?

(I) Everything that you do in what is recognized as Silicon Valley?

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(B.G) Oh boy. That's a hard one, man.

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(B.G) So, I think I talked about it.

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(B.G) I think the culture of this integrated, imaginative, build oriented culture,

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(B.G) the culture of curiosity, and also all the older Californians I met. My neighbors,

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(B.G) all the professors at Stanford, you know, people who are based in Silicon Valley are some of the most innovative thinking,

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(B.G) curious, broad minded people I've ever met. And those are my heroes.

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(B.G) You know, all these people I've met. Whether there's some old 80-year-old on a Palo Alto City Council,

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(B.G) I'm just eager to hear their stories because, all of them have this thread of somehow being a renaissance person,

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(B.G) somehow being, wanting to build things by hand, somehow wanting to do new things, being optimistic, being curious.

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(B.G) And...I would say those human beings of Silicon Valley have been the biggest inspiration for me. In terms of the Desi here,

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(B.G) there are practical things that have happened. Now you look at the major top ten, ten doctor and tech companies,

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(B.G) well, seven of them are Indian CEOs. Right.

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(B.G) So I think there's a lot of this view of glass ceilings being...broken.

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(B.G) Has that helped me? I don't know, maybe it has, it allows me to go into circles that I wouldn't be allowed in.

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(B.G) That's one. But the other thing that has helped me in my line of work a lot in the last 5, 10 years is the rise of Indian software tech,

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(B.G) the rise of Indian startups. That has been a huge deal for us, right, from my Yahoo and LinkedIn days

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(B.G) I always built huge engineering teams back in India. Now what's happening is a lot of the venture capital build,

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(B.G) large companies in Silicon Valley are saying, hey, we have to be part of that explosion in India.

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(B.G) That's something that's now very new. And I think having a Desi identity selfishly obviously helps because, you know, I can, I can relate to both sides.

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(B.G) And when I go to India, even though I've never worked for a day there,

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(B.G) I'm very much a "firangi" (foreigner/Western), right? Who has only worked in the U.S. and my mental models are all very much American as far as work is concerned.

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(B.G) It obviously helps, right. Because people deal with you as, oh, here's this guy who's experienced, but he's an Indian from America,

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(B.G) right. So I would say that stuff has helped a lot. Other than that, it's other than the culture of optimism and the culture of build, I would say

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(B.G) yeah. I think, I think some of the stereotypes have expanded, as I pointed out, the glass ceiling part.

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(B.G) Those have I would say, indirectly or directly helped me.

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(B.G) But coming back, I'll make this point again. I mean, as long as my brain is working, my body is working.

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(B.G) It is so helpful for us to be from India, around; Did you just freeze up Mantra?

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(B.G) Hello, are you still there?

(I) I can hear you. I can hear you. Yes.

(B.G) Okay, you can hear me. Okay, sorry. I think I would just say the inner streams

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(B.G) for those of us who are still genuinely curious of India, and I am, I am one of them for the past and the future.

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(B.G) And I'm very curious about American past and the future.

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(B.G) There is no other place but Silicon Valley to look at yourself, because there's this culture of building optimism,

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(B.G) the culture of allowing oneself to get, get reinvented.

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(B.G) So I would say I am very fortunate with that hybrid identity more than a pure Desi identity.

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(I) Sure. Okay. So now, how do you foresee your or your family's future in Silicon Valley?

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(I) Are you hopeful? Not only like not; when I say family I don't mean of course, not only just your immediate family,

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(I) but, you know, as you see the nature of work, as you meet people from all over,

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(I) you know, do you, how do you foresee that? Do you; are you very hopeful?

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(I) Are you cautious? Are you concerned about anything, especially that, that what we understand broadly as Desi.

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(B.G) It's work in progress. Nobody knows what Indians in second and third generation would look like.

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(B.G) They will be part of Americana, of the brave new world of rebuilding itself.

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(B.G) Right. So they have to be part of this journey that America has decided for itself of how to build a better,

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(B.G) better democratic society and, you know, hopefully do business with the rest of the world in a more judicious and wise way.

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(B.G) I think, look I don't know the answer. This is a very difficult question because as we get really old and we get towards the end of our lives,

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(B.G) many other needs come out from the soul and spirit, of wanting to belong,

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(B.G) of wanting to be in your old ancestral home, of wanting to wake up in a suburb of Calcutta smelling the rain,

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(B.G) right? And maybe that will come, I think those are all hard questions, when economically you're not;

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(B.G) One of the challenges of living in the Bay Area that we didn't talk about it. This is, ultimately it's a gold rush town.

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(B.G) It's a gold, it's an economic flywheel. What happens when you finish your economic journey?

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(B.G) What happens when you finish your corporate and your entrepreneurship journey? What happens when you finish your technology journey?

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(B.G) You can stay curious. You can, you can still read. You can still go write code, but you are not full time participant in, the next generation is.

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(B.G) I don't know, I mean, that is a question I have for myself. How do we keep ourselves happy and productive?

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(B.G) That's surely a question in my mind. Is it tinged with apprehension and fear?

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(B.G) Maybe, maybe it is, right. We don't know...how to end one's life in Silicon Valley,

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(B.G) I don't know yet. But we will have to go, go away somewhere far and remote.

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(B.G) I haven't figured that out, but I just hope that the second, third,

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(B.G) fourth generations of Indians coming out of the Bay Area from our families, you know, be good, strong build, building citizens for the U.S.,

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(B.G) right. That they keep democracy alive in the USA and help indirectly keep democracy alive in India,

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(B.G) I think that's very important.

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(B.G) I think relating to both sides in the best possible way, giving back, paying it forward in the best possible way is what we should do.

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(B.G) Where do we build our last? I don't know the answer, but I'm...looking to figure that one out.

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(I) Sure. So, so that was my last question on the list.

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(I) But if there's anything that you would, that, you know, I haven't probably asked or it hasn't come up.

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(I) Is there anything that you

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(I) think about when you think of, as you see different waves of Indian families that, and coming to the Bay Area, Indian community growing,

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(I) do you have any thoughts about this? You know, broadly speaking, Desi community in Silicon Valley.

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(B.G) Oh boy. I would say two things.

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(B.G) One is the matter of curiosity. There's an old book, one of my very literate humanities PhD type friends gave me. The book was called America's

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(B.G) In the Heart, was written by a Filipino immigrant called Carlos Bulosan.

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(B.G) And he, you know, he worked in the strawberry fields and was an agricultural

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(B.G) laborer. I think, a lot of us fortunate Silicon Valley types

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(B.G) ultimately, you know, when I'm in New York on business, so many of the Uber drivers are Indians or Bangladeshis.

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(B.G) I think one of the things that is lacking partly in the Indian community here, and I'll just limit myself to Silicon Valley professionals

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(B.G) for now, I can't give a larger answer. Is, you know, do we know the people who work in restaurants that well?

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(B.G) Do we know the cooks of these restaurants that well? Do we know the people who run motels here that well?

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(B.G) Well, the Patels and the Desis have been running all the motels of the Midwest and South.

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(B.G) I would say, I hope I can find out more.

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(B.G) I hope I can learn more about how the other Indian groups are living.

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(B.G) Because they are not in our faces, right. But like in New York they're right there,

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(B.G) you don't have a choice but to talk to people. As one of the other part is,

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(B.G) the kind of constant work part. I mean, the constant work on identity,

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(B.G) what will people gravitate to? What will be there?

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(B.G) A central driving force, a farming community.

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(B.G) And, you know, that's something that worries me about the Bengali urban side of me extremely deeply.

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(B.G) As a lot of us kind of quote unquote, postmodern Bengali who come from Calcutta don't take religion as our core driving force, right?

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(B.G) That is not, I mean, I know we are all participating in the Durga Puja, but more on the community aspect, the beauty aspect,

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(B.G) the energy aspect, not in the spiritual traditions and under religious traditions.

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(B.G) If I look at the two things which bring people together, other than cricket and, you know, Bollywood, right?

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(B.G) I would say, one is people's ethnic and language groups.

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(B.G) And one is frankly...religion and some aspect of spirituality and how it expresses itself. I would say,

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(B.G) how does that evolve in the Bay Area is what I'm extremely curious about.

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(B.G) How do people come together more, beyond their immediate circles?

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(B.G) Because, you know, my life in a way accidentally has been about that, right?

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(B.G) Being a curious person with a very thick skin, you're knocking on doors

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(B.G) I shouldn't be knocking on, right. You know, I've accidentally ended up doing stuff that some Indians do not allow to do, right.

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(B.G) I mean, you won't find a lot of Indians trying to engage in the historically black colleges that, that deeply right.

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(B.G) You know, you don't have that many Indians who are actively organizing a more American driven, avant garde, you know, festival like Ragas Live.

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(B.G) So, I am, that's something that I'm curious and worried about, because in India we come from a collection of very,

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(B.G) very small, what I would call micro...circuits, micro networks and micro cultures.

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(B.G) India, modern India, if you look at what's happening now, the driving force of defining what a nation is,

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(B.G) what our history is. The reason people listen to these narratives,

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(B.G) which are often wrongheaded or cruel or, you know,

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(B.G) kind of ignores what I think is good about India, is because there has never been a larger coalescing movement on what being Indian means.

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(B.G) Our local identities are often the strongest. I'm curious about that in the Bay Area,

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(B.G) and I see that as sadly, or you know practically, reflecting what Indians are like back in India. That it's one of those two things.

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(B.G) I hope, I hope, I hope in my lifetime if I have 20, 30 years left, I don't know how much I have left.

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(B.G) I hope I, you know, I can personally and my people who are close to me, we can mix across these networks,

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(B.G) we can mix across these communities, that we are not trapped in these smaller concentric circles.

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(B.G) I would say those are some of the, couple of questions.

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(B.G) The third question to me is even more important. I would love to see Indians who are successful here, who are, you know, lucky to make money,

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(B.G) who are lucky to gain power, to give back to kind of how America should look like.

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(B.G) How will it remain a strong democracy, offering a level playing field, offering a platform for everybody to,

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(B.G) you know, raise a family, get an education, health care, have a job that they enjoy doing.

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(B.G) And I would say, Indians engaging in the U.S. and even, you know, if you look at the Bay Area towns,

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(B.G) I'd love to see Indians being in the city council more, becoming mayors more.

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(B.G) Not because they're Desi,

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(B.G) but they should bring their special chemistry of Desiness to the American table and kind of influence things for the better.

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(B.G) And I think what you are doing with your Studs Terkel like spoken history thing is,

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(B.G) you are raising these questions in a very gentle way, as to what does identity mean,

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(B.G) where does it go? Right.

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(B.G) So to me, Indians who are fortunate like us, participating in the American experiment is very important to me, and not to withdraw back into our shells,

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(B.G) into our pre described, prescribed or prescribed, you know, kind of the smaller communities.

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(B.G) I would say those are a few of the themes I still have in my head.

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(B.G) That's about it, man. Yeah, yeah.

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(I) This is great. Thank you.

(B.G) Did the taping happen?

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(B.G) Recording happened actually?

(I) Yes, yes. It's still happening

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(I) and I'm going to stop the recording now.

(B.G) Thank you. By the way, I just want to say thank you.

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(B.G) You have been such a refreshing, positive person to talk to.

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(B.G) I really admire what you're doing. I hope, I hope, I hope you do some amazing interviews and kind of, we can help you distribute it.

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(I) Yes, that would be great, yeah. I'm going to stop the recording and then I'm going to talk about something else.

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(I) Thank you.