

Desis of Silicon Valley Speak: An Oral History
Sandip Bhattacharya and Bipasha Sinha Interview

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Interviewer (I): Okay, so thank you very much. I'm Mantra Roy from the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library of San Jose State University.

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I: And thank you for agreeing to interview

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I: for the "Desis of Silicon Valley Speak: An Oral History."

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I: So just to start off, I would like you to introduce yourselves and kind of describe the journey that you have had so far

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I: until you are at this point in Silicon Valley.

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Sandip (S): So my name is Sandip Bhattacharya. My wife is also with me. Her name is Bipasha Sinha. So we came to the Silicon Valley, 2006, late 2006 and then we kind of made it our home, right. And both of us have been, have traveled extensively around the world.

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S: Many countries actually, including our homeland India. And then finally, we kind of made this our home now. You know, I came to U.S. to do my second Master's in Business from Boston.

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S: And while I was doing, I was offered a job. And that's how I basically came here. For the interview, I came here and then I liked that place. When I went back and completed my degree, I said, it is the place to be. So that's why I landed up here. Yeah.

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I: Okay, and would Bipasha want to add to that?

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Bipasha (B): Yeah, basically the reason we moved here to, as my husband said that he wanted to do his master's here and we moved to Boston and from Boston to California.

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B: Predominantly,

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B: I am a teacher. I teach art, drawing, sketching, everything to all the students, like schools after schools. And yeah, and we moved here, we liked it here and we just stayed back. That's what it is. Yeah.

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I: Okay, so what does Silicon Valley mean to you, to both of you? Like, with regarding your work and the fabulous music festival that you both do.

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I: What does Silicon Valley mean to you in that context?

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S: Hmm. So I think it's a big, very big question; and actually there are two questions in there, in that question, right?

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S: I think one of the things that what Silicon Valley means to us are essentially it's a very cosmopolitan, very progressive

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S: place, right? You kind of are accepted very easily. As I said, we traveled all over the world. And this we found to be very different. Including, and if I'm comparing with Boston, though there is a very strong, you know, Indian, pan-Indian diaspora there and I could see significant,

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S: you know positivity in that, in Silicon Valley, A). B) In terms of facilities [inaudible]

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S: or restaurants and so on and so forth. And, while we are not very

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S: temple going people, or going to any place of worship and so on, but we noticed that, you know, there are lots of places of worship here and so on and so forth. People can

00:03:08.730 --> 00:03:26.310

S: can go there. And I think that's one is, it's

B: very accepting

S: very open arms, right. And also you have a place where you can disagree with somebody, at the same time be civil about it, right. So I think that's a positivity of Silicon Valley.

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S: Bipasha, do you want to add something?

B: Yeah, so Silicon Valley for me is some like, you know, people are open, they're accepting, you can have your opinions.

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B: Boston was little bit restrictive in, you know, people were not that open. Here you see a lot of Asians. So yeah, it was easy to talk to them when we came here, it was, you know, not that difficult to communicate with people.

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B: And as far as the other stuff is concerned culturally, you know, Pujos (religious festival), festivals, they were all here already when we came here. So yeah, it was very easy for us to just settle down and feel at home.

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S: So that's the first part. The second part is related to the festival. Right? I think your question is how did we get into this festival thing, isn't it, is it correct?

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I: Yes, yes.

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S: Yeah, so I think one of the positive things about Silicon Valley is what you've heard. But then there is also another thing,

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S: which can become negative, in the sense that there's a lot of people running after a serious amount of competition.

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S: I don't know how much of that competition is valuable, but there is a competition and there is a lot of

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S: competition because of competition. You see what I'm saying. You're, you're just running because you are a rat in the race, right? That kind of a mindset, not in a derogatory sense,

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S: but it is a significant amount of competition, A). B) is, also we noticed, at least I and my wife noticed, that while there are a lot of these so-called cultural organizations or religious or religio-cultural organizations and so on and so forth,

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S: we notice that quite a few of them are kind of exclusive in nature, A). B) they are also non-secular in nature, and especially the religious ones.

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S: And C) what is very important is that we thought that, you know, we should have a very secular, very inclusive, and non-elitist progressive way of, you know, conducting.

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S: A festival is basically an event, but there is a lot that goes before the event and after the event.

B: Yeah.

S: Right? And we said, okay, we're going to have a festival of Bangla music. And why Bangla? Because that's, that's the language that we

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S: think.

B: We speak, yeah we think.

S: Right? And I think, I think, while we, we appreciate a lot of other cultures and other languages,

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S: but I thought we should, we have a responsibility of propagating our own mother tongue, and that's what we did. That doesn't mean we are, you know,

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S: exclusive about it, but this festival is exclusive for Bangla music. While having said that, there were non-Bengali performers also, including non-Asian, non-Asian born performers too, right?
So

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S: and, that performance was basically five hours, and you know, it was for everybody. I think you've been there.

I: Yes

S: It was for anybody who wanted to participate, should participate.

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S: And why I said it is non-elitist because it is nothing, not about how good you are singing, but the journey towards that singing moment of two and a half to three minutes, or maybe five minutes on the stage, right, A). B) is also inculcating...

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S: how would I say. I would not say cultural, I would say habit of those rehearsals where you can communicate, not only about the music, but also

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S: what is the story behind our music, why that particular word was there in that lyric, why that phrase was used, and what contemporary

00:06:48.510 --> 00:06:53.190

S: history was involved in that and so on and so forth. A song is a song which can be entertaining, but

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S: there's a lot that goes behind any particular song of a particular nature, right? I'm not talking about electronic dance music. I'm talking about

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S: the music which has certain verbiage, with some poetry and music, musical complexity, but at the same time be also very simple to deliver, right?

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S: And finally, while we do all of that stuff, right, there has to be a cause. And what is the cause? Right?

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S: We are professionals, we are privileged in some shape and form, right? And we have a talent of doing music or trying to do music together.

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S: We said, okay, why don't we use these two tools assets available to us to create some kind of a helping hand for folks at home in India, fundamentally in Bengal.

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S: And focused primarily on girl child or, you know, underprivileged while and without being patronizing. You know what I mean?

I: Yes.

S: So we can't be there physically but at least we can provide them financial support.

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S: Whatever we can, right?

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S: It

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S: [inaudible] complete transparency of how do we do this festival. This festival, by the way,

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S: while you know, my, myself and my wife were actually driving a lot of stuff, but I think

00:08:10.440 --> 00:08:17.400

S: there are lot, many people who were driving it, right?

B: Yeah.

S: And there is no structure like they said this is a president, that person is a secretary,

00:08:17.730 --> 00:08:22.440

S: that person is a treasurer, this that and so on and so forth. It was completely open sourced.

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B: And all voluntarily people were doing it.

S: Hundred percent volunteered, hundred percent. And you've been there, right? Hundred percent volunteered.

00:08:28.500 --> 00:08:39.300

S: We...did it, we learned from the last year's festival. We stumbled this year also in some places, but you know, we picked up ourselves and moved on, rather than creating

00:08:39.630 --> 00:08:49.560

S: hierarchical structure and major organizational bureaucracy around it. It was, I mean, I would say it was a kind of a Bengali Woodstock minus the negativity that

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S: were around the Woodstock in the sense, you know, the drugs and all that stuff.

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S: That's basically what it is.

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I: Hmm. So, I mean,

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I: then do you think, say if you were in Boston, would you have attempted to do the same thing, or was it because it's Silicon Valley where this kind of cultural vibrancy is possible, that it helped you?

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S: I..so

B: I think it's difficult to say because Boston is also culturally very, very, you know, it's a very strong place where you can do a lot of cultural stuff.

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B: We don't know because we didn't stay there. However, we, we can say this, that for Bay Area, it's quite accepting. People know these kind of stuff. To get

00:09:30.750 --> 00:09:40.740

B: Bengalis in this place. Like there are so many Bengali festivals and Pujos and going on. So maybe it was, it's a little easier to do that.

S: I think that, yes.

00:09:41.340 --> 00:09:54.330

S: It's easy, but I, you know, I have to say something. Right. We stayed in Boston for a year, right? And if you look at most of the Bostonian Bengali culture or Asian culture is sprouting from the university world, right?

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S: Which is basically

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S: the MITs, the Harvards, the Boston College and so on and so forth. Right?

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S: So if you notice all of them are, you know, they have a particular kind of center of gravity around one of those universities, right, or a bunch of universities or colleges. Right?

00:10:10.170 --> 00:10:22.230

S: Which is not the case in Silicon Valley. That's point number one. Point number two, and in Silicon Valley also I have been, you know, myself and my wife and all of us, we've been trying to do this for many, many years. Right?

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S: And, you know, trying to do this not in this scale that you saw but, you know, trying to do something together. I don't know what that something was.

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S: And as I mentioned, there is a serious level of exclusivity. So people were kind of confused: if I'm not aligned to a particular organization, how can I be not aligned and still do something together? You see what I'm saying?

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S: You know, that mindset typically that you have to be organized to organize something, you know what I mean?

00:10:51.000 --> 00:11:02.940

S: You have to have an organization to be organized. And I actually was very much against that idea that you have to have an organization to be organized. Because the moment you have an organization,

00:11:03.360 --> 00:11:12.870

S: you create boundaries of exclusivity and that is not acceptable so far as our core principles are. Anybody who wants to come from any part of the world, any kind of music,

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S: any kind of talent level, we're not going to judge, right? And by the way, we are no one to judge somebody's capability to perform in a particular shape and form.

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S: And that is basically not only diversity but also inclusion in the sense that, you know, people with certain

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S: physical challenges, mental challenges, or even financial challenges, language, linguistic challenges. Everybody was, you know, invited and I was personally

00:11:39.870 --> 00:11:46.320

S: ensuring that nobody gets a no for an answer. And it's not easy, because you know, if you're not perceived to be a big

00:11:46.920 --> 00:11:52.530

S: a good singer, then it is very difficult for you to assimilate within the team. You see what I'm saying? Right?

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S: So...but I am sure that if that is not the case, that if that is, that is the perception, it is not the problem of the candidate. It is a problem with the team, which is not able to assimilate.

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S: So the team has to work hard to make sure that they can assimilate that particular individual or a group of individuals or an idea. Okay. Right? So all ideas are good, every person is good. Every person has some level of talent and so on and so forth.

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S: So, I think, to your point it is, it wasn't a talent show.

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S: It was

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S: more of an organizing around Bengali culture. And I don't even want to call it as a cultural event. Okay. I mean, that's my point you know, fundamental you know...

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S: argument against calling an event a cultural event. Cultural; these are all anthropological artifacts, right? So, for example, music, dance, art. Right? Books, literature, whatever you call it. Right?

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S: Or even food. Right?

00:12:48.960 --> 00:12:52.470

S: And all of them are anthropological artifacts.

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S: That kind of in a way enumerates or articulates the historical, the history of a culture of that point in time. Right, right?

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S: For instance, for instance, in our, in our, back home in India, if you notice, there have been certain cultural events which are not so nice. Right? For example,

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S: "Sati daho" was an event, right? Or "Devdasi pratha" was a cultural event, right? But

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S: it's an anthropological fact. That's not what our culture is. We have moved on. So there's a contemporaneous matter in the whole idea. Doing songs and dance doesn't make you cultural, right? Right?

00:13:32.550 --> 00:13:39.090

S: In fact, not doing can make you more cultural if you are actually following the...anthropological

00:13:39.510 --> 00:13:46.680

S: artifacts as a part of your part of your, you know, embellishing your...your mind. You see, you see what I'm saying?

00:13:47.340 --> 00:13:56.310

S: From a library, I'm sure you understand what I'm saying. A library is a collection of books. So culture is a collection of lots of these anthropological artifacts,

00:13:56.610 --> 00:14:04.920

S: which gives a particular point in time, a particular color and imagery of that particular time zone when we are no more in this world. Right?

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I: Hmm.

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B: So I think the basic stuff that we thought

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B: when we started Bay Area Bengali cultural, like Bay Area Bengali Music Festival, was that

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B: we all loved music. Sandip was into music. He had a band of his own before we started this program. So, we all loved music and

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B: music was the base, and then we incorporated music by doing something towards our

00:14:33.840 --> 00:14:41.160

B: you know, just giving it back to the society. And that's what we thought that, you know, we can combine both of it and then do good

00:14:41.520 --> 00:14:55.680

B: you know, some way or the other, you know. So, yeah. So last year also we donated a lot of money to Promise Worldwide and this year also we had a thought of making it even bigger. And we donated, I don't know if we can quote that one.

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S: Yeah, we donated to Corona Foundation in Kolkata. They're doing some work with underprivileged girl child.

B: This year also, it was almost double

00:15:04.710 --> 00:15:16.140

B: that we, you know, the proceeds were even better this year. And we are so happy that that we did it, you know, so we, we want to do this every year. Yeah.

S: Yeah. And also, you know...

00:15:16.980 --> 00:15:21.060

B: It's just the love for music that we have. Even we don't call it cultural, if we don't call it

00:15:21.540 --> 00:15:29.730

B: anything. But it's just that our love for music, and through music, we just want to do some good to people who are underprivileged and needy, you know.

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S: Yeah, and also on a technical side, right? Except the auditorium, right? And the physical building of the auditorium.

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S: All the technical components and gadgetry were our own, right? Including technicians, right? So all, all of them are volunteer work and I mean you saw the quality of our...our event. Right? I mean, it was absolutely, there was no negative event. Right? No, no mishaps.

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S: We started on time, we ended on time.

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S: Everybody was heard. There was no chaos. Everybody was fed in terms of volunteers and kids, they were all taken care of. All of that happened without having a

00:16:08.250 --> 00:16:19.890

S: you know, major, you know, structure and hierarchy and reporting and all of that stuff. That's what is fundamentally very different than what we notice in lot of other, other, you know,

00:16:21.360 --> 00:16:30.210

S: organizations and that's why we wanted to differentiate. We could have probably done the same in Boston. I'm, I don't know about that. It's really a hypothetical thing.

00:16:30.480 --> 00:16:36.000

S: But I think it was just a matter of time that, that you know, we took in Silicon Valley.

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S: That, that probably helped us, because it took a while for people to get used to it, get used to the idea. And I and my wife cannot do it, right? There were hundreds of people, in fact, there were 130 volunteers actually doing that.

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S: So that's a lot of people. Right?

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I: Yeah.

S: Yeah, and we were recognized by the city of Santa Clara. And by the way, we did not reach out to them. They reached out to us. We were actually pushing back on them, including

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S: Ro Khanna's office, because we did not want this to be any line to any politics or any party or anything like that. It has to be open. You might have your own view, that's fine.

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S: I might have my own view, it's fine. But this is not about positioning your own individual views. This is about propagating Bangla music and contributing to a good cause. As simple as that. Two line

00:17:23.220 --> 00:17:24.210

S: constitution.

00:17:25.470 --> 00:17:37.800

I: Yes. So regarding that, it just tying into my next question. So do you consider yourself, in the light of what you have done, do you and you, and I hope that you will continue to do this even in

00:17:38.130 --> 00:17:47.580

I: the forthcoming years. Do you consider yourself as a Desi of Silicon Valley, who is contributing to the cultural map of Silicon Valley?

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S: I don't want to use the word Desi.

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S: [inaudible] that I'm contributing. You know, I think we can evaluate the quantum of contribution, right? Contribution is a quantitative term, correct?

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S: What we are doing, what we can claim is that we have wholehearted intent to do something to bring people together. That's all. Okay.

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S: It's nothing more than that. We don't get any content that we, that we've collected so much of money or so many songs were sung. No.

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S: Our content is essentially we are happy. We made, the whole team, not only me and my wife but 130 people,

00:18:23.370 --> 00:18:34.530

S: that we were all together in that journey. That allness is important and the cause that is very important. Right? That's, that's the second part of the question. The first part of the question is Desi thing; I think,

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S: you know we, I and my wife, don't think that we should have any definition of a geographical boundary based on your passport, right, which means a passport is giving you a

00:18:50.250 --> 00:18:58.710

S: political geographic boundary that you are from that part of the world and so on and so forth. I think, you know, especially Bangla culture Mantra, you know very well,

00:18:59.130 --> 00:19:06.570

S: has been very international and it's very humanistic. Right? In fact Rabindranath Tagore was asked, what do you, what do you choose,

00:19:07.140 --> 00:19:18.390

S: nationalism or patriotism? Right? And he chose patriotism, because he said it is a, it's a diamond. I would rather not have a glass in place of a diamond, because he was a humanist.

00:19:18.630 --> 00:19:24.900

S: And humanism has to do with internationalism, as well as, you know, global citizenry. Right?

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S: At the same time, you can't boil the ocean, right? So global citizenry is a melting point of all the ideas and cultures, right?

00:19:32.970 --> 00:19:47.910

S: It's just a matter of fact that I was born in India to an Indian family and so on and so forth, and my government gave me a passport.

B: Yeah, I think we can say we are more Bengali than yeah.

S: Exactly, that's what we bring to the table, right? We reached out to everybody, anybody actually.

00:19:49.980 --> 00:19:57.060

S: And we believe that the moment you take, make yourself Desi, there is a non-Desi element to it, you see what I'm saying?

00:19:57.570 --> 00:19:58.320

I: Yes.

00:19:58.680 --> 00:20:13.200

S: You see what I'm saying?

B: So yeah I think we would like to, ourselves to be called more like Bengalis who are settled here maybe, or Bengali immigrants, whatever you can say. But I don't know whether we would like to call ourselves Desis, but yeah.

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S: Well Desi is a brand which I don't think we should stick on our, on our back as a crosshair. I have, I have

00:20:23.160 --> 00:20:40.800

S: apprehensions. Desi means, oh, he's not a Desi, you know, I am a Desi. No, I think that if that connotation is not there, then yes, I am a Desi because I come from India. That's, that's all about it, okay. Do I like to eat steak on a Sunday afternoon in the springtime? The answer is yes.

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I: Yes.

S: Do I want my, you know, my non-Desi, I mean [inaudible]

00:20:45.000 --> 00:20:47.160

S: to listen to Bangla music? Absolutely yes. You see what I'm saying?

00:20:48.120 --> 00:20:48.870

I: Yes.

00:20:51.900 --> 00:21:01.530

I: Sure. So, but would you still say that, so in your work right, both with the Bangla Music Festival and your other professional life,

00:21:02.070 --> 00:21:11.280

I: do you think your identity, whether you, I mean, if it's a Bengali immigrant identity that you identify as or if you are asked to identify as, may not

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I: be a label you want to adhere to yourselves, but do you think that plays a role in what you are doing in a certain way?

00:21:20.280 --> 00:21:34.590

I: And do you think identifying yourself as a Desi would kind of, how would it inform if you were identified as Desis, because Bangla Music would, you know, technically would fall under the title of being Desi cultural music or whatever.

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S: Yeah.

I: How does that inform the work that you do?

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S: It doesn't actually, it doesn't. So this is something very innately coming out because the way I've been brought up, right?

00:21:47.400 --> 00:21:53.820

S: Not because the way I think. You see what I'm saying? So it's more of an internal evolution, like, you know, I've been brought up,

00:21:54.180 --> 00:22:03.300

S: me and my wife and all of those 130+ people, we've been brought up. And all of them are immigrants in some shape and form, right? It's a matter of duration and some maybe 10 years and some maybe 3 years.

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I: Yeah.

00:22:04.350 --> 00:22:07.440

S: All of us have grown up listening to music at home,

00:22:07.770 --> 00:22:14.610

S: you know, reading books and so on and so forth. And every evening picking up the harmonium and singing songs or early morning and so on so forth, right?

00:22:15.030 --> 00:22:20.730

S: That's a part of thing, we never thought at that point in time that is because we are busy. That did not identify

00:22:21.180 --> 00:22:31.350

S: our, that particular activity has got nothing to do with our geographical identity, right? That was what we are. Basically respecting your parents is what we are, right? You know,

00:22:31.890 --> 00:22:43.920

S: appreciating the good work of Bengali literatures or poets, and you know, all those great philosophers is what we are. And I think that, that we, you know, we felt that you know, that part of our innate

00:22:44.370 --> 00:22:52.470

S: you know, upbringing, right? Or mental, mental calibration I would say has to come out. It's [inaudible]

00:22:54.600 --> 00:23:08.370

S: And that is exactly what we get. It was not really to say, okay, this is my identity. I have to prove it. You see what I'm saying? I'm not flashing that on somebody's space saying, okay, this is Desi and now look at me what I can do. No.

00:23:08.760 --> 00:23:19.350

S: This is like, you know, if you go to somebody, some Italian's house and a woman is making a nice pasta, not because she wants to prove that she's Italian, because she wants to say, look, this is my good food, you want to share it. You see what I'm saying?

00:23:20.010 --> 00:23:31.890

B: But however, saying that, we can say this much, that maybe if we would have been in India, maybe we might not have been able to do this kind of a thing at

00:23:32.550 --> 00:23:42.570

B: at this, at you know, this large scale. It is possible maybe because we came here and we're doing it. You know, I don't know if that makes sense to your

00:23:43.260 --> 00:23:47.520

B: question, if I'm answering that. But yes, maybe in India we might not have been able to do it

00:23:47.850 --> 00:24:00.900

B: because of many reasons. Here we are able to do, do it, because now we know that we did it already. So maybe we, it was easy for us to do it here maybe, you know. So maybe we thought we should do it or maybe

00:24:01.650 --> 00:24:14.700

B: if we felt that, you know, there was a need to do it, to do something good, you know, and we were capable of doing something good for the community. So maybe that feeling came because we are here. So,

00:24:14.880 --> 00:24:15.180

B: that, you know.

00:24:17.040 --> 00:24:29.610

S: I think if you look at 130 of us, right, me and my wife are not the only people. But we, you know, if you talk to somebody they might say, you know what, this is my identity. Therefore, I did it. Right?

00:24:30.180 --> 00:24:45.600

B: How will, we don't know that whether all those 130 people have the similar views that we have. Because we started, it was started by me and Sandip only and we started doing it. However, we really don't know if that intention that we both have,

00:24:46.260 --> 00:24:47.640

B: the similar intention that

00:24:47.760 --> 00:25:07.710

B: all these other people who come to see the program, there were like 700 people in the audience. They had a different viewpoint, right? But we as a, I think we both had a different, you know, concept. Yeah.

S: So every person who came, every person who volunteered would have his or her own perspective, right?

00:25:08.490 --> 00:25:12.570

S: So, and I would agree that, you know, some of them

00:25:12.660 --> 00:25:29.940

S: may have done what they have done because they wanted to ensure that it is a part of their identity, okay. That's my Desi identity, I want to do it. Somebody must have just done it because somebody else is doing it. Right? And somebody may have done because they think, oh, no I love music. I want to perform.

00:25:30.270 --> 00:25:35.190

S: Somebody may have just done it because, you know, they are completely aligned to what we are saying. So end of the day,

00:25:35.460 --> 00:25:41.670

S: all of those various ideas are basically assets for us to make this event successful, isn't it, right?

00:25:41.820 --> 00:25:47.610

I: Yes.

S: We don't have to have a unidirectional, you know, North Pole kind of a scenario.

00:25:48.090 --> 00:25:57.390

I: Sure. I guess I'm also trying to understand that, you know, sometimes like you know, in the field of diaspora studies or immigrant studies, like you become, I mean, there is this

00:25:57.840 --> 00:26:04.230

I: theory saying that, you know, you become an Indian after you have left India. You become a Desi after you have left your "desh" (homeland),

00:26:04.650 --> 00:26:09.630

I: because you are either, some people either try to recreate or they try to remember

00:26:10.050 --> 00:26:18.120

I: and they want to do it for next generations, and or just for the sheer love of it. That you know we will do is we have grown up doing it. There may be multiple reasons.

00:26:18.510 --> 00:26:24.660

I: So you, one becomes a Desi only after one has left to one's "desh." You do not become a Desi while you're living in the "desh," really.

00:26:25.020 --> 00:26:29.190

S: Exactly. I think you're right.

B: You're right, yeah.

S: So one of the, one of the important, now that you ask me that

00:26:30.660 --> 00:26:47.550

S: question, one of the items that, one of the important inputs would be, at what age group you are getting this kind of an idea, right? So if I was an 18-year-old kid, right, whether I would have done this or not, even if I come to the U.S. I am not so sure

00:26:47.850 --> 00:26:49.290

S: whether our kids

00:26:49.530 --> 00:26:52.710

S: are thinking in that sense or not, you know what, you know what I mean?

00:26:53.010 --> 00:26:55.440

S: They are, you know, lived here. They have

00:26:55.530 --> 00:27:07.950

S: grown up here. They've seen a different world altogether. I'm not so sure whether they will be thinking the way that we are thinking. Yes, there is some sense of insecurity and therefore sense of, you know,

00:27:08.460 --> 00:27:13.200

S: underscoring what our thoughts are. It is very likely, right, it is very likely.

00:27:13.560 --> 00:27:21.300

S: And fundamentally for me and my wife, this is what we can do very good, right? I cannot make an Italian pasta for instance, right, whether I like it or not.

00:27:21.750 --> 00:27:30.780

S: So that's the way we looked at it and I think, you know, if I was in India it would have been, whether I could have done it, I don't know, but I'm not so sure about it.

00:27:31.170 --> 00:27:38.040

S: But given, given my upbringing in my university days and so on so forth, I was equally active that time too. And, you know, we were organizing

00:27:38.370 --> 00:27:52.530

S: different kinds of stuff. But it was not really focused, the way we are focusing here, which is the two dimension propagating Bangla music and, you know, contributing to a cause. In India, you don't have a need to propagate Bangla music, is it already a default.

00:27:56.490 --> 00:27:57.330

S: [inaudible] if there is a need to do it.

00:27:58.830 --> 00:28:14.340

B: Somebody think to a certain extent, what he said was that, like away from India, then you feel that we should be more Indian. So yeah, it sometimes happens like when we try to force sometimes, you know. You should go to the Durga Puja, you should do Saraswati Puja, you know, you should we do this, you

00:28:14.340 --> 00:28:26.010

B: should do that. And we do it, but is it totally to, for this festival that you said that, is it true for the festival itself? Maybe half of it, that because we loved music.

00:28:26.310 --> 00:28:38.820

B: Because we loved doing music. So we just correlated with that by doing something for the community and do the fundraiser, and you know, the charity. Yeah.

S: Well, I have no problem if somebody calls me Desi. That's not an issue at all.

00:28:42.480 --> 00:28:49.230

B: Yeah, we are Desis by heart. You know, by all means.

S: Yeah, you know, you're saying you can take India, you can take an Indian out of India, but not India of Indian, right, that's what you're saying?

00:28:49.260 --> 00:28:50.070

I: Yeah, I mean, there is a theory.

00:28:51.150 --> 00:28:51.630

S: Exactly, exactly.

B: So we are there, you are there, you are there.

00:28:56.220 --> 00:28:58.650

S: But India was only since 1947, before it was something else, right? 450+ princely states.

00:29:03.060 --> 00:29:13.590

I: Right, and I think that is also the reason why we speak in our native languages at home too, right? So that, with the hope that our children will learn the language, and we also want to be able to do that.

00:29:13.920 --> 00:29:27.900

I: And at the same time, like, as we have said that, there are different generations of immigrants, right? So people who came in the 40s, 50s, for example, they had this compulsion to teach their children to speak English to get accepted in the wider society.

00:29:28.110 --> 00:29:30.090

I: Our generations don't face that

00:29:30.180 --> 00:29:30.960

I: issue anymore.

00:29:31.290 --> 00:29:35.820

I: We want our children to be bilingual or trilingual depending on the languages you speak at home.

S: Right.

00:29:36.030 --> 00:29:40.410

I: So, so there are different generations in which you either try to create or you try to erase

00:29:40.590 --> 00:29:41.820

I: who you are from

00:29:42.180 --> 00:29:46.800

I: from within in many, many ways right? And that creates our immigrant or diaspora identities.

00:29:47.070 --> 00:29:52.800

S: Right, and also your identity will also have a geographical differentiator for example.

00:29:53.010 --> 00:29:53.310

I: Yes.

00:29:53.340 --> 00:29:57.450

S: But identity in Silicon Valley will be very different than North Dakota, for instance, right/

00:29:57.480 --> 00:30:08.490

I: Yes, yes. And that is something I also wanted to ask. Like, you know, you have lived in different parts of the world, right? So, and, you know, how does, how are those experiences different

00:30:09.030 --> 00:30:15.060

I: as an Indian say if you have lived in Japan, or if you have lived in an European country, and you have lived in Boston for some time.

00:30:15.840 --> 00:30:27.750

I: Do you think your identity, whether you subscribed to it or not, you know, as an Indian there, the way you were perceived the way you perceive yourself, is that different from the way that those dynamics operated in Silicon Valley?

00:30:28.140 --> 00:30:29.190

S: Absolutely, absolutely.

B: Absolutely.

00:30:29.250 --> 00:30:31.080

I: How? How is that different?

00:30:31.080 --> 00:30:34.650

S: Yeah. So let's take we lived in Singapore, right?

00:30:35.220 --> 00:30:37.980

S: So Singapore, it is, it is a very Asian nation.

00:30:38.340 --> 00:30:40.020

S: It's a very cosmopolitan country,

00:30:40.140 --> 00:30:40.470

S: right?

00:30:40.800 --> 00:30:41.250

S: It is

00:30:41.280 --> 00:30:47.280

S: very, very cosmopolitan. I mean people, you know, it's very and it's very close to India, like three and a half hours to Kolkata flight time.

00:30:47.670 --> 00:30:52.230

S: You know, you will, you will have every luxury. You would need every consistency you need.

00:30:52.590 --> 00:31:00.150

S: But the fact of the matter is that, except for certain industries, you are always looked at by the local people

00:31:01.500 --> 00:31:07.260

S: as the majority of the country. I don't want to go into more details, but

00:31:07.440 --> 00:31:18.960

S: you are a serious amount of competitive threat to them, right? And it is very apparent in any conversations, even if you go to the dining room of...

00:31:19.740 --> 00:31:30.270

B: Even in Munich also.

S: a corporation, you will see that, you know, you can see that that there is some level of, you know, unwritten segregation if you will. And I'm sorry for using a harsh word

00:31:31.140 --> 00:31:40.860

S: but that's the sense we got, right? And similarly in Germany, early Germany, early 90s, we did see a serious amount of, in fact you know, [unclear]. There was, like, people were

00:31:41.190 --> 00:31:51.150

S: writing posters, because that time there was a, there was an open kind, kind of a German green card they opened and there was a huge push back and that created certain nationalistic

00:31:52.140 --> 00:32:01.320

S: you know, anger against Indians, right? [unclear] I remember very vividly. But over the period of time, we noticed that even in Germany, especially Western Europe,

00:32:01.800 --> 00:32:09.660

B: They've opened up, yeah.

S: they opened up after European Union. They were more comfortable talking in English and so on and so forth. But still,

B: There was this language problem, yes.

00:32:10.260 --> 00:32:21.180

S: There was this issue of language. There was this issue of acceptance. And at the same time also, I think we also take a, have to take a blame. We also feel intimidated by the size and color of

00:32:21.600 --> 00:32:28.230

S: skin, right? I mean, I'll be brutally honest here. We have that, you know, I don't know whether it is because of colonial rule or whatever,

00:32:28.530 --> 00:32:39.090

S: that kind of thing is part of our DNA it seems, you know, involuntary it comes out. Some people are more impacted, but I did notice but I did not feel personally that I was impacted,

00:32:39.330 --> 00:32:52.890

S: but I could sense that there is that kind of air, right?

B: Which is not the case in Silicon Valley.

S: It is not the case in Silicon Valley. I think in Silicon Valley, we notice that there is a lot more respect, mutual respect I would say, for both sides.

00:32:57.090 --> 00:33:12.900

S: And among this is the need for significant respect for others. And we are also known here, so-called Desis are known here, for bringing in high quality talent and so on. And the same was in Boston also, you know, the Indians or the Desis were known for high quality doctors, engineers

00:33:14.370 --> 00:33:17.760

B: Not only in IT.

S: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. In Boston it was really non-IT, banking,

00:33:18.840 --> 00:33:30.510

S: medicine, and professor, teaching. Very, very high quality, you know, Desis. But in Silicon Valley, I think it's more like high quality engineers and so on, and obviously, because the business is different. Right?

00:33:33.240 --> 00:33:33.600

I: Sure. Hmm.

00:33:34.980 --> 00:33:44.610

I: That's yeah. That's what I've been hearing from most of the interviews I've been doing, that there is a, there is a distinct difference. So, in

00:33:45.240 --> 00:33:55.650

I: I mean, continuing that thought, do you think the Silicon Valley and what, whatever that means to you, do you think that influences your identity?

00:33:59.580 --> 00:34:06.690

S: It may shape. I, you know, if you have an identity, you have an identity, right? If you think that you will have to take care of a person who is

00:34:07.350 --> 00:34:17.460

S: who is met with an accident on the road, it has nothing to do with where on earth you are, right? It is an innate human value, isn't it? Right? There are certain core innate human values, doesn't matter where you are.

00:34:17.760 --> 00:34:21.210

S: Yes, the way you express that innate value might have a color

00:34:21.240 --> 00:34:30.150

S: based on where you are. At the same time, what a particular location provides you with certain opportunities or lack of opportunities, right?

00:34:30.270 --> 00:34:39.210

I: Yes.

S: For example in Silicon Valley, you can have a very different point of view on you and we can have a very healthy debate, very open progressive debate, right?

00:34:39.600 --> 00:34:44.160

S: Which is not probably the case if you go to certain other parts in the U.S. itself, for example,

00:34:44.730 --> 00:34:51.330

S: right? Or for that matter, even in Singapore, you can't say a few things even if you are bubbling inside, right? You just can't do it.

00:34:51.780 --> 00:34:54.510

S: And then there is a lot of other bureaucracies that are involved.

00:34:55.380 --> 00:35:04.350

S: B) is the authorities here, I have noticed the Santa Clara County and the other authorities, they're very, very friendly with all these kind of diaspora

00:35:04.920 --> 00:35:11.340

S: events. Right, right? So they are, they know that, you know, these guys are doing good stuff and they want to cooperate.

00:35:11.700 --> 00:35:17.550

S: They, I have noticed, very little bureaucratic hurdles been placed to make it difficult, right?

00:35:17.970 --> 00:35:25.800

S: If I was in Singapore, I would have found a serious amount of bureaucratic hurdles to get it there, you know, get there. I know that for sure. Right?

00:35:26.790 --> 00:35:36.660

S: So that's an advantage. I'm not so sure about, you know, other than Boston, I did not live in any other parts in the U.S. But I'm sure there could be certain openness in other parts of the

00:35:37.050 --> 00:35:51.450

S: U.S. and several, similarly, there could be some level of closeness in some parts of...U.S. itself.

So Silicon Valley is definitely the county officials, all of them are also open, they're more open

B: More Asians, yeah.

00:35:52.290 --> 00:36:01.350

S: irrespective of whether that person is a Caucasian or or far East Asian or Indian or even Middle Eastern, right, or European, right? They can relate.

00:36:03.210 --> 00:36:03.630

S: You know, yeah.

00:36:03.930 --> 00:36:22.200

I: Yeah. Is it because of two things. One is because, you know, particularly San Jose as a city, a major percentage of the population is foreign born and it has been that, like that for a very long time. Is it because of that you think, or is it because all the different

00:36:24.060 --> 00:36:39.960

I: groups, you know, the communities from different places of the world that live in San Jose, or the Bay Area in general, they have been very active in promoting their own identity through any kind of cultural form. Is it because of both or is it because of one?

00:36:39.960 --> 00:36:46.440

B: It is because of both. I think it's because of both, because both of them plays a very, very vital role when you

00:36:46.800 --> 00:36:58.620

S: talk about how we are what we are today. You know, the openness, the acceptance, how people behave, how, you know we don't feel scared when we go out. There are places

00:36:58.920 --> 00:37:08.760

S: in Germany, when you go out you feel insecure. You know, you feel that you know, people are watching you, or you know, you don't feel that, you don't feel threatened here.

00:37:09.090 --> 00:37:18.270

S: Especially in Bay Area, you don't feel threatened. You go at the middle of the night, you don't, you're not scared for your color or, you know, all those things. I think, yeah both. Right?

00:37:19.680 --> 00:37:27.540

S: So I have, I have, I want to add to that perspective, right. I think one of the things that is important to consider, Mantra, is the time, right?

00:37:28.350 --> 00:37:39.810

S: Time damage, right? So as you, as you rightly stated, 40 years back when Silicon Valley was not Silicon Valley, right, maybe 50 years back, folks who came here had to prove themselves, right?

00:37:40.830 --> 00:37:53.160

S: So they had to slug their, you know, the days and nights and midnight, and I don't know what other thing they have to do to establish themselves, right? I don't think they had, they came with a serious sense of unknowing [inaudible]

00:37:57.360 --> 00:38:06.450

S: do kind of things, right? They probably depart. For them it was a luxury to do all of these kind of diaspora work, right? Cultural work, whatever you want to call them, right?

00:38:06.810 --> 00:38:13.560

S: But what they did was laid the foundation that. you know, we are coming from various countries, various locations,

00:38:13.800 --> 00:38:24.390

S: and we contribute to this world, and this part of the world specifically, with significant value, right? In terms of quality and quantity, whether it is Hispanic population, whether it is Chinese Americans,

00:38:24.750 --> 00:38:31.200

S: whether it is Indian Americans or, you know, Middle Eastern Americans, you name it. Right? So they had proven that they are, they are prove

00:38:31.680 --> 00:38:41.790

S: what every inch of what they're doing. And then the next generation, next wave of generation, did not have to prove anymore that, you know what, we are not here as as

00:38:42.030 --> 00:38:57.540

S: you know, somebody who will take away resources, but we are here to add on to those resources. Therefore, the respect is kind of given, right? In other countries, you know, the people who move in, their migrants, they have to perpetually prove that they have to earn the respect, you know what I mean?

00:38:57.870 --> 00:39:00.180

S: The Silicon Valley in that sense is far mature

00:39:00.540 --> 00:39:03.810

S: that they know that you know folks have come in from various parts of the world

00:39:04.170 --> 00:39:10.920

S: have added to their their, their culture. And that's what it makes them. I mean, who was there otherwise. I mean, otherwise, if you think about it,

00:39:11.280 --> 00:39:20.880

S: we are all coming from various parts of the world here and settled here and, you know, kind of making it better. And now we are in a position to, not now I would say, maybe 10, 15, 20 years

00:39:21.210 --> 00:39:35.400

S: I would say even more, right? We are in a position to, kind of, you know, flourish ourselves, right? If you take 15 years back, there was only one or two developers. So it was more of an identity scenario. Today it is not identity scenario, it is more of a

00:39:36.660 --> 00:39:43.740

S: it's not about identity scenario, and it is more of in actually doing things that we want to do. There is nothing to prove anymore. You see?

00:39:44.160 --> 00:39:44.430

I: Hmm.

00:39:46.290 --> 00:39:55.500

I: Great. So in, we have been talking about, how do you foresee the future of what you are doing and

00:39:56.430 --> 00:40:11.910

I: in terms of the music, in terms of maybe your family or your other day job, if I may call it. Like in those perspectives, what do you see as your future in Silicon Valley, even your family's future in Silicon Valley?

00:40:13.980 --> 00:40:22.080

S: I don't think our family, our future individual families or individuals features are tied to this particular activity, okay, the cultural

00:40:22.080 --> 00:40:29.580

S: activity or event. Right? It should not be. That event should go on its own. It should our legacy beyond us or me or anybody, okay.

00:40:29.970 --> 00:40:37.710

S: Right? That's the purpose and if it doesn't have it, it should die, essentially.

B: No but, is she asking question related to the festival?

S: Yeah. So, so I'm saying that

00:40:38.460 --> 00:40:52.260

S: our personal lives should not be impacted by that, right? You know, how I live, my family, my...life is completely independent of that, you know. That particular event is not determining how we determine ourselves, right? But

00:40:52.680 --> 00:41:02.130

S: how we determine it ourselves will also make sure that how we engage with those kind of activities. Right, right? Which is the other way around. Basically what I'm saying is

00:41:02.520 --> 00:41:12.600

S: that I don't, I personally think that, you know, Silicon Valley has given us a lot of opportunities. It is up to us, incumbent on us, to kind of in cash and capitalize on those...

00:41:13.950 --> 00:41:26.640

S: on those opportunities. And since we are able to capitalize, it is our responsibility to give back in whatever shape and form. And this is one of the avenues by which we are trying to give back. That doesn't mean this is the only avenue.

00:41:28.200 --> 00:41:32.970

I: I see, yes. Thank you. Bipasha, did you have to say, add anything to that?

00:41:33.270 --> 00:41:48.000

B: No, no. I just wanted to check that whether are you asking this question regarding the festival or you're just asking as a, you know, we're separate from the festival and as a, as a Desi here, or a as a

00:41:48.270 --> 00:41:57.810

I: Yeah, both actually. Both. In terms of Silicon Valley, the way Silicon Valley is going from 2006, right, that's when you came here to 2020, 14 years

00:41:58.140 --> 00:42:08.220

I: you know, what you see the direction that, you know. I mean, Silicon Valley has changed so much in these 14 years and then, you know, your...musical this particular event that

00:42:09.090 --> 00:42:15.060

I: you have organized or, you know, that's been a couple of years old now, right, but you have been doing music for a longer time. So

00:42:15.690 --> 00:42:27.030

I: in the larger context of Silicon Valley and your life, your identity, both with the music, as well as your Desi identity, like what is the direction you see in Silicon Valley?

00:42:28.170 --> 00:42:35.550

B: Well yeah, I think I would agree with Sandip, what he said, however, I would still add on by saying that, and see this is I think,

00:42:36.660 --> 00:42:43.410

B: now that we started this, it will go on. We do it, good. We don't do it, that's also good.

00:42:44.820 --> 00:42:53.160

B: That's also a part of life, if you're not doing it. However, for our kids, I don't know if they will be involved in this or not, but we see this [inaudible]

00:42:55.980 --> 00:43:11.010

B: so we will continue doing it. This would mean that we are investing a lot of time, effort, energy, or to volunteering hours into it and maybe at this point of time in the or, or both

00:43:11.610 --> 00:43:20.160

B: you know, my, both my girls are now in college and they'll be out and they'll be on their own. So maybe we'll have more time and, you know,

00:43:21.000 --> 00:43:26.010

B: to invest on this kind of a project. Yeah. And then it'll really

00:43:26.400 --> 00:43:36.540

B: I think help us to go beyond.

S: Yeah, and I think I was talking about few minutes back about our innate, the way we are brought up, right? So I would quote what Bhagavad Gita saying, you know, "karmaá¹ty-evÄ dhikÄ ras te mÄ phaleá¹hu kadÄ chana" (Chapter 2, Verse 47).

00:43:37.290 --> 00:43:51.090

S: We don't care what is the end, we are only worried about are the means, right, because we will continue to do it. If it, if there is an end to it, fine. There's no end, it's perpetual, that's fine. Somebody else will take up this other thing.

00:43:51.900 --> 00:44:01.800

B: Actually, we haven't planned, yeah.

S: Yeah, we've not, as I said, we're not organized as an organization. We don't, you know I think it'll, as people have come together, you know, as I say,

00:44:02.340 --> 00:44:10.620

S: you know, you're going to walk in alone and people join in and suddenly a caravan was formed. That's basically what it is.

B: And we have not planned our lives ever, so I don't even know that

00:44:10.920 --> 00:44:20.670

B: we are going to be here. We are going to be doing this forever, what we are doing. Maybe somebody else will be doing it. Maybe we'll not be here. Maybe we'll go somewhere.

00:44:21.180 --> 00:44:26.910

B: We don't know. But yes, as long as we are here, we are enjoying doing what we're doing right now and making fun doing it.

00:44:27.390 --> 00:44:39.930

S: And this is not an organization. This is not an event that is done as a corporate would like to do. You know, there are social organizations which actually are structured like corporates, including nonprofit. This is absolutely non

00:44:40.500 --> 00:44:55.590

S: non-corporate. I mean, there's no sense of corporates definitely here, very clearly, that is something outside the domain of. So I think it will have its own life and it'll continue like a, it's a symbiotic organized, organized way of doing things. Right?

00:44:56.580 --> 00:44:58.710

I: And I think that is why it has been so successful.

00:44:59.340 --> 00:45:02.910

S: I'm not sure about success yet. But yes, we tried our best and I think

00:45:03.720 --> 00:45:16.380

S: what we charter with those two, two ideas and those two ideas are tick marked, they're doing well. "We" means everybody is doing well. And we are happy that we're able to contribute, you know to a cause, you know, that is very important.

00:45:17.460 --> 00:45:22.920

I: Right. Okay, thank you very much for your time to talk about your work and

00:45:24.480 --> 00:45:29.070

I: and discussing what you do. So I will stop the recording now.