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Interview with Swati Mehta About Her Ethnic Background (FA 601)

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Folklife Archives Project 601 - EthniCity: Contemporary Ethnicity in the Inner Bluegrass

Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

Adler: This is Betsy Adler. It is June 15th, 1995. I'm interviewing Swati Mehta for EthniCity. [long pause] No, you don't have to tell me. [laughter] Start with your name.

Mehta: Okay, my name is Swati Mehta. And I'm from the west part of India. And I was born in '67. And I've been... I came to Lexington, me and my husband came here to study as a student. My husband is a chemical engineer. I followed him with the children [?] for the same purpose to study. I have my masters in mathematics from India and started to do here computer science.

Adler: Oh, good. What is your address?

Mehta: In Lexington?

Adler: Yes.

Mehta: It's 700 Woodland Avenue D220. It's an apartment in Lexington.

Adler: Great. And how did you, let's make sure that we are... yeah, everything is fine. How did you learn to do Mehendi?

Mehta: Okay, I, like as a kid I grew up in India and summer time you need some activity. So, like when I was in college that time I decided to do something creative in summer and so, I just took the classes just a few blocks away. The lady used to teach us. I think in a fifteen day period I learned. She taught us how to self-mehendi. Starting from there to how to prepare cones and then how to apply. It was a fifteen day course and I learned it over there.

Adler: Every day, all day or?

Mehta: No, it's just one and a half hour daily for fifteen days.

Adler: Did you practice on each other?

Mehta: Yes. First you practice on a piece of paper drawing. And then she taught us some hand, we started putting it on hands, then on feet. I mean when you get married they put on feet, also. This part.

Adler: On the top of your foot.

Mehta: Top of foot and hands.

Adler: Now, how far up the foot does it go when you do it on your foot?

Mehta: Up to the ankle.

Adler: Up to the ankle like a sock or something.

Mehta: Yes, yes. And people wear here, what is they call it? The friendship...

Adler: Bracelet.

Mehta: Bracelet, yeah, up to there I would say. But you don't fill the whole thing they just put a design into it there and it looks pretty. And this gives very good color. I mean you have to apply mehendi and leave it over night. And dry it and leave it over night. You sleep with it.

Adler: Yeah, right. Now what do you do with your hand?

Mehta: I think you, what we do is ...

Adler: A plastic bag.

Mehta: ... we take lemon juice and a sugar, make a syrup of that. And just dab it on this mehendi until it becomes dry, sticks to your hand. It doesn't come off.

Adler: Oh, really.

Mehta: Yeah, when you sleep. So, that leaves it, I mean you don't have to worry about a bed sheet or anything. Just to be safe we put a piece of plastic or paper, something under the hand. Next morning when you get up you just scrape it off and apply a little oil and that color starts, I mean when you remove it it is orange in color.

Adler: You put what on it? You apply what on it?

Mehta: A little oil.

Adler: Just any kind, like baby oil or...

Mehta: Baby oil, even vegetable oil is fine. Cooking oil is fine.

Adler: Eat your hand. [laughter]

Mehta: And this is a little fragrant and it stays on your hand.

Adler: And that's the smell of the henna.

Mehta: Henna, yes.

Adler: Can I smell it? What does it smell like?

Mehta: Yeah, sure. Actually these are green leaves and they dry them and make a powder.

Adler: Uhhh, it smells kind of like tea.

Mehta: Yeah, it's just.

Adler: It's smells like dried leaves.

Mehta: Yeah, that's true. It's just, can I show you, do you want to see dry powder, too? I can get it.

Adler: Yeah, yeah.

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- Mehta:** It comes in leaf form, too, and they dry it in powder like...[shows something]
- Adler:** Oh, let me take a picture of you with it.
- Mehta:** Oh, okay.
- Adler:** You can sit down if you want. It might be easier.
- Mehta:** Sure. This is the powder form, dry powder, dry henna they call it.
- Adler:** Okay. Now, where do you get it?
- Mehta:** Ah, actually, you know there is an international market here.
- Adler:** Uh-huh, they sell it there.
- Mehta:** They sell it in henna powder. You get packets. But I got it from India but after I got over, I bought it from here. Actually, you can dye your hair with this, too. If you don't want to use all the chemicals in stuff, people do dye hair with this. You just apply and gray hair goes. Everything becomes...
- Adler:** Really. Well, what color does your hair end up being? What would it do to my hair?
- Mehta:** Well, oh, [laughing] I don't know. I think lighter brown and it just goes to orange-brown. I mean you have to coat like use five, six applications. I mean just if you don't want to use chemicals and stuff like that. I mean many people go for this.
- Adler:** You do it like you wash your hair or do you put it on like a paste?
- Mehta:** Well, you just apply it? [sound of door opening]
- Adler:** Hello.
- Mehta:** That's Rakish, my husband. So we just apply it.
- Adler:** And then do you sleep on it? What do you do?
- Mehta:** No, no, no, no, instead of that you leave it on for a hour or so and then wash it out. This paste that you put in your hair. Many people do it, I've seen here, too.
- Adler:** Yeah, I think when I talked to _____ [?, Zeena] she has done that.
- Mehta:** Yeah, she does, too.
- Adler:** Okay, now, what do you do here? You have the powder and what do you mix it with?
- Mehta:** Lemon juice.
- Adler:** Just pure lemon juice. Do you squeeze the lemons or do you buy ReaLemon? Can you do anything like that?

Mehta: Yeah. We get the lemon, lime actually, green lime. Green color, you know limes, don't you?

Adler: Yeah. So, is lime better than lemon?

Mehta: Yeah, it's a little more sour than lemon, I think limes are. And you just soak this powder in, we sift this powder three or four times or it won't go through this cone. So, it's this tiny hole.

Adler: Oh, so, you sift it three or four times, so, that it is real fine.

Mehta: Real fine, yeah.

Adler: And then you mix it with...

Mehta: Lemon juice, lime juice.

Adler: Lemon juice or lime juice.

Mehta: And then leave it overnight, soak it overnight. I soaked this yesterday night.

Adler: So, how much powder do you take for how much juice?

Mehta: I mean, I just did it approximately, no, nothing like that, I mean just this consistency. It should come not real thick, not real...

Adler: Like a pudding or something.

Mehta: Yeah, pudding, yeah, that's true, like a pudding or a porridge.

Adler: Is henna edible?

Mehta: No, you can't eat it. It gives color and fragrance. We have henna trees in India. And they pluck leaves and dry it and make powder. And then... but all you do is three or four tablespoon of henna, maybe, powder, in a powder. And like maybe one lemon, one lime, one whole lime juice. And if it is not enough then you can add a little water, too. A little water is fine, one tablespoon.

Adler: But you don't won't too much.

Mehta: Not a lot, yeah.

Adler: If you make too much then you have to keep adding more juice.

Mehta: More juice, yeah, that's true. So, that's how and you soak it overnight. The next day you are ready, just prepare a cone out of a piece of plastic paper. Just a simple cone and tape with a piece of scotch tape.

Adler: From a plastic bag or...

Mehta: Uh-huh, it's a zip lock bag.

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- Adler:** Oh, okay. And you just make it with a real fine...
- Mehta:** Then you make a square of it and then...
- Adler:** A real fine point on it, yeah.
- Mehta:** I can show you if you really want to see it.
- Adler:** Okay. I'll get some pictures of you doing that.
- Mehta:** Okay.
- Adler:** So, you cut it in a rectangle.
- Mehta:** Square.
- Adler:** Oh, you're not done yet. [laughing] I brought two cameras, this one I've never used before.
- Mehta:** So, this is a square. And then I mean you just hold one corner and make a cone. Like you do for what do you call decorating, I mean icing, cake icing. They do have cones, right?
- Adler:** Right.
- Mehta:** They use the same thing, cone bags.
- Adler:** So, you just swirl it around there.
- Mehta:** And then fill it from out and from in. The seam you can see inside, you fill it the whole thing. There shouldn't be any air bubbles left.
- Adler:** Now, can you do that by yourself?
- Mehta:** Yeah, I just did it right now. You want me to show you.
- Adler:** I mean with the tape and everything. You hold it in one hand and tape with the other hand. Is that what you did?
- Mehta:** Uh-huh, let me show you. [laughter] It won't take long. You just hold it.
- Adler:** Uh-hmm, and then take some scotch tape.
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm.
- Adler:** And you start at the end with the point so that you hold the point shut.
- Mehta:** Yeah. I hold this point but I leave it after I fill it, like... Once you fill it.
- Adler:** Change camera.
- Mehta:** Change camera. You haven't used that before.
- Adler:** No, this is the first time I've used it.

Mehta: See, like I have sealed this part and it won't come off. I mean I can just hold it from anywhere now. Start filling from inside first. I'll come back to this later maybe.

Adler: Okay.

Mehta: But first I start filling from inside because there shouldn't be any outlets for air. It should be airtight this cone. All this thing will do, once the air bubble gets inside, mehendi won't come out from the hole. So, I just ruined just one whole cone just now. [laughter] I mean I prepared the whole thing and there was an air bubble in there. But you fill like this. That's easy.

Adler: Uh-huh, and you need to have it really sealed because otherwise the stuff will get down in the cracks and things instead ...

Mehta: Yeah, it won't come out from the right place.

Adler: Yeah, that would be kind of messy. I can see why learning to make those is one of the first lessons.

Mehta: Yeah, [laughing] they teach us first how to prepare cones.

Adler: And do you practice when you learn to prepare a cone, do you practice with something else before you use the mehendi?

Mehta: Yeah, we do it with pick, too. But that has become a very primitive method now. Nobody does it with a toothpick.

Adler: Toothpick.

Mehta: Toothpick, I mean sharp, pointed stick.

Adler: Oh, that would take forever.

Mehta: Yeah, that takes, and this is real smooth. That was real primitive method, I would say. Nobody uses that now. So, the first thing they teach you is how to make cones in the classes, professionally when you go for classes. Summer is a good time to learn all this stuff, extracurricular activity.

Adler: Yeah. What other types of kinds of things do you do?

Mehta: Me, I do crafts, a lot of crafts.

Adler: Do you? What do you do?

Mehta: I do a lot of embroidery, and, traditional folk embroidery on costumes and stuff.

Adler: How did you learn how to do that?

Mehta: That I learned from one lady, too. She taught me in India.

Adler: Are there things that you learned in your family?

Mehta: In my family, no. I mean, I learned cooking in my family, maybe I would say that. I learned cooking from my family. No, my mom, she knows embroidery but she never had time. She stayed home but I had three sisters and one brother. So, she had to take care... she was busy taking care of us, so, she didn't get time much for herself or her art.

Adler: Now, where in India are you from?

Mehta: I'm from _____, state is Gujarat, city is Bhavangar.

Adler: How do you spell?

Mehta: B H A V A N G A R, Bhavangar.

Adler: [pronounces it] Bhavangar.

Mehta: Oh, you are pretty good at that. Even here even though we are used to all the way we speak. The words are different. Not the words are different and we speak with a real great accent and I think [laughing], you know, it's difficult, people find it difficult to say our names. They are complicated.

Adler: Because they are long.

Mehta: Long and pronounced, it is a difficult pronunciation.

Adler: Now, is your name shortened?

Mehta: My is short for India. Yeah, it's the same.

Adler: You didn't change or anything.

Mehta: No, it's Indian.

Adler: Yeah, it seems very short.

Mehta: My first name is also short. S W A T I.

Adler: What does that mean, Swati?

Mehta: It is one of the constellations, the name Swati.

Adler: What is it? I mean what is it a constellation of?

Mehta: Uhhh, I mean the name of the star is Swati.

Adler: Oh, a star, not a constellation.

Mehta: Zodiac star. _____ we call it _____, what does that mean?

Adler: _____ [pronounces word].

Mehta: _____ is our zodiac or constellations. So, it's one of the stars named Swati.

Adler: Well, it's a pretty name.

Mehta: Thank-you.

Adler: So, how did you end up... you came to Lexington because your husband was going to school?

Mehta: Uhmm,...

Adler: Graduate school.

Mehta: No, we both came, in fact we were able to come, we got married and we were in India. We studied at the same school in India. He did his engineering in India. Then he had taken all the foreign exams, I mean to come here you have to qualify with taking seven or eight open exams for engineers. And he got admission here, after our marriage he got admission and then both of us planned to come here. We thought that if both us get visa then we will be able to come here. One of us get then ...

Adler: Then you wouldn't do it.

Mehta: You wouldn't, yeah, we wouldn't do it.

Adler: Was your marriage arranged?

Mehta: No.

Adler: No.

Mehta: We knew each other from ninth grade.

Adler: Oh, my goodness. Is that unusual still or is that...?

Mehta: He liked me, I mean it is unusual. There are _____ [?] marriage cases are increasing now like younger generations. And they are studying together and they become good friends. Still we don't have the dating and all that...

Adler: Did you date at all before you were married or did you have chaperones that had to go everywhere with you?

Mehta: Yeah, right, I mean, I went to his place a lot of times. And he would come to my place, we would sit at our place with the family and stuff. But we never dated, went out. I mean if we go out it was always with family functions and stuff. So, we can get together but with both families, his family and my family. So, my parents didn't have any objections.

Adler: They knew each other pretty well by that time because you had gone to school together.

Mehta: Yeah, by that time. And he was a topper [?] in school, school first always. So, so my parents knew him too, very well. And I was like an average kind of student.

Adler: They thought he would be a good influence on you.

Mehta: [laughing] Oh, I don't know. But he did propose me when I was in college. And he was in south then, south India. He went to school in southern side of India far from our place, three days from our place.

Adler: For college.

Mehta: Engineering college. He was quite far from us then. We studied in the same school. I stayed in Bhavangar. This is how you do it in the inside, too.

Adler: So, you put the tape all up and down and all over.

Mehta: Uh-huh, outside too.

Adler: Nice and tight, okay.

Mehta: You can take it as an example with you.

Adler: Great, okay. I'll do that. I'll put it there.

Mehta: And if the hole is too tiny you can just cut it with scissors.

Adler: Just a little snip.

Mehta: Snip it there.

Adler: Okay, are we ready.

Mehta: This is how we do it. Do you want me to put it on light?

Adler: Oh, it doesn't matter. Does it matter?

Mehta: No.

Adler: Okay.

Mehta: Okay, we just fill it in.

Adler: We take the spoon and drop the goop down in there.

Mehta: Yeah. [laughing]

Adler: Now if that spills it really will stain, right?

Mehta: Yeah, it stains.

Adler: So, you put, what is that, teaspoon?

Mehta: Yeah, teaspoon.

- Adler:** Then you shake it till it goes down there.
- Mehta:** To the end, you can't see any bubbles. No space should be left.
- Adler:** Okay. How far up do you fill the cone then, just a couple of spoonfuls? Do you get it real full?
- Mehta:** Not real full because then...
- Adler:** It will squish out.
- Mehta:** Yeah. There is like one teaspoon, maybe two teaspoons at the most.
- Adler:** Two good full teaspoons.
- Mehta:** Yeah. I mean you can make it to a smaller size because once you press it, it's going to come up here.
- Adler:** Right.
- Mehta:** You want to leave a little space over there and not see that it's not, don't, should be clean everywhere so you can feel it.
- Adler:** Okay. You want to be able to see if it is leaking out. So, you need to clean it. So, you just squeeze it shut like an envelope.
- Mehta:** Yeah. First I seal it from here, from the top here. It may come off, sometimes it may leak from top but it's okay if the cone is working.
- Adler:** You just squeeze it and tape it shut together good and tight and then fold down one side.
- Mehta:** Fold it.
- Adler:** One corner.
- Mehta:** And then other corner.
- Adler:** So, you fold it, okay. So, you fold the two corners sort of toward the center, so, that you have a ... Then you put that right up the middle to hold the two corners down. Now, is this reusable?
- Mehta:** Well, you can freeze it and reuse it but once it's dry, it's not going to work smoothly, this cone.
- Adler:** Oh, look it, it squirts out. Boy that is fine, isn't it?
- Mehta:** Yeah, I hope it works and doesn't have air in it.
- Adler:** Is it fun to do it?

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- Mehta:** Yeah, it's fun. If the cone just works out well, then it's fun. But sometimes cones...
- Adler:** Well, you never know until you actually get it loaded and try and do it.
- Mehta:** Right, yeah.
- Adler:** So, it doesn't want to flow. Is there air in there or what's the...?
- Mehta:** Yeah, I think so. I think there is some air in there.
- Adler:** That really just squirts out doesn't it?
- Mehta:** Yeah, it squirts out but I better make a bigger hole.
- Adler:** Oh, goodness. It's getting dark, yeah.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it's going to work. [pause and then Adler says something too low to hear]
Now, it's no good. Should I go ahead and fill that cone. I'll make one for you.
- Adler:** Okay. I'll try to figure out how this camera works.
- Mehta:** I have some photographs of Mehendi.
- Adler:** Oh, do you?
- Mehta:** Yeah. I can give you some if you want.
- Adler:** That would be great. I can copy them and give them back to you. That will be wonderful. Are they ones that you have done?
- Mehta:** Yeah.
- Adler:** Oh, great. Maybe we can make like a little exhibit or something.
- Mehta:** Sure, yeah.
- Adler:** You've got to sort of bend the tape in half a little bit to get it way down inside there.
- Mehta:** Yeah. It's hard to go down there, deep down. It gets shorter and shorter.
- Adler:** Now, this doesn't want to squeeze. Is that the problem?
- Mehta:** Yeah, I think there is some air in there. Because it won't squeeze.
- Adler:** I can smell it. It smells good.
- Mehta:** Many people don't like the smell of henna sometimes, I mean, if you are not used to it. It gives a real good color on hand, yeah, a really good color. I'll make a hole so that we shouldn't have any problem. Oh, I hope it works this time.
- Adler:** There's no way to test it before you seal it up, is there?
- Mehta:** Right, it never happens like this, maybe it's...

Adler: Because I'm here.

Mehta: Actually, what I do, I had like two or three Indian girls got married here and I did apply Mehendi for them, bridal Mehendi. And it was real great. So, like I had been making cones, it's not like I am out of touch. But something is not. Then I was using Mehendi that I got from India.

Adler: The cones.

Mehta: No, Mehendi.

Adler: Oh, the henna, uh-huh.

Mehta: Henna and it was really very smooth. You don't need to fill this, I filled this but I don't have it filled up.

Adler: I hope I don't spill it on your hand. Can you add more liquid to it or if you do that does it become too runny?

Mehta: Yeah, it becomes too runny. This has some air, too. Look, it is not going down there. Do you have to go anywhere?

Adler: No. [pause] That must be frustrating. What did they use for cones before they had plastic bags? Did they use paper?

Mehta: I think sticks.

Adler: Oh, they just did it with sticks. Can you buy cones already made?

Mehta: Yes. You can buy. You can buy the cones that are already prepared. I think this one is going to work. [speaks very low, can not hear]

Adler: It has to come out real consistently, doesn't it?

Mehta: Yeah, smoothly, for the line. Something is wrong here.

Adler: Now, when is this, when are these done? There are special ones that are done just for brides. Are there special patterns? When you said bridal mehendi.

Mehta: Right. I have a book here that shows all the different ones.

Adler: Oh, wow.

Mehta: And this is a, if you want a chart to learn to do fingers. This is how. It's a simple one.

Adler: Those are simple? [laughing]

Mehta: Yeah. These are the feet. You make designs like that.

Adler: Oh, they're beautiful.

Mehta: I should show you the bride I was doing. Here's the bride.

Adler: These patterns, do they have names?

Mehta: No, they don't have any names. They're just made by artists. She's a lady...

Adler: She designs them.

Mehta: Yeah. These are her ideas and she is applying it right here.

Adler: She's putting it on. Is she doing it on herself?

Mehta: Yeah, on herself.

Adler: Oh, goodness.

Mehta: And there's the bride. It goes up to here.

Adler: Oh. Half way up your arm.

Mehta: Yeah, up to here.

Adler: Like a long glove.

Mehta: Yeah. Okay. This is the bride that I did.

Adler: The feet.

Mehta: The feet and you can fill in, select a part of it.

Adler: Pick parts and join patterns together then. They are gorgeous.

Mehta: Are you feeling hot?

Adler: No, are you too hot?

Mehta: No.

Adler: Now, what goes on the palm cause these are all on the outside of hands, right?

Mehta: No, these are the palms.

Adler: Palms, okay, and then do they do it on the outside, too?

Mehta: Outside, too, but then you can select from here...

Adler: Okay, so, that's why the hands are like that.

Mehta: Yeah, right.

Adler: So, you would select from these and put them on either side.

Mehta: Either side you can put it. But on the palm side that is where, not much on the outer side. The inner side is more, you fill in more.

Adler: Oh, okay. Why is that?

Mehta: I think it's because this is more flat surface and it comes out well in here more. And the color don't come out as it comes out of here in the palm.

Adler: Because it's maybe sweating or something.

Mehta: No, maybe the skin color.

Adler: The skin is just different. Yeah, I see the veins, you have your veins and everything on the outside. So, it's not as smooth to do.

Mehta: And it's not even, like smooth. The bridal mehendi includes this part also. The fingers aren't like this. This is inner part of fingers and palms and outer side is like this. There is so much difference.

Adler: Yeah, so much simpler.

Mehta: This is lighter here. You don't put much on the outer side.

Adler: And thumbs.

Mehta: If you want a simple, then you can select simple and mix combination of all the design. Pick some from here and some from here. Can be creative like that.

Adler: Now how long will these take to do?

Mehta: Like three hours or two hours, I would say. Maybe four.

Adler: And when would people do them. There's bridal mehendi and then when else, what else.

Mehta: What more occasions, you mean?

Adler: Yeah.

Mehta: Like if there is somebody getting married then other girls would come to there like...

Adler: Like if you are going to a wedding like I'm going to on Saturday. [laughing]

Mehta: Oh, really. Then you can apply, too.

Adler: You would have it as part too because it is dressy.

Mehta: It's a tradition also. People get together and they call professionals who put mehendi. Like four or five girls and they put all your relatives and everybody. They just get together to sing songs for the girl who is getting married. See, that's another tradition we have. Like if any girl is getting married, there are many festivities for one whole week. The marriage is one day only but they have other festivities like different days. And one day is like they get together, everybody from both the sides, the girl's side particularly my uncles and aunts...

[end of side one, tape one]

[side two, tape one, audio begins on counter 132]

Adler: So, all the bride's side of the family would get together.

Mehta: All the relatives get together to sing songs because the girl is leaving that place anyway. So, she is set to leave her parents. We all grow up so close. And I'm close to my uncle, my uncle and aunt and they really feel sad that I am so far here, sitting here 9,000 miles away from them.

Adler: Yeah, do you have family in this country at all?

Mehta: No, no, just two of us and nobody else. So, we miss all of them. We call them every month. Every month we talk to them, our parents, his parents, my parents. And my grandparents. My grandfather is pretty old, ninety years old.

Adler: Oh, my goodness. Are you thinking that you might stay here or are you going back home?

Mehta: Chances are that we, I mean if he gets a job here, I mean because of his degree here. He has done his Ph.D. in chemical engineering and that's a good field. But _____ [?, cannot understand words said here, counter 33]... I mean, like we don't have any base here, no support from any family. We just came as totally nobody knew us here and we started on our own. So, it was difficult to start life here to learn each and every system, everything. I mean everything.

Adler: Everything.

Mehta: I mean how to talk to people starting from that to learn about them - everything - how to deal with them, go out shopping, where to shop from, where to do groceries. Because that's two different countries, I mean totally two different cultures and everything. So, you'll learn it. But I think younger people they adapt to everything fast. I think older generations are not that flexible.

Adler: So, you feel like you really didn't have any problems.

Mehta: No, we didn't, in fact, we like here. Here we have made a lot of friends. Go to different associations and different places, clubs and stuff. We make some friends. I think in a four year period you learn a lot of stuff when you go to school. And school is totally different environment from outside world, I would say.

Adler: Yeah, right. So, are you in school here?

Mehta: Yeah, I did part-time, but yeah.

Adler: What are you working on?

Mehta: I'm working on computer science. I told you. I don't want to continue with mathematics. But if I were in India I would have been in Ph.D. for I just started. Since we came here stopped everything. And see he got a job in India to electric company but then he left that job when he was getting a chance to come and study further here.

Adler: That's a hard choice to make. To drop a job and parents there and everything else.

Mehta: Oh, yeah, living...Parents and everybody. Yeah, there you have a lot of support from your parents and here, I mean, nobody. In front of your fanfare growing up that way[?] with all the facilities and here you come. I mean you start on your own. It's different. But it's very common here. I have an American friend who was telling me that "Swati, you are a spoiled kid." [laughing] I mean they try to tell me that here everybody is so independent. She said that I grew up studying and I did everything on my own. But initially it was so hard for me to understand because us trying to come here but you just can't come from two different families, two different countries and everything is different. But my, my American friend she is married to an Indian. So...

Adler: So, she understands both cultures.

Mehta: Yeah.

Adler: That's good.

Mehta: She goes to, she has been more to India than me. After coming here I have been once only. I mean after three years, last year I was in India for three months. But she went four times after she got married. And mean every year or year and a half she goes. She's a very nice girl. She studies at Georgetown and EKU.

Adler: At Richmond.

Mehta: Yeah, Richmond, not Georgetown. It's hard. You miss your parents.

Adler: I would think so.

Mehta: Yeah, very, very much because I grew up staying with them all my years. I didn't want to study away. They didn't want to send me to hostel. We call it hostel in India like if you want to go far.

Adler: Go away to school or something.

Mehta: Yeah, you are to stay in one. But I think dorms and stuff that's something they have here.

- Adler:** Well, is this going to work?
- Mehta:** Yeah, I think I should try. You don't mind sitting. I think you are really patient.
- Adler:** No, no, uh-uh. I impressed that you can even make those at all whether or not they work.
- Mehta:** It has to work.
- Adler:** They look complicated.
- Mehta:** It has to work.
- Adler:** So, you fold the...
- Mehta:** I try to make it short but it's an exact square.
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** You can make it shorter also if it is too big. You just cut it.
- Adler:** To make the right size. What happens if it is not straight or if it's not an exact square? It's harder to tape down because it's uneven.
- Mehta:** Uh-huh, right. Let me get another tape. I think this tape is not strong enough. I'm not using the tape that I used the first time.
- Adler:** Now, that's much bigger. This is just regular, old scotch tape. And that's a ...
- Mehta:** And this is heavy duty, I would say.
- Adler:** Yes. Do you want to stick it on my finger or something. Make myself useful.
- Mehta:** Yeah. [laughing] Marriage is a big occasion in India. But like after coming here, we saw the marriages here and I like, those are better here. [laughing]
- Adler:** Why?
- Mehta:** Because it's so small. You finish it fast. Everything goes so smoothly and on time. Ours goes on for twenty-four hours. You get tired by getting married. [laughter] It's a long, long, long process. I can show you my wedding photographs.
- Adler:** Oh, yeah. I'd love to see them.
- Mehta:** We had like two thousand people at wedding ceremony.
- Adler:** Really! Two thousand.
- Mehta:** Two thousand.
- Adler:** Is it outside?

Mehta: Yeah, you set your place. You can rent a hall. But my wedding was at my place. We had about half of the size of _____ [?, counter 202, can't understand where she is comparing it to] You have been into that building?

Adler: Uh-huh.

Mehta: It was this big, huge ground we had. It could hold everybody.

Adler: But that was your whole extended family lived there?

Mehta: No, it was just us.

Adler: Just your family.

Mehta: My family.

Adler: Your immediate family or aunts and uncles?

Mehta: No, nobody stayed with us. They were in different towns, different cities. I mean far from us. No, nobody was close, stayed close to us. But they all came and stayed with us fifteen days.

Adler: Fifteen days?

Mehta: Uh-huh, come to help in wedding. I mean wedding is a big ceremony in India. You would be shocked. It's different.

Adler: Yeah, fifteen days, two thousand people, that's...

Mehta: But not daily, two thousand people I invited on the day of marriage. Not for fifteen days.

Adler: It's still a lot.

Mehta: We had two hundred people, two hundred relatives for fifteen days.

Adler: Golly.

Mehta: We had servants, fifteen servants maybe, cooking and cleaning and stuff.

Adler: That's a big wedding.

Mehta: Yeah, it is a big wedding, huge wedding.

Adler: Are they all that big?

Mehta: Yeah, ours was exceptionally big, I would say but weddings are like 700 to 800 people, minimum they have. I haven't seen less than a hundred people ever in my life in wedding. That's why I used to get... _____ [?, can not understand words here] You don't see any people here in wedding and it's in a church. And one thing I saw here is who is getting married they have to prepare everything. Gosh, I was like what they have to go through.

[laughing] I've seen, even Indian kids here, those who get married here, I mean they had to do everything on their own here. You can't afford to.

Adler: You don't have a family and servants.

Mehta: Yeah, servants to do it for you. That's why, my friend Diana, she tells me you are spoiled that way. [laughter] And but it's very natural just think if you were brought up that way then you won't feel... coming here, even to wash utensils was hard for me because I hadn't washed my clothes or utensils in my life.

Adler: So, how did you learn how to do that?

Mehta: I learned because I liked it here.

Adler: It was something that you just had to do.

Mehta: Yeah, because I was willing to stay here so I would do anything. I would learn it. But cooking I know very well. That is the first thing my mom taught. I think all Indian girls they teach to cook. Nowadays, guys also want to cook. My brother is learning, too because he has to learn. I told him he can't...

Adler: Oh, good. How old is he?

Mehta: He's fifteen. He is ...

Adler: I have a son who is sixteen and I'm trying to teach him to cook. He needs to learn, learning how to do more than heating up pizza.

Mehta: Yeah, but life is easy. You don't feel like you are working really. They have made it so easy, facilities and everything.

Adler: What do you have in India?

Mehta: Pardon me.

Adler: What do you have in India? Everything has to be done from scratch.

Mehta: Yeah, I mean, we do have everything in India. But it's different here. Here, I mean, tiny, tiny things _____ [?] I mean they are trying to make it easier. In India I mean I haven't done this part, in India it's cheaper to hire people. Because by hiring the servants we are helping them.

Adler: You are providing an income for them.

Mehta: For them and for the family. So, it's like not being rude or cruel or something like that. We're helping people. There is a big class of people...

Adler: Do people who are servants feel that way?

Mehta: No, I mean they like it.

Adler: They like it.

Mehta: They want to. I mean we had servants who were working for us since eight or ten years. They don't want to leave.

Adler: Practically family.

Mehta: I mean they know each and everything. Folding laundry, I mean, each and everything, doing bed and everything they do.

Adler: So, what do you do all day if the servants do all the work?

Mehta: Cook. Cook. That's my mom, yeah...

Adler: She managed the household.

Mehta: Yeah, she managed the stuff and took care of us, kept an eye on us. Yeah, see, her life is much better than I seen women's life here. Because here it becomes a dual responsibility for a woman, she is to iron [?], take care of kids, household stuff, cooking, everything.

Adler: And work.

Mehta: And work.

Adler: Outside the home, yeah.

Mehta: Yeah, and so, she is like dual role. At home that doesn't work. That way, she is always crisp [?]. I like that. I was telling my mom, she's really lucky. And she is fifty now and she has a great life right now. She doesn't have to worry about...

Adler: Does she worry about you being here?

Mehta: Yeah, I mean just because I'm far she doesn't get to see me, so, she worries. But knows that Rakish, my husband, she knows that he is a great...

Adler: He'll take good care of you.

Mehta: Yeah. So, she is not that much worried about me. Initially she was because I was so far from her.

Adler: Were you real homesick at first?

Mehta: Uh-hmm, for two years I was, two years.

Adler: Two years, oh, golly.

Mehta: Then I started diverting my attention to other places then you don't remember much if you are busy with work and stuff.

Adler: What did you do when you first came?

Mehta: What I did was just go to church, make offerings, make friendship and then we had... I'm a _____ [?, sounds like Gujarati, counter 283]. My mother is a Gujarati. So, we have a big association for the Gujarati people. There are like four hundred or eight hundred people maybe in this town.

Adler: Eight hundred from _____ [?, Gujarati]?

Mehta: Gujarati, I'm from Gujarat state and we speak Gujarati, that's the language.

Adler: Right, yeah.

Mehta: And there are eight hundred people.

Adler: Good heavens. How do you find each other?

Mehta: You don't need to find because when I came here... There is networking. There's a newsletter and there is a calendar which will give us the phone number of each and every family. And somebody told us, the Indians, we have a sumaj, we call it sumaj, it's a _____ [?] that is here. And we gather every month at the Unitarian Church, Universal Unitarian Church and here we get together and celebrate all of our festivals. We have picnics at Nicholasville off of _____...

Adler: Yeah, I've been there.

Mehta: We are there on Saturday, whole day.

Adler: Oh, great.

Mehta: We get together and have lunch and dinner with them, play games and hear all the stuff and have fun. That's how we meet people because they know we are near they come down to this place. So, we don't feel that much all so lonely.

Adler: Who is, is there a president of that association?

Mehta: Yeah, we have a committee every year. But the committee changes but right now the president is Dr., a new doctor at UK, his name is what? Dr. Moncur [?] and his wife is also doctor. They both are doctors. His wife is at St. Joseph Hospital and he is doctor at UK, pediatrics. He is head of the department of pediatrics. He comes for Children's Miracle Network. He comes on TV for that.

Adler: Okay.

Mehta: So, he is president of our association this year. They have secretary and treasurer and...

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

- Adler:** And that's, what's the name of the association?
- Mehta:** The Gujarati Sumaj.
- Adler:** Sumanj.
- Mehta:** Sumaj.
- Adler:** Sumaj. S A...
- Mehta:** ...M A J.
- Adler:** S U M A J.
- Mehta:** You are good at pronouncing.
- Adler:** I can say them but I don't remember them, that's my problem.
- Mehta:** It's good. I know it is hard. Because if like, if so and so calls and says it is so and so calling but then I ask them to spell it if it is an American name because I write it in a wrong way. I am talking too much. Let's get started. [laughing]
- Adler:** Well, let's hope this one works. Well, they have a son named _____ [?, Braj], right? The Montajs. [?]
- Mehta:** They have two sons.
- Adler:** Yeah, an older one at Northwestern.
- Mehta:** At Southwestern.
- Adler:** At medical school.
- Mehta:** Yeah, yeah, right.
- Adler:** Yeah, okay. I've met them. Braj [?, or Rog] is a good friend of my sixteen year old.
- Mehta:** Really. Okay. [pause] My brother, there are two brothers, my husband is one brother. There are just two brothers. And his brother, he's a doctor. He's an eye surgeon in India. And he got married in January, the 19th of this year to citizen girl here.
- Adler:** Oh, good, where does he live?
- Mehta:** In India.
- Adler:** Oh, he lives in India now but he married an American.
- Mehta:** Yeah, Indian American.
- Adler:** Yeah, but he's living in India.
- Mehta:** Yeah, he's in India and she's here.
- Adler:** She's here.

- Mehta:** It takes two hundred and ninety days to process the procedure.
- Adler:** Oh, my goodness.
- Mehta:** Immigration is very strict.
- Adler:** So, is he going to come here.
- Mehta:** Yeah, he is going to come here. He will be in Long Island because the girl lives there.
- Adler:** Oh, good, so, then there will be family closer, a little bit closer.
- Mehta:** Yeah.
- Adler:** It's still a ways away but still...
- Mehta:** Yeah, that's true. We will have somebody.
- Adler:** Well, that will be nice for you.
- Mehta:** Yeah, he'll get here in October, maybe. I hope that this works because I feel really bad that you came here for his purpose and couldn't make it for you. [laughter] If you are really interested we can make it again. Next time, I'll make sure. This was a little of short notice.
- Adler:** Yeah, well, I appreciate you doing this for me.
- Mehta:** No, I can prepare, it's no problem. I mean, I'm feeling bad because it is not working today. [laughing]
- Adler:** Maybe it's the weather. Does the weather have anything to do with it?
- Mehta:** I don't know. Maybe I haven't strained it well. I should strain it in a piece of cloth maybe. That's what I'm feeling. I should strain it in a piece of cloth, fine.
- Adler:** Squeeze it through. Is that what you would have to do?
- Mehta:** Yeah, right.
- Adler:** Let me get that. Eeeeh! Sorry. I've been out working in the garden and my nails are gone pretty much.
- Mehta:** Yeah, gardening is that much... I love gardening.
- Adler:** Are you able to have a garden here at all?
- Mehta:** In Lexington?
- Adler:** Yeah.

Mehta: No. I just do inside. Can you see? I mean I just fill my whole place with ten, fifteen plants, I have everywhere. And my husband says, “No, that’s good. We don’t want anymore plants. You have made this place a nursery.” A plant nursery.

Adler: Well, they look very healthy.

Mehta: Yeah, I love plants.

Adler: You can come and weed in my garden any time you want. [laughter]

Mehta: I don’t know.

Adler: Are you going to need some more?

Mehta: That should be fine. I don’t think this is going to work. But I can, let me try. [pause] _____ [?, says someone’s name, maybe her husband] can you get something to drink? What would you like to drink?

Adler: Oh, just some water.

Mehta: Juice or Sprite or ...

Adler: Juice would be fine.

Mehta: Orange juice?

Adler: Yeah, that would be real good.

Mehta: _____ [says same name] ice cubes you’d like in your orange juice?

Adler: Yeah.

Mehta: Can you see that orangish color?

Adler: Yes, is that what it does?

Mehta: And it becomes darker as day goes on.

Adler: Do you want to do it on me?

Mehta: Sure, yeah?

Adler: Is it working?

Mehta: I don’t... that’s what I’m trying. [Says sentence in Indian language] It’s not working. The liquid dried maybe in preparing Mehendi.

Adler: It doesn’t seem like it would be so complicated.

Mehta: It’s not complicated. I mean regularly. I mean I’m scaring you.

Adler: If you had a big enough hole it would go through though, right?

Mehta: Yeah.

Adler: Cause it’s just...

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

Mehta: Yeah, but then you don't get...

Adler: Then it's not going to be as pretty, yeah.

Mehta: I mean real fine line. If you want to want real fine line, a big hole will not be pretty. I'm sorry.

Adler: Oh, that's all right. I'm sorry it is taking so long for you. Can I borrow this book and photography?

Mehta: Oh, sure, yeah.

Adler: I can do that tonight and bring it back.

Mehta: Don't worry if you want to keep it for a week. I'm not going to use it this week.

Adler: Are there other books, too?

Mehta: Oh, yeah, a lot of books.

Adler: Do you have other ones?

Mehta: I don't have others. I just got one. I thought one would be enough. But I'm interested in it. When I talk to Indian girls, they love it but they don't know how to do it.

Adler: So, do you ever teach them?

Mehta: Yeah, I taught many girls, yeah. Young girls in summer, last summer I taught them. And they loved it. And they did a try on their own. You can pick a simple pattern and I'll do it for you.

Adler: None of them look simple. They look really complicated. They are like really fancy, like gloves. They're really... they're wonderful.

Mehta: So, this way you need to have very thin cone.

Adler: So, that you can do all the little fine.

Mehta: Yeah, and curvy lines, curvy.

Adler: Well, is this the leaf, is that you just use the real thin but you just keep going over it or do you use the different size?

Mehta: Yeah, it is fill in.

Adler: Fill it in.

Mehta: Fill it in, yeah.

Adler: Do different artists who design these have different styles? If you saw them could you recognize the style?

Mehta: Oh, yeah.

- Adler:** There is even directions in English.
- Mehta:** Directions in English.
- Adler:** What are these all?
- Mehta:** This is _____, this is Mehendi, this is English. [Husband brings in drinks]
- Adler:** Thank you.
- Mehta:** We can put it down. It won't stay there. There are so many languages.
- Adler:** Oh, there's more. What is this? Is this Arabic?
- Mehta:** No, this is south Indian languages, south Indian. This is Arabic.
- Adler:** Oh, okay.
- Mehta:** There is Arabic.
- Adler:** What are these? Do you know?
- Mehta:** No. This, this, this, all these are south Indian languages but which is which, I don't know.
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** But I know there are [names four different languages] The fifth one is which?
- Rakish:** _____ [says another language]. There are several other languages. [names them] They all have a _____ dialect.
- Adler:** It's so confusing.
- Rakish:** No, not really.
- Mehta:** Because...
- Adler:** But if you traveled there wouldn't you need to know the language?
- Mehta:** Common language is _____.
- Rakish:** If you are in the northern part of India, north and central part of India, you can easily do your way with Hindi. But if you go to the south then, you should know English because the script of the northern Indian languages and the southern languages are totally different. The scripts of southern language are similar. So, for them it is very difficult to learn any of the northern languages including Hindi. So, they would not prefer that as a common language. So, for them it is easy to learn English because English is anywhere common day language. That is why they prefer English as a common language.

Adler: And they, can they all sort of read a little bit of the other languages then because they are a little similar or are they...?

Rakish: Yes.

Adler: Or are they just different enough that they are really a whole other language?

Rakish: I understand your question. Well...

Adler: I mean it's like romance languages like Spanish and French and Italian are sort of similar.

Rakish: Yes, that's true. Like if you knew Tamil [?] knew Tamil language, you wouldn't know _____. You wouldn't be able to understand _____. Similarly if you knew _____, you would be able to understand _____. Same is the case of northern Indian language. Like I can, even without knowing that _____ exists as a language being a Bujarati I can understand Marati. And I can understand _____, and I can understand _____ and obviously I know Hindi. So, basically if you knew Hindi, you would know [names four languages], those languages. _____ language do not have any ancient script of their dialects. There are approximately 950 dialects in India. So, that means 950 languages and I think at least 25 of them have script. And there are 16 officially recognized languages in India. Which they have their own literature. So, like, I'm a Bujarati. I like English as a language but I also like Bujarati as a language. And Bujarati literature is quite extensive. It has been written since last three or four hundred years, maybe more than that. I've got lots of books which I brought from India. So, you know all languages have their own languages. It's like a lot of people lump Europe together as if it were a country. The same economic currency, you can use pound anywhere. But the country is completely different including food habits and dress habits. I guess you get used to it if you are staying in India.

Mehta: She's recording. Today cones are not working.

Rakish: You need, what do you need? You need more plastic or something?

Mehta: No, I tried two different... It's not.

Rakish: Maybe you have too much water in it.

Mehta: No, it's not. It's blocking the whole thing.

Rakish: That means the particle size is much bigger.

Mehta: Yeah.

Adler: You just need to cut bigger holes?

- Mehta:** No.
- Adler:** Then it's too clunky.
- Mehta:** This is too big all ready.
- Adler:** It must be frustrating for you.
- Mehta:** I mean, I don't know why it is not working. This is blocked. This particle is what is clogging it up. [Husband says something in Indian] No, _____, water is not the problem. Do you want me to wipe off that for you? Do you see the orange color?
- Adler:** Uh-hmm, yeah, after a while it would be really dark.
- Mehta:** Do you have time, want to get together again?
- Adler:** Sure, do you mind?
- Mehta:** No, I don't mind, actually, I would like to be able to show you. But I will do it a better sieve it maybe with fine cloth. I have to find some way to sieve it properly because this is not the way I've done before. Before...
- Adler:** Have you not used...
- Mehta:** This mehendi from here. I have used the one I have from India and it was very smooth. You just need to soak it. But here they had a lot of particles. They have not sieved it.
- Adler:** Well, do you need a mortar and pestle or something to grind it finer?
- Mehta:** This is fine actually.
- Adler:** It seems very fine.
- Mehta:** But it has a lot of particles in it. Let me show you a mehendi project. You just tell me, maybe this coming week you want to get together before Wednesday. Same time. Because Wednesday I am having friends from Florida.
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** I mean you just check your planner and I'm sorry that this didn't ... [laughing]
- Adler:** That's okay. It's really interesting. Look, you can see the pattern even though you wiped it off. You can see there is a little pattern there.
- Mehta:** Once you put the mehendi it comes out this clear pattern. Patterns are this clear and that looks even better. Very clear and nice. I mean it's not worth trying today. I know. Because this mehendi. [sound of stirring]
- Adler:** You can even hear it being sort of gritty in there.
- Mehta:** Yeah.

Adler: And it shouldn't be that way?

Mehta: No, it shouldn't be, it should be real smooth. I can use this mehendi again. You want to get together tomorrow day?

Adler: Yeah, we can do that.

Mehta: What I can do is I can sieve this and make cone . And this wet mehendi I can sieve it in cloth. Then put in fine cone. See, main thing is it should be really fine and smooth otherwise it starts clogging. You saw it right.

Adler: It must be hard to get that through a cloth then.

Mehta: No, it's easy.

Adler: You really have to squeeze it through.

Mehta: Just hold the cloth on a container. If you had a good sieve then you wouldn't have to go through all this trouble. I have strainer but what do you call it, strain tea.

Adler: I have a flour strainer.

Mehta: Yeah, but...

Adler: That's going to be too big, yeah.

Mehta: You need finer than that, real fine.

Adler: The only other thing I have is a meat grinder and that would be way too big.

[laughter]

Mehta: Let me check. [goes away from microphone]

Adler: We had a flour grinder too, now that I think about it.

[end of side two, tape one]

[side one, tape two]

Adler: This is Betsy Adler. It's June 15, 1995. I'm interviewing Swati Mehta for EthniCity. [pause]

Mehta: It is too shiny. It has gleams on it.

Adler: Uh-hmm, the glare.

Mehta: Yeah, glare. I told you when I put that sarab [?] thing. It has not come out well. It was really night, at night.

Adler: Oh, yeah. Look, oh, that's beautiful. Yeah, they are a little blurry.

Mehta: Yeah, it did not come out clear.

Adler: Now, sometimes that's the camera, it doesn't want to do close-ups.

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

Mehta: I took that syrup [?] thing with the mehendi but then we realized that was really harming...

Adler: Make it shine.

Mehta: Yeah, that's the glare. Photographs do not come so well. But you could call the people at night. I mean we had professional photographs but... This was at one o'clock at night and I said, "Oh, I forgot."

Adler: Yeah, you're not going to get anybody. How pretty.

Mehta: You can just find one which, everything, select the one that you want. Maybe it is clear.

Adler: And this was a bride.

Mehta: In fact those are my hands and my feet. So, some professional came and did for me.

Adler: Oh. And did you. Now, can you do them like that?

Mehta: Yeah, I can do them like that. And I did same thing here. All the girls here who were a bride I did this here. I started from here, look.

Adler: You start ...

Mehta: Start from here.

Adler: Start on the arm and work your way up to the fingertips when you do them.

Mehta: Fingertips, for bridal. And up here it was from here.

Adler: Just above the wrist.

Mehta: A bracelet, actually this is a year from then.

Adler: What a beautiful sari.

Mehta: Ah, thank you. This is a section, this is wedding in the morning. Look, can you see here? It is very light. It didn't come out dark. Let me show where my hand is clear. Look here, you can see it is dark, the color.

Adler: It's dark but you can't see the pattern really.

Mehta: Yeah, it's too far. [says a sentence too low to hear]

Adler: Oh, wow.

Mehta: The outer side is not much. Did you see that?

Adler: Uh-hmm. It's really fairly simple except that it's really complicated, too at the same time.

- Mehta:** Okay, you can see here, too, a little bit. I mean it's really not...
- Adler:** I see it is, it is mostly on the inside there.
- Mehta:** And it comes out that dark, brown instead of an orange. It goes to dark brown, a burgundy shade.
- Adler:** Does it turn different colors on different people's skin types?
- Mehta:** Yeah, depends upon how much heat you have in your body. If you have like a lot of heat you get real good dark color. But if you don't have a lot of heat in body... like I tend to get very less color, usually. But this mehendi was really good one and I took well.
- Adler:** A real dark one.
- Mehta:** A real dark one and it came out well. But it takes like ten days, twelve days to go from your hand. It won't go immediately like washing color. I mean.
- Adler:** Now, what is the car that was there called? The car decorated.
- Mehta:** Oh, yeah, they decorated a car and the guy sits in this car and comes to marry at my place.
- Adler:** Okay, so, it's the groom that comes in that.
- Mehta:** A decorated car. [laughs] Initially, they used to come on elephants and horses. But now it has changed, they come in car. [laughing]
- Adler:** Oh, how dull. [laughter]
- Mehta:** This is reception. I think, yeah. Evening we have reception, a lot of food. There are his parents, his brother. The doctor who is coming here. His parents, my parents. Those are my parents. We have uncles and our friends, a lot have come to our wedding. A lot of people there. Everybody comes to wish and give...
- Adler:** Now, were you able to bring everything with you when you came or is it there in storage?
- Mehta:** No, it's there. I got this outfit, Indian outfit, here. I go Indian function, I wear that. But you don't get much chance, like eight or ten days a year, maybe. You go for a dance or something like that.
- Adler:** Do you mostly wear American style clothes when you're here?
- Mehta:** Yeah.
- Adler:** What do you wear in India mostly?
- Mehta:** I wear, I wear _____, you know _____ she wears that outfit.

Adler: Yeah, with the pants and the top.

Mehta: Top, yeah.

Adler: They look so comfortable.

Mehta: Yeah, they are. I mean, you get it in all cotton and real nice material, so, if it is hot, you don't feel hot in that. You feel comfortable. But actually we are wearing everything, all types of clothes. Pants. I never wore shorts in India very much except at school when you exercise and stuff. Because I was from Catholic school. I studied in a Catholic school. We had nuns from Spain and Europe. Still they are in India there, the teachers. It was a very nice grade school.

Adler: So, are you, yourself Catholic then?

Mehta: No, I am Bujarati but I studied in that school. They never...

Adler: Is Bujarati a religion, too?

Mehta: Bujarati is many religions. It is like another sect divided into many... I mean if you go to caste system, we our like make caste system complicated. I mean I am a Jain. Have you heard of a _____ [?, Buddha], _____ and Jainism are similar religions.

Adler: Okay.

Mehta: We are vegetarians. I don't eat meat or anything. In Jain, I mean my religion taught us that you don't kill even an ant or a mosquito. So, something like that. My grandma is real strict. I mean she is real strong belief. I mean if I see a cockroach, I will just kill and throw it.

Adler: You feel guilty?

Mehta: Yeah, being a Jain, I really feel guilty because I was brought up that way not, don't harm anybody until they harm you. So, defense is different. But we just don't go and for your pleasure kill anybody. Same way, I mean, my grandma, she doesn't produce onions, anything grown underground, carrots. She doesn't eat all that. I mean there is scientific reasons why. I mean I don't know in detail because I didn't study my religion so much. I mean I was busy group studying, you don't have time to study your religion. But what everybody practices in your family, you know. You are brought up that way and you learn all that stuff.

Adler: You know that, right.

Mehta: But my grandma, she comes and stays with us, like in a year four months with us. So, at that time she really makes us follow all those things. I mean she likes it, so, we do follow. We like to do with her. It's not that she is forcing on us. She tries to explain it to us. When we were children, we didn't like, it was like a lecture but now we do like. It is interesting. And both of us are vegetarians, not eating non-vegetables. We eat vegetables. But as we come here, anywhere we go to eat, we can't...

Adler: I was going to say, it must be hard to do things. There's salad bars but you get kind of tired of salad bars after awhile.

Mehta: Yeah, and any parties we go, we just get to eat dessert and salad. That's all. So, what we do, we eat at home and then go.

Adler: Then go.

Mehta: To the party.

Adler: People need to learn to be able to cook more different kinds of vegetarian foods.

Mehta: Yeah, there are vegetarian groups here in Lexington. And we are a part of that. We have potluck every month. American style potluck where you prepare dishes and people learn from you.

Adler: Yeah.

Mehta: Like change recipes.

Adler: Yeah. So, did you have trouble when you first came trying to adjust your eating habits and cooking styles to what was available here?

Mehta: No, I think mostly all we need is vegetables. And Indian stores they have all... I mean I had to go to Chicago to get Indian groceries. There is one here in Lexington but I don't like that. It's real dirty. She sells Indian food. She has a bad rap over here, nobody likes her much. They don't like to do business very much. We go to Cincinnati or Chicago. And a lot of friends go to get for you.

Adler: Give people shopping list and they bring it home.

Mehta: Yeah, and they get for you and I go I get for them. I never had problem so far. All spices and stuff I brought from India. In fact I got it when I went there last year.

Adler: And they mail you things if you need it.

Mehta: Yeah, my mom mails like, yeah, from India she mails like three or four parcels from India. It comes out expensive. I make everything. And then I started cooking American vegetables. Like broccoli we don't get in India.

Adler: Do you like it?

Mehta: Oh, yeah, I love it. I love it. So, I just convert it into Indian taste. I mean I mix broccoli, carrots and peas and mingle vegetables with curry or something like that. It's a nice meal. You get used to life here. You don't feel it's part of problem. Our side is very white. You don't get color on our side. This is how we pray.

Adler: With your hands together.

Mehta: With eyes closed. This is me, my dad, my mom. This is my house here and it's outside and you had to meet when gazebo style thing in which we sit and marry.

Adler: I saw that back there.

Mehta: Back in here somewhere. Did you see that here?

Adler: Yeah. It's very elaborate.

Mehta: So, and to plant that, you had to plant that and create your garden from that. It's a bamboo. And there is a man who does all these pujas. He was performing. We just had to sit and do what he says. He says everybody. My grandmother.

Adler: And then there you are here.

Mehta: Yeah. [laughing] This is here in USA When it snowed I was really surprised when it snowed.

Adler: You hadn't seen it before?

Mehta: No. [laughing] This is, I performed in Headley Whitley dance. I made a performance in celebration of Indian culture.

Adler: Oh, okay, yeah. Can you still do that?

Mehta: Yeah.

Adler: You're really talented.

Mehta: This was our group at Headley Whitley it was an Indian celebration. It was three years back, the whole group.

Adler: _____ [?, someone's name, counter 145]

Mehta: You know her?

Adler: Yes. Do you all get together and practice at all?

Mehta: We did a lot of practice for this.

Adler: Uh-huh, and do you now, do you still practice at all?

Mehta: No, I don't take much part in it now. I've gotten busy. But I did for different programs learning different, different dances. Once I performed in church, too, Emanuel Baptist Church. It was different dance. This was different dance. This is from north India. This dance is from north India and central part of India. And the one which we did at church was south Indian dance.

Adler: Are you all going to be dancing at all any time?

Mehta: Recently, no, not now but maybe in the autumn time, October, we'll be doing it then. Ask _____ [?, says name, counter 156] if she dances. She is a good dancer. You can ask her. Maybe she will. I may be not here during that time to contact. I'm planning to go to India to visit my mom and dad.

Adler: Oh, that will be nice.

Mehta: Here's another Indian outfit. We have bright colors. Jewelry is like bright gold, different from here.

Adler: Right.

Mehta: Here you have 14 karat gold, right?

Adler: Uh-hmm. I like the furniture style.

Mehta: Yeah, it's nice. There's mom and dad. See, this is his family, his mom and dad and brother and my mother-in-law's sister, her husband's daughter-in-law. So, it's like whole family move together. I mean they have been with _____ [?] for twenty, twenty-five days.

Adler: That's a long time.

Mehta: Yes, but see, he's a doctor and he's retired and he can afford to take off.

Adler: So, he can do that.

Mehta: He can afford to take off. Like he stays in Bombay and that is a pretty _____ [?] place. And he comes to our place which is on the seacoast and it's very peaceful and nice.

Adler: Sounds beautiful.

Mehta: Yeah, it's like six to eight miles from our place, sea coast and sea beaches.

Adler: Did you grow up swimming and stuff like that?

Mehta: No, we didn't do swimming but we go to play. Swimming I didn't, no, that came after coming here. In India I never did swim.

Adler: Do girls swim?

Mehta: Yeah, they do but I was a little shy when I was growing up. We had a coach who used to teach us in the swimming pool but I never did just because he was a guy. I said, "No, I can never do it. How can I let any guy teach me?" I was so shy. There were girls who used to go from my same area. We all went to same school. And they told me, "Come on, Swati, don't be so shy." But I was real shy. I never. [laughing] This is an Indian gathering here. We all wear saris. That's when we get to wear Indian costumes. There's one Indian costume. There's me getting ready for dance. There's an outfit. There's my sister and brother and another festival. [counter 186, can not understand sentence] Sister ties something brother's wrist and that's to protect him and wish him good and stuff like that. So, that is again another festival for us, a big festival.

Adler: He looks like he is enjoying the attention.

Mehta: Oh, yeah. He enjoys, I mean he likes you get big, big _____ [?, counter 195]. You get big, big rocks from the sister this time.

Adler: Some geode or something.

Mehta: This is us here with our friends. Let me tell you one thing see if we can get together tomorrow. Let's see, tomorrow.

Adler: Let me see if I have my calendar here.

Mehta: I forgot that I had to go for dinner.

Adler: I have that potluck from six to eight tomorrow.

Mehta: Really, that will be hectic for you, too.

Adler: Yeah.

Mehta: And I have to go for dinner, too. When should we pick for us to get together. Sunday?

Adler: We could do it Sunday, yeah. Saturday morning.

Mehta: Saturday morning. I'm going to go Alpha Farm [?], I told you, for the picnic.

Adler: Yeah, that's right.

Mehta: In the morning I go to farmer's market and get some vegetables. You get fresh ones from there. I like it.

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- Adler:** Yeah, it's nice that it finally started again.
- Mehta:** Yeah, but I haven't been there. Do you want to take those?
- Adler:** No, let me just take the book because these are a little bit blurry and I don't think... by the time. By the time they're copied they'll be really unclear. They're beautiful though.
- Mehta:** They didn't come out well.
- Adler:** Those things happen.
- Mehta:** Yeah, something goes wrong.
- Adler:** Just that little bit.
- Mehta:** I'm really feeling bad that you have wasted your time.
- Adler:** No, no, no, no. That's fine. Don't worry about it.
- Mehta:** These things make you crazy when it doesn't work. Frustrates you.
- Adler:** Has that happened before, that hasn't happened before?
- Mehta:** No, no, no, not much. I mean if one doesn't work, other will work. But I told you that I haven't used this mehendi. But I was just in hurry yesterday night and I didn't realize about the mehendi. I think I soaked, after I went to bed I got up and realized it, I have to soak...
- Adler:** Oh, dear, I'm sorry.
- Mehta:** No, no, no, no, I'm not, I don't want to make you feel guilty. I mean I am just telling you what I did. I just came out there and found a bottle and strained it two or three time but I didn't realize that even after straining it that it would be so much _____ [?]. We can see mehendi if maybe we can apply on Sunday.
- Adler:** Do you want me to give you a call Sunday to see how the day is going? Would that be the best way to do it?
- Mehta:** Uh-huh, yeah, after dinner time will be okay with me, too. So, you will come four o'clock, five o'clock. That will be fine.
- Adler:** Okay, okay.
- Mehta:** Call me. If you decide that, I mean, you might want to pass time with your family.
- Adler:** Well, my, yeah, [laughing]
- Mehta:** See, you only get to see on weekends.

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Adler: Yeah, probably, but they usually leave about noon to get back. I'll have to see. It will depend on what we have to do. I'll give you a call.

Mehta: Sure, even if you are not coming.

Adler: I'll give you a call so you will know.

Mehta: Then we can fix for week day. I hope it's Monday. It won't keep longer.

Adler: Yeah, Monday we can do it for sure, too. I have something Monday evening.

Mehta: Evening.

Adler: Monday evening, I can't do it. [laughter] Sunday.

Mehta: Your choice, you don't have much choice.

Adler: Sounds like it, doesn't it.

[end of interview #1]

[Second interview conducted 6-18-95]

Adler: It's June 18, 1995. This is Betsy Adler and I'm interviewing Swati Mehta for EthniCity. We are talking about Mehendi and there are some long spaces on the tape because she is working and it is difficult to concentrate on the work and talk at the same time. This is the what?

Mehta: Eucalyptus oil.

Adler: Eucalyptus oil.

Mehta: It's an extract from eucalyptus leaves.

Adler: Okay.

Mehta: So, it just gives very dark color.

Adler: And you put that on afterwards.

Mehta: No, right now.

Adler: Now.

Mehta: Before applying. So, you want to apply that? Do you want a dark color or light color?

Adler: Sure. What do you recommend? I need that off.

Mehta: On that hand mehendi.

Adler: Do you have some soap? I'm so hot, I'm all swollen. I don't know if it will even come off. You might have to work it into the pattern. [pause] laughter

- Mehta:** Do you want a tissue?
- Adler:** No, that's why I wore my old pants. I'm not worrying about them getting dirty.
- Mehta:** That's good.
- Adler:** That smells good.
- Mehta:** Very nice. Pure extract.
- Adler:** Where did you get that?
- Mehta:** I got from India actually.
- Adler:** Can you get it here?
- Mehta:** Yeah, you get very easily in India. I mean people if they have a cold and stuff, you put two or three drops in a bath with water and ...
- Adler:** Ah, so that you are breathing it in.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it opens it up.
- Adler:** Does it do anything to your skin, too, like make it soft.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it's nice, it's soothing. I mean here they call it... I saw a show that shows all this stuff and they used it for a bath and that you should do it take eucalyptus leaves, you should squeeze and just put into bathtub when you are taking it for relaxing.
- Adler:** Oh, really, just a relaxing bath. We have some eucalyptus plants in our neighborhood garden now. I noticed the other day. I'll have to steal some leaves sometime.
- [laughing]
- Mehta:** Yeah. It gives such a good smell even if it is in house. After you left it started working.
- Adler:** I wonder why. Well, it's beautiful.
- Mehta:** Because I knew that it was the cone thing that bothering it.
- Adler:** So, did you have to do more on it?
- Mehta:** No, what I did was just [pause] change it in a piece of paper, I mean a fine piece of cloth I did.
- Adler:** I hope my hand doesn't shake too much.
- Mehta:** It shakes a lot but I'll get used to it. This won't come fine because I made a big hole.
- Adler:** Ah, that's okay. That's going to pretty. It that some.

Mehta: But we'll just use this other part and make it maybe a little different. And I'll keep on doing the different, you will be able to make it out.

Adler: So, we will be able to see the difference but we will see that it came from that.

Mehta: Yeah. [pause]

Adler: Oh, you were going to tell me, are there names for the patterns?

Mehta: No, they don't have any names. I mean it's not like, it's just simple design. You draw it like modern art...they don't have names. Maybe I think you are thinking like artists here they draw the drawing and they have the name on each one.

Adler: No, ...

Mehta: Is this what you are asking me?

Adler: No, no, more like, you know, like this looks like sort of a paisley pattern or something like that. I just wondered sometimes...

Mehta: No, they don't have any names.

Adler: Sometimes like embroidery stitches have names or something and I wondered if there are some of these that are sort of repeated if they have some kind of name to them. You know, "Now we will do the..." like, I don't know what...like "the wave pattern" or something.

Mehta: Right.

Adler: Or the fern or seashell or something.

Mehta: I started at the wrong side. I should have started on this side.

Adler: You should rub that off or...l

Mehta: Want to do that? You can do that.

Adler: It's up to you, you're doing it. Want me to go wash it?

Mehta: No, that's okay. The whole thing will color it. See, I started at wrong side. If I am holding it too tight, you have to tell me.

Adler: No, no, that's fine. That person has a longer hand than I do.

Mehta: Yeah, that's why you have to adjust like...[pause]

Adler: Now, what kind of cloth did you run it through? Can you talk while you do this?

Mehta: Sure, yeah.

Adler: I mean, I didn't know if you can talk or if you have to concentrate real hard and not talk.

Mehta: [laughing] Yeah, it's a really fine, it's not a cheesecloth actually.

- Adler:** It's finer than that.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it's finer than that.
- Adler:** Is it like a sheet almost?
- Mehta:** Yeah, a really very fine cloth, very fine one I have, so I used that. But I did that, otherwise it would not have worked.
- Adler:** Now, as you do this are you squeezing it a little bit?
- Mehta:** A little bit.
- Adler:** Just real light though.
- Mehta:** Just real, very light, just touch it and it comes out. And like your hand should be steady when you do this, applying this mehendi. But you get the practice after awhile.
- Adler:** I see you taped the ends shut so it doesn't leak out.
- Mehta:** So, that it won't dry out, also.
- Adler:** So, it will stay, you can store it...
- Mehta:** For a while, yeah, just a few days.
- Adler:** So, for July 1st, you can make a whole bunch of them in advance and bring them.
- Mehta:** Uh-huh, and as you planned, do I have to come there and show this?
- Adler:** Yeah, if you would.
- Mehta:** I don't know what are my plans for July. I don't know if anything comes up.
- Adler:** Well, let me know as soon as possible because I have to do a program.
- Mehta:** It's very fine.
- Adler:** Oh, yeah, it's much finer.
- Mehta:** It's a very thin hole. That has bigger hole.
- Adler:** So, you would use one with the bigger holes for doing something like that where you are filling in more.
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm, filling in, filling in the extra. This is one...
- Adler:** You need to have a really steady hand to do this, don't you?
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm, but after a while you get practiced. [pause]
- Adler:** You said you did this for four weeks. Is that what you said.
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm.
- Adler:** It feels good on my hand.
- Mehta:** It will be very cooling.

- Adler:** Yeah, so, cool feeling.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it is very soothing, this henna.
- Adler:** Now, is this same mixture that you would put in your hair?
- Mehta:** Right. I told you, yeah, it is very cooling for your head, too. It feels really good. Once you put it in your hair, take all of your heat from the head.
- Adler:** Uhhh... What would it do to my hair?
- Mehta:** Yeah, that's why it becomes so cool and relaxing. You feel so relaxed.
- Adler:** It would really make my hair a different color, wouldn't it?
- Mehta:** Uh-huh, make it orangish. But you are to keep on applying like... This is what I can't... what I'll do, I'll...
- Adler:** Now, did you say you are working during the day?
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm.
- Adler:** Where do you work?
- Mehta:** Working in the home, I go to somebody's place to work.
- Adler:** What do you do?
- Mehta:** I do baby-sitting.
- Adler:** Oh, do you like doing that?
- Mehta:** Actually, she is my cousin.
- Adler:** So, it is in the family even.
- Mehta:** Right now she doesn't have anybody to take care of. She is looking for somebody.
- Adler:** Does she work? She needs somebody.
- Mehta:** Yeah, she is full-time. She had a miscarriage recently. So, she needed...
- Adler:** Oh, extra help.
- Mehta:** Yeah, extra help, so, I go and help her.
- Adler:** Well, that's good.
- Mehta:** I know she really needs me badly. And she just started working again. You don't get off here for nothing in this country. It is so different from India. I mean because women there get three month paid leave.
- Adler:** For maternity leave.

Mehta: Uh-hmm, that is paid. It is the government. And free education. We have free ed... I studied free totally with just minimal amount for...it's just for goods. Education is

_____...

Adler: Because they are trying to encourage women.

Mehta: Uh-hmm, yeah, and it's in villages. But any school medical, engineering, architecture, any school, they have no fees for that, very minimal amount. But this is because

_____ [?, Raju Ghandi], you know Raju Ghandi?

Adler: Uh-hmm.

Mehta: He was assassinated and he brought all these reforms. He did a great job for girls in India.

Adler: That's great.

Mehta: There are people who are so _____ [?, illiterate, counter 129] they will not allow girls to study. I mean, if they have sons... this is I'm talking about really small towns.

Adler: So, what do the girls do?

Mehta: You can relax just a little.

Adler: Sorry. The girls just stay home and work.

Mehta: Yeah, in villages, they make them work, poor girls.

Adler: For the family.

Mehta: Because they need extra income, too. She works, even young girls... they have life of, I mean, they are like laborers in India. See, your hand, it didn't come out even, but it's okay.

Adler: Yeah, I just have a shaky hand. I'm probably not the best person to have this done to, am I?

Mehta: It will be fine.

Adler: It tickles.

Mehta: It's not, I'm pressing it a little, too, I think.

Adler: No, that's okay. [pause] You are so steady with that.

Mehta: Yeah. I mean, you get control after a while. That's what I told you, right? As you practice this more and more, you get more control of this cone.

Adler: When was the last time you did this?

Mehta: Let's see, a year back maybe. When _____ [?] got married, a few months back maybe, six or eight months.

Adler: So, it's been a while.

Mehta: Yeah. I'm trying a very fine print today because I want it to get little. I kind of work things together. [?, unsure of last two sentences] I can't talk and do this so well.

Adler: That's okay.

Mehta: Got a little messy here.

Adler: You want me to move up my hand?

Mehta: No, I'll just pick it up. Look, you can pick up with this, too. Shows what comes across...

Adler: Oh, look at that. You just use the point instead of squeezing it out, you use it to clean it up.

Mehta: Uh-huh.

Adler: Now, does the tip get soft after a while?

Mehta: No.

Adler: Does it stay pretty tight?

Mehta: It stays tight. I get clean, all right. If you have _____ [?] or something, you don't have to worry. You keep one waste paper with you so you can just squeeze it, and if you don't get the flow, you can squeeze it.

Adler: When did they start doing it with the cones instead of using sticks?

Mehta: I think, ten, fifteen years back, maybe, ten.

Adler: So, did, like when plastic bags came in or something? Was that or was it before? Did they use cloth ones?

Mehta: Oh, no, no, actually, I think they, somebody came up with this idea and decided, it was not like, plastic was invented long back, I think. But they come up with this idea because this was easier.

Adler: So, doing it this way isn't really very old.

Mehta: No. Only fifteen, twenty years old. If you are not comfortable, let me know.

Adler: I'll tell you. Sorry I am shaking so much.

Mehta: [laughing] The lines are not going straight but it's okay. This is good, look. If you are relaxed, you don't shake.

- Adler:** Yeah, this hand shakes more than my other hand, too.
- Mehta:** So, we picked the wrong hand, huh?
- Adler:** Oh, it's pretty. [pause]
- Mehta:** I have to put this here with me. [pause] Maybe something is blocking this...[pause] Something is clogging this cone, I don't know what. I have to be careful with it because this a better cone than the other one.
- Adler:** Because it is thinner, smaller.
- Mehta:** Thinner, yeah. Even do it small. [pause] Do you find it interesting?
- Adler:** Fascinating.
- Mehta:** Oh, this happens sometimes that people here are not used to the smell and stuff; they may not like it sometimes.
- Adler:** And it even feels real good, too.
- Mehta:** Yeah. I was a little bit worried when you came you said you wanted to do something.
- Adler:** It's feels great.
- Mehta:** Oh, that's good. [pause] Whoops! That's a _____ [?, counter 230]
- Adler:** Okay. And do you start, when you do one, when you are starting out, do you start at a different place on the hand for different patterns?
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm, I mean, it depends, well, it's hard, like if you start at the base of the pattern it becomes easier like, to go from base to the top. That's where we start. Usually we start from here but I don't think you want to go up to that part.
- Adler:** To the arm. Yeah.
- Mehta:** Every design, any design, it doesn't matter what design it is, big or small, it looks pretty. All the designs look pretty. You will have to put the hand aside.
- Adler:** Like?
- Mehta:** Like. Let me get another tissue. [pause] Excuse me, I'll go and get a tissue.
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** You can have some _____ [?] [sound of her leaving room]
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** Do you like it?

Adler: Now, who would have this done? Is this only for brides or is it for other occasions?

Mehta: Yeah.

Adler: What kinds of occasions?

Mehta: I told you like, one is like if you are going to somebody's wedding you do it. Or like if there are some festivals, we have a lot of festivals in India. Like special festivals... It's coming out.

Adler: So, like any occasion where you would get dressed up, would that be appropriate?

Mehta: Yeah, like when you get dressed up and specially we have all different festivals like _____ [?, Divali], let's see. And even girls do it on some fun time but usually in cities nowadays people do it only for weddings and stuff. Like if you are going to somebody's wedding and it is like a whole program, I told you, people sing songs.

Adler: Uh-hmm, yeah.

Mehta: Family gathering, it's a family gathering at bride's place and bridegroom's place but it's separated. People get together and sing song. One side does the singing song and the other song... there are professional ladies who like four or five different ones come, how many you want to call and they'll be putting mehendi on different people's hands. It's like one corner this is happening, other corner this is happening. It's like a festival at the house.

Adler: Yeah. Do men ever have it done?

Mehta: No. No, I don't, I mean, there are some castes...

Adler: Do they use any henna anywhere?

Mehta: I think in _____ [?] in _____ [?, same word] men also put some mehendi but they don't have designs. Different castes, different people. Look, this is not working any more. [pause] Something's wrong. This is bad, look, this is not happening well. It shouldn't come out a lot. It should come out in an even flow.

Adler: I'm bad luck for you.

Mehta: No, it should be all right. [says a sentence too quietly to hear] Come on, work.

Adler: You need long fingernails to be able to do this. [laughing] Now, the lumps are going to make the lines not as thick, I mean too thick instead of even.

Mehta: Yeah. [pause] I'm just looking that's why the flow, there is some problem.

Adler: Is it my hand?

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Mehta: No, don't worry. [pause] I'm just using my nails but you shouldn't use your nails.

Adler: It should come out smooth anyway.

Mehta: You don't need to actually, I mean, it's getting harder. It's tiring, do you want to relax?

Adler: No, no, I'm fine.

Mehta: This doesn't work again.

Adler: How was your picnic?

Mehta: Oh, it was so nice. I met a lot of people yesterday. [Adler sneezes] Oh, okay. [laughing]

Adler: Excuse me. [sneezes again] [laughter] All of a sudden I think I got some eucalyptus up my nose or something. [laughing]

Mehta: Is it too strong for you?

Adler: No, it smells very good.

Mehta: You are tired, you look tired. Your son goes to which school?

Adler: The one that's here right now goes to LTMS, Lexington Traditional Magnet. He'll be in eighth grade. And my oldest son...

Mehta: You have two sons.

Adler: Yeah, the other one is a senior now. He's at Dunbar.

Mehta: [pause] It's smooth, this is spreading.

Adler: Oh, moved my hand, sorry.

Mehta: No problem.

Adler: He's at camp in Owensboro now, the oldest one.

Mehta: Uh-hmm, that's good.

Adler: Yeah, he's having a good time.

Mehta: Now, you don't have to worry about your kids, they're grown-up now.

Adler: They're getting there.

Mehta: Yeah, he'll be out on his own soon.

Adler: Well, the older one, last night, he stayed home alone while my husband was here. He was in Owensboro.

Mehta: Your husband?

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

- Adler:** No, my older son, all by himself for the first time.
- Mehta:** Wow.
- Adler:** Left him home alone. He's going on seventeen. He's pretty responsible.
- Mehta:** He's going where?
- Adler:** He's going to be seventeen in July.
- Mehta:** Oh. [pause] When this gets this way, it becomes messy. It doesn't look good.
[pause] It will give good color... it may look _____ [?, counter 378] right now but it will give good color.
- Adler:** Because it's so nice and thick.
- Mehta:** Uh-huh. There you are. You may want to keep like that. There is tape over there to stop spreading.
- Adler:** Stop squishing it together.
- Mehta:** And it's stops spreading before it dries. After it dries it's okay, not, doesn't make much difference.
- Adler:** You should have a little form for people to put their hands in to hold them in the right position.
- Mehta:** Right. Stand, maybe, like you get one for cross-stitch. Yeah, it's making a little mess, this corner here. Did you see that?
- Adler:** Uh-hmm.
- Mehta:** You don't have to worry about it. The color all over, it won't even show really.
[pause] Well, the one part I do and the other part get stuck. Look, now it's working.
- Adler:** It's so smooth when it really works.
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm, if it works it won't give you hard time. Just have to press it properly. I was going to call you at ten thirty that day you left, it was working. [laughter] It gave such a hard time that day. And I really get upset if anything doesn't work.
- Adler:** It's so frustrating.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it becomes frustrating after a while if it is not working. Is it boring for you?
- Adler:** No, it's really interesting.
- Mehta:** We will finish it fast. What time is Noah finishing?
- Adler:** Oh, they have somebody giving them a ride home and he's got a key to the house.

- Mehta:** So, you don't have to worry.
- Adler:** There's my thumb.
- Mehta:** Sorry, are you hurting?
- Adler:** No, no, no, I forgot to keep my thumb away.
- Mehta:** Oh, okay. This corner is really becoming messy now. [laughing] But we don't want go so far up here because the more and more we go into this corner it is going to squish. And it's very natural your hands tend to go together. [pause] It's nice out.
- Adler:** It sure got warm today, though.
- Mehta:** I didn't go anywhere today just because it was hot. Just went for groceries and came back.
- Adler:** I still have to get groceries. I'll wait, Noah has a friend who is going to spend the night, I think I'll make them go grocery shopping for me.
- Mehta:** You can't do that. It's okay if you don't want to leave it on all night.
- Adler:** But that's better, right?
- Mehta:** Yeah, that's better.
- Adler:** I will.
- Mehta:** Morning, you get up, you remove.
- Adler:** Just wash it off.
- Mehta:** No, don't wash it off, scrape it off.
- Adler:** With a knife or...?
- Mehta:** The back of a knife.
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** Or the butter spoon maybe. Back of the... not sharp but like, don't scrape it with sharp thing. You may scrape your skin.
- Adler:** Okay.
- Mehta:** Just use the back of a butter spoon or knife.
- Adler:** It seems like it is already drying where you started.
- Mehta:** Uh-hmm, yeah. [pause]
- Adler:** Do people use hairdryers or anything on it to make it dry faster?
- Mehta:** No. It dried with the heat of the body. It, your hand has a lot of heat. So, it is going to dry naturally. You won't need anything.

- Adler:** Does perspiration affect it at all? It doesn't run it or anything.
- Mehta:** Yeah, it will run, it will make it a little runny maybe. But once it is dry, I mean, it air dries, I mean we will put air holes in the bag, so, it will get some air. So, it won't smear.
- Adler:** I see.
- Mehta:** Once it's dry we put the syrup on, still, sometimes it gets so hot, so damp inside, the plastic bag is so hot sometimes, we put holes in it. Give it, the air circulation will help to make it dry. This color has become messy now. It looks terrible. [laughing]
- Adler:** I'll wear a band aid over that corner. [laughter]
- Mehta:** Okay, we want to make it simple, so, I'll try this.
- Adler:** Do you want me to move my hand somewhere?
- Mehta:** No, no. When we squeeze this point, maybe if something is stuck in there it will come out. [pause] Now, look your hand has stopped shaking now.
- Adler:** It is sort of frozen in position. [laughing]
- Mehta:** If you are tiring, I will try to finish it fast.
- Adler:** No, that's okay. It is really interesting. I admire you being able to do this.
- Mehta:** I like it. Like year after coming here, things make you so busy. I mean things are like that here. It keeps you so busy.
- Adler:** It's hard to find the time to do.
- Mehta:** Yeah. I try, we don't have time, like...
- Adler:** Are you in school? Are you taking computer courses?
- Mehta:** Part-time.
- Adler:** Are you in school during the summer?
- Mehta:** No, in the summer I am taking a break. But again like last semester I took class, two classes and maybe this semester, now, since I am going full time baby-sitting, I've got my days filled for awhile. You can't do both things together, I feel.
- Adler:** Uh-hmm.
- Mehta:** Yeah, because computer science is a lot of assignments. They give a lot of assignments.
- Adler:** Do they?
- Mehta:** Oh, boy, they won't let you set free two or three weeks [?, unsure of first part of sentence] two or three assignments a week and they are like, programming.

Adler: Programming things that take a lot of time.

Mehta: Yeah, a lot of time. I took class and it was nice, I mean very interesting. And like I have access, easy access at home but then you have to spend a lot of time, if you are out all day then you can't... [laughter]

Adler: Sorry, wiggling.

Mehta: Because these fine lines will get on each other. They'll be too messy. I'm making so... there are cones which are finer than this one.

Adler: They must be hard to make. To make it that fine, it's hardly cutting off any of the end.

Mehta: No, it's just, you don't give it, you don't cut it... It depends, I mean you can make it fine and you can also... [pause]

Adler: Now, do Indian women wear wedding rings?

Mehta: But I have removed it. I was not comfortable. We have other things which we wear on necks [?] which is called _____. They are like wedding rings, they put on brides, the groom puts on the bride's hand, the finger. I mean you exchange rings. We have something that the bridegroom puts on our neck, a necklace like thing. It's a black bead, it's called _____.

Adler: I think I've seen those.

Mehta: But they are pretty. But I can't wear those because I am really uncomfortable with jewelry. Now, I don't wear bangles, we have bangles too. But I don't wear anything.

Adler: You don't like to wear it.

Mehta: No, the ring, gold, it's uncomfortable, I removed it. Just can't do it for a long time.

Adler: I was just wondering because having this on your hand...

Mehta: What?

Adler: The mehendi on your hand, you know, like I took off my ring to put it on.

Mehta: Are you okay?

Adler: Yeah, I started relaxing my thumb. I have to hold it out.

Mehta: Uh-huh. On hands we put this intricate designs. This one we use for lines. This one we use for leaves.

Adler: The thicker one because.

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

[end of side one, tape one]

[side two, tape one - June 18, 1995]

Mehta: Sometimes you just have to hold on to your breathing, also, for awhile when you are doing real intricate things. Just pick it up, let it touch somewhere.

Adler: Excuse me. It was the end of my finger. I'll try not to get it on your dress.

Mehta: No, it won't, you can put your hand on my dress. [pause]

Adler: It's coming out. I shouldn't say anything, should I?

Mehta: Uhhmm, one minute it will, one minute it won't. And it depends how you press it. [pause, sound of bird] There's a bird here. [pause] It looks good.

Adler: Pretty, yeah.

Mehta: You want some lemonade?

Adler: What?

Mehta: Some lemonade, some more.

Adler: Oh, no, I've still got some there. I'm okay, thanks. Are you ready for a break?

Mehta: No.

Adler: You're working hard. That's pretty. I pushed it together there where my thumb was.

Mehta: But this will become so dark that you won't be able to...

Adler: Won't notice.

Mehta: ... the color.

Adler: Really?

Mehta: By the evening, see, when you remove it, it won't be dark color, maybe, but as day goes on, like when you go to take a shower don't put a lot of soap on this hand.

Adler: Okay.

Mehta: Just wash it and try not to use a lot of soap in this hand. We are a little messy on the hand here but we can't do anything about it. A little here and there, it's fine, it happens that, I know.

Adler: It's so pretty.

Mehta: But what I'm saying is after you scrape it, put a little oil and then go to shower. As day goes on that whole day...

Adler: It will darken.

Mehta: It will become darker by evening. I mean color comes brighter and brighter. It picks up color, from orangish it will go dark like dark orangish, like rust color you will see by the end of, I mean by night. As day, the first two days it just picks up color.

Adler: Really, two days?

Mehta: If you put lot of hand in... I mean hand a lot of time in water, it may not pick up color but still it give good color.

Adler: Well, I just won't be able to dishes or anything.

Mehta: I mean this is not the color that will show up. It will be darker. [pause] It's coming out. It is flower designs in everything in this.

Adler: And look the animals.

Mehta: And you said like no names, like actually I mean it doesn't have any names, part of the design you just say, "I want this similar design." You just have this reference book.

Adler: Or you could say, "I want animals, or initials, or flowers." Or something like that.

Mehta: Yeah. Don't touch this area. [pause]

Adler: Do young girls have it put on, too?

Mehta: Uh-hmm.

Adler: There's no age?

Mehta: No. With bridal mehendis are done by brides only. Young girls do like simple like this. This is called simple mehendi, real simple designs. Smaller than this maybe, younger, everybody can put it. This small one maybe.

Adler: So, anyone can wear it.

Mehta: Any religious, girls like to do it. Not guys, of course, girls only do it.

Adler: So, girls do each other.

Mehta: But all the girls can't put it. Really this is a little hard to put. I think once they get a little older, girls start doing it. They learn it. It depends what their interest is. [somebody comes in] Hi, Rakish.

Adler: Hello. [He says, "Hello."]

Mehta: You want to take our photograph later?

Rakish : Wow. That's great.

Adler: Doesn't that look good?

Rakish :It's really nice. [sound of background noise]

Mehta: She is willing to do that. If she don't feel right, or you feel it's messy, you just go right ahead...

Adler: Well, it seems like it is going to be okay. It's already drying.

Mehta: Rakish, you will come here and take our photograph? You can eat your tea in here.

Rakish: Yeah.

Mehta: This is nice design, too.

Adler: That is pretty. I like the way they match like that.

Mehta: Yeah, I mean finger design, that's what I'm talking about. You could have done that. I have put this on so many girls, several girl, here. Even in Cooperstown I did for two different girls. She was going for somebody's wedding. She said, "Swati, can you do for me?" I said, "Sure." She lived downstairs in basement. She was going for some Indian wedding. And we had the dance program, too. I told you about it. She wanted to do for that, too.

Rakish: [says something to Swati in Indian]

Mehta: Ask her.

Rakish: How do you want me to take the picture?

Adler: There are two cameras. Can you use two of them?

Rakish: I would know how to use that one.

Adler: This little one is just sort of an aim and shoot, I think.

Rakish: Yeah, I can use that one.

Adler: Okay, well, you can use that. That's black and white and that's colored slides in that and it has the flash that you stick on the top.

Rakish: Okay, in this one. Well, that is black and white. Let me try. Maybe you can just tell me what to do.

Adler: Yeah, just slide that there on the shoe on the top there. And tighten it. Other way, yeah, like that.

Mehta: Whoops, your shaking.

Adler: Oh, I'm sorry. And then it tightens, there's a little ring under there. Yeah, that. Just tighten it. It might be tightened enough. It doesn't lock really. And then you turn it on, on the back there's a switch, on the bottom left. No, on the flash. Yeah, just turn it on. Let's see what it's set at. It should be set here. Now, you just aim and focus it.

Rakish: What do I focus?

Adler: You focus those. And then what you have to do is read the distance on here and, it's kind of complicated, you have to look up here on the chart for the feet and then that will tell you where to set the opening which is this one here.

Rakish: This is the distance where?

Adler: From you to me, where ever you are going to be standing.

Rakish: It has to be very exact?

Adler: Uhhh, not, not, you know we can do like three pictures in a range if you want and that way one of them will get it.

Mehta: Whoops, no, it's okay, because it will give a lot of light and we want to record photo. It is hard work. [pause]

Adler: That's pretty. Do you want me to move my hand somehow?

Mehta: Pardon?

Adler: Is my hand okay?

Mehta: Yeah.

Adler: You see how it works?

Rakish: Yes. It is focused, right?

Adler: Well, maybe, it's. I don't know I just sort of do it.

Rakish: That's the focus, right. Is that the focus?

Adler: No, this is the focus. It might be... well, you can see, let's look here. You're probably down around, probably somewhere around right in there.

Rakish: So, this one is in feet and this one is in meters.

Adler: Yeah, but I think that the flash is in feet, so...[pause]

Mehta: Whoops!

Adler: What happened?

Mehta: I just put my hand in your...

Adler: Oh.

Mehta: I keep putting my hand in your mehendi.

Adler: Oh, that's beautiful

Mehta: Yeah, we should have done it on all the fingers but we wanted different.

Adler: Yeah. [pause]

- Rakish:** Well, I'm not really focused. Can we do one thing? Can we use my camera?
- Adler:** Sure.
- Rakish:** It has fully operative aperture and that has color in it and that is what I'm used to.
- Adler:** Okay. Simple. Try this one.
- Rakish:** Yeah, I'll try that one, also.
- Adler:** Because then we can make prints from it. And I'll get you some prints. That one, let's see, set it, let's see you're probably, if you'll stand maybe right about there and focus onto here we can estimate your probably going to be, what would that be, five feet?
- Rakish:** Five feet, yeah.
- Adler:** And then you can just set, look on the back there at five feet.
- Rakish:** Yeah, this one?
- Adler:** Yeah.
- Rakish:** Okay, that's at 5.6.
- Adler:** Okay, that's F 5.6, then. And then, here, then you take this, this one and put it, to 5.6 there, right there. See it lines up with that little red dot. And that should be right.
- Rakish:** What is this one? Little ring, no, not that one, this one.
- Adler:** Ah, I don't know.
- Rakish:** You don't know. [laughter - Adler]
- Mehta:** You don't need to use that, right?
- Adler:** No, I guess not. [laughing] I'm not sure what it is.
- Mehta:** Those things are so complicated. Why do they have to make it so complicated.
- Adler:** [laughing] I've forgotten.
- Rakish:** Now, put this on for the camera.
- Adler:** Yeah, if it is forward. You see the green?
- Rakish:** Yeah, okay.
- Adler:** Yeah, and then push the button in the middle.
- Rakish:** This one?
- Adler:** Yeah.
- Rakish:** I ought to focus this now.
- Adler:** Yeah, you probably ought to focus now. Actually, it's pretty easy.
- Rakish:** Okay. What do you want to do? You want a picture of that.

- Adler:** I want her doing my hand but show her doing it, her face and everything, too.
- Rakish:** Okay, yeah.
- Mehta:** She should come in the picture. [laughing]
- Adler:** It's a wide angle lens. It will probably pick it up. Because I don't want to be in the picture [laughs]. I'd rather. [pause]
- Mehta:** This has started flowing, we can put... Are you okay, Rakish?
- Adler:** You can take a couple, don't worry about it. If you think it is out of focus, do another one a little bit... what?
- Mehta:** Can I just do...?
- Adler:** Oh, yeah. Go for it.
- Mehta:** Was it okay?
- Rakish:** It flashed, didn't it?
- Adler:** Yes. Now, where you thumb is, just push that forward.
- Rakish:** This one?
- Adler:** Yeah.
- Rakish:** Like that.
- Adler:** And that will advance it. Just push it all the way forward. There, yeah, and now you can take another one.
- Mehta:** Are you okay? You are shaking. If you are tired, tell me. We can change your position and stuff.
- Adler:** No, I'm fine. No, I'm okay.
- Mehta:** This finger, we should end in all the fingers, okay?
- Adler:** Yeah, it's beautiful. Do you want me to sit on the other side? Would that be easier? [pause]
- Mehta:** That's a little flower and we just want to fill in this part. It doesn't matter really.
- Adler:** Do the designs sometimes go all the way around the hand or does it sometimes stop and then you do a different one on the other side?
- Mehta:** You stop, yeah. I mean you start from here, go up. And then you start from here and go up.
- Adler:** And that would be one. They can be, they're different designs. It's not like you connect them here or something like that.

Mehta: You can do that too but usually the designs are, somebody likes a lighter one and somebody likes a heavier one. No two fingers are alike. You don't want a lot of design on the back because that hand is always exposed outside. Anyway, it doesn't give a lot of color. I wish that you would take with other camera sometime. [He says, "What?"] Take with other camera, also.

Rakish: Oh, yeah, that's right.

Mehta: It's pretty.

Adler: Yeah.

Mehta: That's where we messed up over here. When it was not working.

Adler: Uh-hmm, when we were starting out.

Mehta: Yeah. It gave us a little hard time.

Adler: This one I really don't even know how to do. This is on and then flash. It's completely automatic. I don't have the instructions. Somebody has loaned me the camera and said "Here, this is how you do it." And then I promptly forgot what they said. [laughing] And it sort of adjusts, what I was told it adjusts. So, if it needs the flash it will use it and if it doesn't, it won't. Can you do sort of a close-up of my hand?

Rakish: Yeah, okay. Maybe we should put it there.

Mehta: Want to focus with that one? [He says something in Indian language.]

Adler: It's an old one.

Rakish: Well...

Adler: Well, it is. It's an old one where you had to do all the work yourself. [They both say something in background, can not understand what is said.] It's easy to use if you don't use the flash on that. But when you use the flash then you have to do all that adjusting. It takes forever. But it turns out good.

Rakish: Did it take?

Adler: Yeah. Do you want... oh, you put all that away already, didn't you?

Mehta: I can get it.

Adler: I just wanted to have a black and white of the, of you pretending you are doing it.

Mehta: Let me get it out again.

Rakish: My camera is the same, similar type. It has a color read in it. So, maybe...

Mehta: It is a simple camera, an automatic one. Let me get the cones out.

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

- Adler:** Maybe you can do one with my camera, too. [pause]
- Rakish:** Okay. [sound of camera shooting] You want one more of...?
- Adler:** Yeah.
- Rakish:** Okay. [sound of camera] This is neat. Now, with our camera.
- Adler:** Whoops! I need some little popsicle sticks to keep them apart. [laughter] It's like you need a splint on your hand or something.
- Mehta:** It is very natural. I told you it comes that way with everybody. I told you. Everybody has same problem. [sound of camera shooting] Ready?
- Adler:** It is so neat looking.
- Mehta:** It smells good.
- Adler:** Yeah, it does smell good.
- Rakish:** Now, if you want a close up here, you put it somewhere...
- Mehta:** Put it on the wall.
- Adler:** Oh, okay. [sound of camera shooting]
- Mehta:** Is the light still good? [He answers in Indian.] Sorry, he is speaking our language, [laughing] you won't understand.
- Adler:** That's okay.
- Mehta:** You get so comfortable with your language, mother tongue, it just comes out naturally. Comes out [laughing] and you don't have to remind yourself. It shows up on your hand.
- Adler:** Yeah. It is neat looking. Did you do a close-up on it?
- Rakish:** Not on that one.
- Adler:** Do you want to try with that?
- Rakish:** Yeah, sure.
- Adler:** You can't get real close on that because it is the wide angle lens but it will do pretty good.
- Mehta:** But still take one or two close-ups with this, too. I mean do this way like, a little different, like. I mean..
- Adler:** I'm trying to keep my... like so?
- Mehta:** Something in that area. Turn your hand like that. Here that should be okay. Get the thumb together... [laughter]

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Interview with Swati Mehta (B3,F19-21; B1,F3)

Adler: Is that enough? I'm getting trained to keep it apart finally and now you are telling me to put it together.

Mehta: Yeah, together.

Adler: I don't normally hold my fingers, my hand against a wall here. [laughter]

Rakish: I don't think I can just get the hand.

Adler: That's okay, just as much of the hand as you can. [laughter and then pause]

Mehta: Did it focus?

Rakish: Take a minute for the flash.

Adler: Is the flash on?

Rakish: Yeah, it is still waiting for it to come on.

Adler: Oh, I may need to get new batteries for it.

Mehta: I like the smell of henna. Be careful. [laughter]

Adler: I just knocked some off smelling it.

Mehta: Do you want to shut this off, here?

Adler: Yeah, we can do that. [audio goes off]

[end of interview]