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Interview with Jayashree Shivamoggi

Jayashree Shivamoggi

Wenxian Zhang

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Dr. Jayashree Shivamoggi (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

Interview with Jayashree Shivamoggi and Wenxian Zhang

Friday, March 26, 2021

WZ: Good afternoon. My name is Wenxian Zhang; I'm the Head of Archives and Special Collections. With me is Dr. Jay Shivamoggi, and she is going to participate in our oral history program.

So Dr. Jay, can you tell me your family background? Where did you grow up? Where did you receive your education initially?

JS: Wenxian, it is such a pleasure to do this oral history project with you. I am really glad I get to do this with a very dear friend.

Like you, I'm an immigrant. I came to this country when I was twenty-nine years old. I was born in the southwest part of India to an engineer father, who used to be transferred to little projects all over the state, and so I grew up in little villages. It was a very idyllic setting; it was awesome.

When I was nine, my father sent me to a boarding school, because as awesome as all this village life was, if I was to get a good education, I needed to grow up in a boarding school. So I grew up in a boarding school; I got my master's in physics in India. And then, I like to say, life happened: I got married, and then my husband was a professor in the University of Central Florida. I waited

for me to get my green card, and I arrived here in 1988, and I got my Ph.D. from UCF. And here I am.

WZ: I'm very much interested in your early life. As you mentioned, like you, I'm also an immigrant myself. I actually came the same year, 1988, from China to the United States. So we have a similar background, growing up in Asia.

So maybe tell me a little bit more about your early childhood; about your family; why you chose to become a physicist. That's very unusual for an Asian female person.

JS: Yeah. The earliest memory I have is—the psychologists always talk about how, when a child is traumatized, that is the memory they always carry. My earliest memory is in the garden of our house, where they had these huge croton leaves, and I thought they looked like snakes. I always used to be really scared of that plant.

But what I remember is the overwhelming community of the place. And because my father was an engineer, growing up in India—which is very feudal—we always had servants in the house. We always had people to take care of the gardens, to take care of us; and my mother had a lot of help. Life was really, really happy and interesting: riding bikes to school; hanging out with friends. And then when I went to boarding school, my boarding school was a very cool place too.

My father, I have to say, has a very big impact on who I am and what I became, because my father was way ahead of his times in terms of education for girls. As is a common conception, which is very prevalent in India and in many parts of Asia, the girl daughters are not valued or welcome. But in our house, that was not the way. My father was the exception, and he always treated me as though I was the most valued child; as valued as my brothers and my sisters. I'm the oldest of five.

When people say I was the princess for my father, it could not be more accurate, I feel. He really treated me like I needed all the opportunities I could get. He was very interested in my education. He was an engineer, and I think that spurred my interest in science. And mathematics always came a close second.

My fondest memories are walking at night with my father, my mother, and my younger brother, when my father would point up to the sky and show us the galaxies; show me the Milky Way. And we used to talk about—he will have mental math: we'll be walking, and he will be asking me and my brother little math questions. We were, at that time, four and six. He instilled in me a love for numbers and a love for mathematics which I carry to this day.

I had a teacher in boarding school who was also very instrumental in my career; in my falling in love with physics. The first time I read about the nuclear reactor and how the nuclear reactor works, and how nuclear fission and nuclear fusion happens, I was just awestruck. It felt like there's nothing more beautiful in this world that I could be studying. So that was under their influence.

My great-uncle, my mother's grandfather [uncle], he was one among the pioneers of physics in India. He got his Ph.D. from [the University of] Manchester in the 1920s, and then came back to

India and started very prestigious physics departments in many different universities. And even after he retired, he came to one of the premier nuclear centers in India; he came there and worked as their spectroscopy advisor. Even when I was little, I had no idea what he had done, but he was this grand old man that I looked up to. I didn't know what he had done, but I always wanted to emulate him. And then only much later, I realized he was a physicist, and I was on my way also to becoming a physicist.

So I had a lot of really interesting influences in my life that all culminated in me getting interested in math and physics early on in my life. And then I had someone to look up to. And I had excellent teachers. So it was a confluence of all these different factors in my life that led me to choose physics.

WZ: That sounds really wonderful. So you said you are the oldest of all the siblings. Your father, definitely university educated. What about your mother?

JS: My mother was not; she had just finished her high school, as was common. They got married in 1957. In the fifties, that's about what the women were aspiring to. There were a few women who were college educated, but that really was not the norm.

Actually, I'm going to digress a little and tell you the story of the women of that generation. My mother, who was so bright; but then, the expectation was, you get your high school diploma, and then you get married. And then my father's younger sister was also brilliant; but then, same thing: she got her high school diploma, or rather, she finished her high school exams and got married before the results were announced. When the results were announced, she and her brother-in-law—both had appeared for their exams at the same time, and she had passed with what they call a first class, more than 60 percent. And her brother-in-law graduated in a second class. She always talked about how she couldn't even rejoice her first class, because she had to be mindful of the fact that her brother-in-law only passed in second class. The brother-in-law went on to get a Ph.D. in textile engineering, and went on to become number two in a major textile factory in India, and he did incredible work.

I always wonder—I mean, later on, same thing happened to my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law finished her high school exams and got married before the results came. All her guy friends—whenever we met them, they all talked about what an incredible student my mother-in-law was.

So when I look at these three women—my mother, my mother-in-law, and my aunt—I realize the women in India always had it. They were all bright and really incredible students, but nobody thought of them as, you know, professional scientists. But they all got married, and they became housewives, and they were raising children. But they all, I think, in their own way, shaped the futures of their children.

WZ: That's truly amazing.

So you said that you attended boarding school for your elementary and high school? Can you tell me about your university experience?



In 1979, Jayashree played the lead character in a drama for a college event at Karnatak University, where she earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Physics (*Photo: Dr. Jayashree Shivamoggi*)

JS: My university was, as you know—I don't know how the system is in China, but in India, after you finish your high school, you go to a three-year college. You get your undergraduate degree there, and then you go to the university for your graduate school. So, undergraduate, and—they call it graduate and postgraduate education, right? And they're very distinct, and they're very separate.

I had really fun times with my undergraduate education. Again, because my father was always posted in small towns, I went to a boarding school. I stayed in a hostel, and I went to school. It was in a very scenic spot. We had good teachers, and I was interested in many different activities.

Recently, when I had gone home, one of my classmates couldn't come to see me, but his daughter came to see me. She was relating to me a story that her father had told her about me, and which I had completely forgotten. Apparently, I was in eleventh grade, and—eleventh, twelfth, and then three years of undergrad, you do in college. And I was such a stickler for guys behaving rudely with girls. I had raised such a hell about it, all the teachers had actually sent a circular to the guys, telling them to leave me alone. He could not get over that, and he was telling his daughter, “You have to meet her, she's a firebrand.” I had forgotten all about it. But, you

know, the Me-Too movement—I guess I was an early fighter for the Me-Too movement while I was in college. And I think if you raise your voice, people do listen, you know?

I had a bunch of really fun-loving friends, and we made a lot of racket on campus. But at the same time, we all also studied very hard. Even then, physics was considered to be a subject for the nerds, and physics was considered to be a subject that you had to work very hard for. And I was very proud of it; I was very proud that I was doing something that was difficult, but something I loved. Again, I had incredible teachers, so when I went to the university, where you get your master's, I was one among the top students there.

Now looking back, I feel that—you know, this was in the early eighties, and we used to have a course on Fortran programming. The class was taught by a professor, who talked to us about programming on a blackboard, and we were taking notes in a notebook. What was missing was the computer. We were learning a computer language without even looking at a computer. That's how—I don't want to say *backward*—how access to all this modern equipment was just totally missing.

And one thing cool—I mean, it makes it a full circle: three of the professors who were in my university in the physics department were all students of my great-uncle, who had pioneered and done all these physics departments all over the country. He had, I think, more than a hundred students who got their Ph.D. with him. And three of them were in my university. They were all very excited when they found out that I was getting my master's over there, and my great-uncle was very excited that I was getting my master's over there. He sent me some books from his collection that were his prize possessions. One of the books was signed by his friend, who was a Nobel laureate, and we were using that book as a textbook. And so to me, that was very special: I had a book that was autographed by the author, who was a Nobel laureate. And so, even though our university did not have any of this modern equipment, the department was actually very well recognized all over India.



In 1980, Jayashree received the first prize at the national speech competition organized to mark the birth centenary of a major Indian philosopher, Ramana Maharshi. *(Photo: Dr. Jayashree Shivamoggi)*

I got an idea of that when I came here. Because—if you remember how, when we came, we had to get this World Evaluation Service done, right? We had to send our transcripts to New York, and then they translated it back to American transcripts and sent it. When I sent that, my friends here had warned me that WES gives a lot of trouble, because they don't know all these universities. They have all these questions, and so you have to give them all the details. So I was dreading it when I sent my transcript. I was waiting to see what kind of questions they'll ask me. But they never asked me anything, and they just sent me the transcript back. And I said, "Well, this is interesting."

At that time, we had another visiting professor in UCF from India, and when he heard where I was from—I told him I was from this little town in the south; I come from a little university—he said, "There's nothing little about the university. It has one of the greatest physics departments in the country." So I was very happy that I got to experience that.

WZ: Well, that's really incredible. Thank you so much, Jay.

So, I guess you graduate from your university with a master's degree in physics. And then you get to know your future husband; you get married. And then you start your immigration path to the United States, right?

JS: Yes.

WZ: You knew each other before you came to the United States, correct?

JS: Yeah. This is a story I have told in Bob [Robert] Moore's [former Professor] class so many times. I mean, ours was an arranged marriage, right? I married my husband six weeks after I first saw him. I met him once, in the presence of fifteen other people. The week after, we got engaged. At the engagement ceremony, we both, I think, went out for a walk for about an hour. And then four weeks later, we were married. That was the extent of how much I knew him. Considering our marriage has lasted for forty years, I think something worked all right.

But the thing is, it's a big network in India, right? I mean, the whole network goes into—when I saw the movie *Mulan*, I realized it was not just very special in India; different countries have their own different styles and ways of doing matchmaking.



Picture of Jayashree Shivamoggi's wedding in 1982. Her parents are to her left, and her husband is flanked by his parents to the right. (Photo: Dr. Jayashree Shivamoggi)

My husband's family was looking for a girl who was interested in studying something in science, preferably math or physics. And I had made it very clear to my parents that I will only marry

someone who will encourage me to get my Ph.D. in physics. So it was just like they say: matches are made in heaven. That's what ended up happening. They eventually ended up connecting my parents, and his parents ended up connecting. I didn't have any other considerations at the time; I wanted a Ph.D. in physics. So that's how it happened.

We got married, and after we got married—he was still a faculty in India at the time, and I was going to start my Ph.D. in India. But then he could not get tenure anywhere in India, because he was not part of the system; he had gotten his Ph.D. in the U.S. It was becoming very hard for him to get a tenured position in India. And so then when he got this position in UCF, he left in '84. It took me four years to come here.

WZ: Wow, that's a quite a journey. So you came to Orlando in 1988. When do you start your Ph.D.? Looks like you received your degree in 1996.

JS: Oh, right away; I started my Ph.D. right away. My daughter was born in 1991, so I had a kid in the middle of my program, and that's how it took me long to finish my Ph.D. It took me eight years.

By then, I knew that I was not going to pursue a faculty position, because my husband was already working eighty-hour weeks. And for me to get a tenure in physics would mean eighty-hour weeks, at least for the first ten years after my Ph.D. I had little kids; I had a five-year-old and a thirteen-year-old, and I felt they needed one parent who was not doing the sixty-hour or eighty-hour week. I wanted more of an eight-to-five job, and so I had decided that I was not going to pursue a tenure-track position.

And so I was working as an adjunct, and that got old real fast. I mean, when you're working as an adjunct, you're still working very hard, and you're not getting paid enough at all. Then I said, "Well, if it means I have to leave physics, I have to leave physics." I wanted a job that would be satisfying, but also let me stay in academia.

WZ: So that's where you began to do the external scholarship work at UCF?

JS: Yes. It literally fell into my mailbox one day. I was doing the income tax returns, and then I see that my husband is making fifteen-twenty times more than I am. And that I'm also teaching three classes, whereas he's teaching two classes. I was very grumpy about that. And my older daughter was just getting into high school, and I was beginning to worry about her college education; how we're going to fund it. So I was ready to take any job that paid \$30,000 or more, because that's how much MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] cost, and her dream school was MIT. I said, "Well, anybody who will give me \$30,000, I'll take that job."

And this flyer for external scholarships director showed up in my mailbox. The only thing I knew about external scholarships at that time was that Bill Clinton was a Rhodes Scholar. So I said, "Well, let me see what it's about," and I applied, having no knowledge of the field. I don't know why they thought it was that I was a good match, but whatever it is, they hired me.

And then what I needed, I learned on the job. I went to a conference three weeks after I started. It was a very helpful conference. That's where I learned what I needed to know.

WZ: Okay, that's great. Now, we finally reach the point that you come to Rollins. So that's 2003. Tell me about your Rollins experiences. When did you decide to come to Rollins? What made you want to come to Rollins, and what was your initial impression of the college at the time?

JS: Again, I'm going to digress just a little bit before I get to that question, because it's a statement, Wenxian, of how Asians are treated in this country. You can say *Asians*, you can say *people of color*, whatever, right?

You know I get very excited when a challenge is presented to me. People hand me a challenge, and I'm always—I throw myself into it and say, “Okay, you challenge me, I'm going to do the best I can, and I'm going to show you what kind of work I can do.” They hired me in UCF in '99, and then by 2002, Fall, already my office was very successful. And again, I had a boss—I guess I made it look too easy. She felt that it was becoming very high-profile, and she thought anybody could do it. And there were ethical concerns, and I didn't want to continue any more.

In the middle of all that, one of my students got a Rhodes Scholarship in Fall 2002. It was unheard of in our fellowship circle that somebody starts an office and in two years, their office actually gets a Rhodes Scholarship. So I was confident of what I can do, and I was also not happy at UCF.

And so I emailed Stetson [University], and I emailed Rollins. I said, “Look, you don't have a centralized fellowships office. And I know how to get it done. So if you hire me, I will come and start the fellowships office. And I'll make it really worth your while.” So, in a sense, I invited myself over.

I don't know if you knew Sylvia Whitman [former Writing Center Coordinator], who used to run the Writing Center. Sylvia used to do some of the scholarships, and she and I had attended a conference together. So I emailed Sylvia, which she forwarded to Hoyt [Edge, former Associate Dean of the Faculty] and Roger [Casey, former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost], and they wanted to meet with me.

When I met with Roger and Hoyt, they liked what they heard, and they hired me. And that's how the External and Competitive Scholarships Office at Rollins was born.



Jayashree Shivamoggi in the early 2000s (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

WZ: Okay. I know what is involved for your line of work, but for our audience, maybe you can share a little bit more information, the nature of the work. Because you are not only a teacher/professor, but also a counselor and a writing consultant—had to be such a detail-oriented—and work under the pressure, work under the deadlines. I really don't know how you can produce miracles every year, year after year. So tell a little bit more—the detail of your work.

JS: Thank you for your very kind question. I loved my job because of that, because every day was different. And I was learning as much as I was advising or counseling the student, because the most important thing that you have to do as a fellowships advisor is gain trust of the students who are applying. Every year about 150 students passed through my office, and we'd get about seventy-five or eighty applications completed, right? So not everybody who comes to the office even ends up completing an application. But they need to feel comfortable to come in.

And so the first task of a fellowship advisor is to put the student at ease, which, I think, as students have told me a number of times, I'm good at. I'm good listener. I listen to them, I put them at ease, and that helps me. And then I ask a lot of questions, right? That helps me understand their passion and their talent. I pull out the all the different opportunities that I am working with and then find a match for their interest and for their passion, keeping an eye on what their future plans are. So it's a combination, right? I mean, it's a little bit of counseling, it's a little bit of advising, it's a little bit of data.

So being the fellowships advisor—I was very lucky that I fell into a profession that, if I were not doing physics, something I was equally passionate about.

At the end of the day, I think it's empathy that makes me a very successful fellowships advisor—and long-term relationships with the students. You need to build a relationship. Start as early as you possibly can, preferably in their first year. Because you help them apply to different opportunities the first year; the second year. And that helps in them getting ready for the big scholarships in their senior year and afterward.

WZ: That's great. (both speak at once)

JS: Go ahead.

WZ: Oh no, you go ahead; I just want you to finish your train of thought.

JS: I just wanted to say, when I made a career change to be a fellowships advisor, it was primarily because I wanted an eight-to-five, forty-hour work week. I had no idea that it would get so interesting, and it could get so—it would consume me so much, I was spending sixty to seventy hours a week anyway. But then I was loving it.

WZ: So since 2003, for the last eighteen years—so you must be working with countless students through this office. So any of those students make an impression upon you that you would like to mention?

JS: Actually, as I was getting ready for this, I was thinking about that, right? I mean, over eighteen years, so many different students I have worked with. So I was thinking, where do I even begin? I had so many amazing students walk through my office.

One name that stands out is Fay Pappas ['09]. She's currently a lawyer in Winter Park and doing incredible things for the community. She just received an award at the state level, because she organized the COVID relief vans for emergency doctors. All these emergency doctors could not go home after they treated patients in the hospital, because they were concerned, they will take it home to loved ones. So she worked with RV companies and then she organized—that's only one small facet of what she has done for community. She works very hard, and I worked with her from her first year.



Fay Pappas '09 (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

And then there's Princess Dickens ['14], who just received a job as a computational linguist with a cybersecurity company in Dallas. Princess was a Spanish and German double major in Rollins. She came to my office in her sophomore year, and she told me she wants to study linguistics. I connected her with the faculty in the German department, and then she received a Fulbright [Scholarship].

And we found out that she was juggling with terrible poverty at home and didn't want to talk about it. So then, enter Fay Pappas. Fay Pappas helped me organize a Go Fund Me account for Princess, and we raised the money Princess needed. Because she was working two jobs and she was supporting her mother and her brother, and so she was concerned: when she leaves, what is going to happen to the house, what is going to happen to her mother? We raised enough money so that she could comfortably support her family and go, having a worry-free year.

I wanted to do it for Princess, because she was incredibly talented. She did her Fulbright, and then she spent two years in Spain, teaching. Then she got a degree in computational linguistics from a top school in the U.S. when she came back. And so Princess has done very well.



Princess Dickens '14 (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

The list goes on. There's Scott Novak ['16]. There's Mitch Verboncoeur ['14], who should have been a Rhodes Scholar, but didn't. And he consoled me; he said, "No, I took the same application and turned it around, and they used it for my Yale Law School application." Mitch Verboncoeur was very special, in the sense he got his law degree admission to Yale in the second week of December, which is very, very rare; they don't do early admissions. The admissions usually happen in March, but he found out in December that he got into Yale, and so it was pretty special. He called me, and he said, "Well, I got into Yale," and two hours later, Harvard [University] sent him acceptance also. So he says, "Dr. Jay, do you think I should then just pull out from all the other law school applications?" I said, "Well, I don't think they're necessary anymore." And so he went to Yale; he got his law degree there. He's now in Austin, working as a lawyer.

I'm in touch with all these students still. It's a relationship, I think, that you develop, and it stays with you for life. For example, the two students that I worked with when I was in UCF in 1999—I'm still in touch with them, right? One of them became a Rhodes Scholar. He's now a faculty at UCF. And the other one got no scholarships, went to *New York Times*, and he won a Pulitzer Prize, I believe last year, probably around (inaudible) for the work he did on Rikers Island. I'm still in touch with him; Michael Schwartz came to Rollins' campus. He talked to our students; he worked with our students. And I think that's the best part of my job: these students become your friends for life.

WZ: Yeah, I agree with that. I know Fay, I know Princess; both of them well. Yeah, that's amazing.

So, you also have the opportunity to work with a lot of faculty, a lot of staff members at Rollins. You want to reflect?

JS: Let me start by naming my very dear friend, Wenxian. It was always such a pleasure to work with you. Because, as you know, at the beginning of the year, I always sent out an email requesting participation in campus committee activities. And there were a band of my friends that I knew that I could always count on. I mean, I was always casting a net to get new people to come in, but there were some people that I knew, that I didn't wait to hear from them, because I knew they were always there. I just had to tell them, "Okay, this is your committee; this is what you're going to do," right? I mean, you were top on that list. I always counted on you to come through and help me any time I needed help.

The other person like that is Nancy Decker [Professor]. I always joked to Nancy—when she responded to that email, I said, "Who asked you? I was not asking you, you're already on the committee, and you are my go-to person for the German Committee, like Wenxian is to my East Asia Committee."

Another thing in Rollins that was home to me, that got me a lot of comfort—again, you know this quite well with me—is the Common Vision group we used to have, back in the day. Donna Lee [former Dean of Student Affairs; returning to Rollins as Vice President for Student Affairs] was a very important person in my life in Rollins. From her, I learned humility; from her, I learned reflection.

Because until then—again, like I was telling you earlier in this meeting, I was my father's princess, right? And my father was the top guy in the village settlement wherever we went. So in that feudal arrangement, I grew up being at the top of the food chain. And growing up in India, I was not exposed to any of the racist ideas or the influences of racism. I grew up with privilege. And then you come here, and you are a person of color. I had no idea what that even meant. Donna opened my eyes to a lot of those things.

The friends I made in Common Vision are people that I always turned to for help, and they never turned me down. And same thing: if Rosana [Díaz-Zambrana, Professor] needed something, I would be there for her; whether it is Rosana, whether it's Patricia Tomé [Professor], Wenxian, Gabriel [Barreneche, Associate Dean of Advising]—I mean, these are some of the people with whom I have this special connection. I feel that faculty of color are missing out right now, because that group is not in existence anymore. I hope Donna brings it back.

WZ: Yeah, yeah, thank you so much, Jay, for your nice words. I always enjoy working with you and talking with those students. I'm just so happy that Donna is going to be coming back. I do miss the Common Vision initiative that we have years back.

So my next question is: besides your external scholarship work, you also teach as an adjunct at Rollins. One course that caught my interest: Nuclear Power, Arms, and War. Tell me about that.

JS: I had a lot of fun developing that class. Because what happened—again, one person I didn't mention here, and I should have, is Lewis Duncan [former President]. I came to Rollins in 2003; when I came, it was the last semester for Rita Bornstein [President Emerita]. I came in as Rita was leaving, and I was brand new when Lewis came to campus as a candidate. He spoke about

the Rhodes and the Marshall scholarships, and I was very excited. I said, “Well, this is the new coming president, who knows what my office does.”

And throughout his time, Lewis was a pillar of support for me. It is really sad the way he ended up leaving campus, but I have a lot of respect and regard for what Lewis did to me and my profession. In a certain sense, Lewis was very influential in me developing that course. Because, as you know, Lewis worked in Los Alamos, and so he knew the ins and outs of nuclear weapons, nuclear war.

I came to Rollins in 2003; I taught as an adjunct for a couple of years. And then fellowships office took over my life. And so I had no time anymore, but I was missing the classroom. So in 2014, when the whole rFLA [Rollins Foundations in the Liberal Arts Program] thing started; they needed someone to teach a physics class. They were short, so they asked me if I could teach this class. And I always wanted to teach a class on the Manhattan Project. I was talking to Lewis, and I said, “You know, I want to develop a class on nuclear projects.” And so he brought me a book from his bookshelf. He said, “Jay, before you design that class, I want you to read this book.” The book was called *Command and Control* by Eric Schlosser.

Eric Schlosser came to campus as a Winter Park Institute guest. I was very, very impressed by that book, because that book talked more about the history of nuclear arms and weapons in the United States. It started with the Manhattan Project, but then it went into the history of nuclear policy in the United States. And then I felt—it made a lot of sense to me to teach this class more as a nontechnical class, because I was teaching it for rFLA in a liberal arts college. It was a nuclear physics class, but I also focused very heavily on the policy and on the history.

I was finishing up the syllabus, and then I get this guest list from Winter Park Institute, and Eric Schlosser was coming in September. So then I had to completely reorganize my syllabus, and then teach the nuclear history and policy part the first month. I had the class read the book, and then we met with Eric Schlosser as a group, so he got to meet the class.

There is no other nontechnical class like that in the country. So I had a hard time finding a textbook, which meant I had to design the materials entirely on my own. And it was a lot of fun doing that. I mean, even though it happened in the fall, when I was super busy with Fulbright, it was a joy. I ended up having guest lecturers come in. Lewis Duncan was one of those, and then Eric Schlosser; the students met Eric Schlosser. So then I taught that class three, probably four times.

WZ: That's great. So, besides your scholarship work and your teaching, you are also actively involved in the Center for India and South Asia. And also, you're a faculty advisor to DESI. So tell us a little bit more about that.

JS: One thing that really impressed me when I came to Rollins College for the first time—UCF, as you know, is a very big school, right? And so, you can be in your corner and not meet too many other people and still be doing your job. But I came to Rollins, and very quickly I met people like Margaret McLaren [Professor], and then Yudit [Greenberg, Professor]. I joked to

Yudit that every time I met her, she taught me more about India than what I knew about India. I was very impressed by the faculty, and by how much genuine interest and curiosity they had.

And then in the middle of all that, we found out that elections happened in India, and Rahul Gandhi ['94] was probably going to be the prime minister; Rahul Gandhi, who is an alum of Rollins College. And so that's how Roger Casey felt that it was important that we have some kind of representation for India on our campus. He invited Yudit and me and some other people, and he charged us with doing the Center for India. To be more inclusive, it ended up becoming the Center for India and South Asia. From the beginning, I was a part of—Ilan Alon [former Professor] used to joke that I'm the only heritage Indian person on campus, and so a very valuable member of the committee. I've been involved with CISA since its inception.

DESI, which is the Indian student association, is a fledgling group. We don't have too many students from India, so that's why we made it DESI, which means it includes all of south Asia: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh. And then we made sure that anybody who is interested in those countries, not just from those countries, also become members. It was a very dear part of my Rollins life.

WZ: So you also led a student field study trip to Nepal in 2010. Is that with Pedro Bernal [Professor]?

JS: No. I went with Larry Eng-Wilmot [former Professor]; E.W. One of the Cornell Scholars was from Nepal, and so he was telling me about his experiences with his father in his gap year, when his father took him to his village and showed him the poverty and the lack of medical facilities in the villages. And so I challenged him. I said, “Why don't you take your friends there and show them what things are like? People in Rollins need to know how difficult and challenging things are in Nepal.” He turned around and challenged me, and said, “I'll do the trip, but you need to be the faculty advisor for our group.” And so then I became the faculty advisor.

The following year, we got another Nepalese student who is now faculty at Rollins, KC Raghavendra [Raghavendra KC]. KC and Aditya Mahara ['12] worked very hard to recruit students, to train the students, to teach the students. And they raised money. We raised \$55,000, so we could organize a health camp over there. I was nervous to do it by myself, because I had never led a group before. So we recruited E.W, who had done a bunch of Rollins Relief trips to New Orleans after Katrina. E.W. and I jointly led the group to Nepal.

I didn't go on the second and the third trip, but Making Lives Better—the Rollins team—went to Nepal three times, and we kind of completed the work we wanted to do in that school. We provided water purification centers; we built a theater. And then we painted the school, we refurbished the school, we equipped the library. Most important, I think, is we empowered the people. They got the idea of what can be done, and they started taking care of the school themselves. And so we felt our work there was done.



From left to right: Aditya Mahara '12, Gabe Anderson (Assistant Director of Explorations), and Raghavendra KC '13, representing Rollins at the Clinton Global Initiative Conference, 2011
(Photo: Rollins College Archives)

WZ: That's really amazing work. Thank you.

So, I want to ask a different question. You talked about your experience working at UCF. You also have extensive years at Rollins. Maybe compare those two different institutions; share your thoughts. Different cultures, different experiences: I just want to get your take on those two schools: student population, cultures.

JS: (Pauses) They're so different, and yet they're so similar, right? I mean, when I left UCF, the number of students was forty-two thousand. And I thought it was too big for my style, right? Because I like one-on-one; I like making friendships; I like building stories. So that's why I wanted small, and I came to Rollins.

And the biggest difference—I'll first talk about the students, okay? I mean, the biggest difference is the UCF students. It's a commuter school. So majority of the students commuted; they didn't stay on campus. A majority of them had part-time jobs. They used to work, and they used to come to school, and they used to drive to school. So their time for extracurricular activity, meaningful extracurricular activity, was very limited. Whereas in Rollins, they lived on campus, and they had all the time.

There used to be an English faculty, her name was Kathleen Bell, I don't exactly remember, and she used to work as an adjunct at UCF, and I think she was a faculty in Rollins or (inaudible) something like that. I knew her from my UCF days, and then I ran into her again here. She told me, "You know, the Rollins students are nice. What else can I say?" And I think she was right: the Rollins students are nice. They have a heart, and they want to work.

Now, one thing common among any of these student groups is apathy. I think if you look at the students as a whole, the students just don't care, right? They want their party; they want their lives; they want their friends; they want their social circle. And they want a decent enough grade, and they want out. I mean, it was true in UCF, and it was also true in Rollins. But then, you don't look at the general population. I had the luxury of working with the *crème de la crème*, right? And those students, no matter where—in UCF and in Rollins—they were driven, and they had a heart of gold.

WZ: Yeah, I definitely agree with you on that.

We have faculty files in the College Archives, mostly just news clippings, about your work at Rollins: being named a top producer of Fulbrights, year after year. And you win the Women's Achievement Award [the Woman of Achievement Award from the Women's Executive Council of Orlando]; you're named among the most inspiring women at Rollins. Those are really incredible, amazing accomplishments. So how do you view your Rollins career years?



Inspiring women at Rollins, pictured on campus in 2014. *Back row, left to right:* Jayashree Shivamoggi, Jill Pigmon P'15, Oriana Jimenez '07MHR '10MBA, and Pennie Parker. *Front row, left to right:* Sharon Williams, Connie Holt '88 '00MA, Rita Bornstein '04H, and Millie Erichsen '07MBA (Photo: Rollins College Archives)

JS: I grew a lot in Rollins College. When I came to Rollins College—you have to recognize, I had come from India in 1988. I came to Rollins in 2003, fifteen years later. For fifteen years, I lived in a bubble of physics and mathematics, right? I mean, when you're a graduate student, as you know, your world is very limited. It revolves around your discipline, and it revolves around graduate students who think like you. And then, even after I graduated—I got a job, I was living with a physics professor. And so I had an immigrant world view; I had a scientist's world view.

Rollins really made me an American. I had become an American citizen in '95, but I think I truly became an American at Rollins College. Donna played a big part in that, and all my friends at Rollins played a big part in that. Yes, I feel that as a woman of color, I was invisible on campus. But then I had an incredible network, right? And the people who were part of my network made Rollins a very special place. I learned a lot, and I grew a lot.

And students. Oh, my God. What can I say about the students? When my younger daughter went to college in 2009, my Asian friends warned me about the empty nest syndrome. They said, Your younger child leaves home; it leaves such a big hole in your life. You better get ready for it, otherwise you will fall into depression. And I half jokingly, more truthfully, told them, "I'll spend all my time with my other babies at work." And that's what I ended up doing.



Dr. Shivamoggi (center) at the Lucy Cross Center for Women and Their Allies, 2012 (*Photo: Rollins College Archives*)

Rollins College made me an American; it made me aware of all the different challenges and problems that exist. Because community engagement is such a big part of who we are at Rollins, and we take pride in that. I learned, I think, from the community; I learned to engage. Who I am today, I think, is largely because of the eighteen years that I spent at Rollins.

WZ: Well, thanks a lot for your candid reflections. So my final question is, as a first-generation Asian American to the United States, how do you view your life journey so far?

JS: Wenxian, this is something I'm sure you have thought about a lot. I mean, it's complicated. Atlanta just happened, right?

The model minority myth is very true. It was true for my daughter, and I'm sure your children experienced it at school. People look at you and immediately think, Oh, you're Indian, so you must be very smart. Or, You're Indian, your parents care only about grades; you're going to be a lawyer, or you're going to be a doctor, or you're going to be a software engineer. I think there's a lot of misconceptions and, uh, I think I had to fight a lot of that.

On campus, it was very routine for people to call me Mamta [Accapadi, former Vice President for Student Affairs], because Mamta and I were the only two Indian women. So, you know, I mean, you're not all the same, right? Mamta is so different from who I am. I mean, people don't bother to get to know you. They have an image of this Indian woman, and they think I fit all that image. It happened to Vidhu [Aggarwal, Professor]. It didn't matter what her discipline was; she came from India, so she was expected to teach colonial literature. I come from India, so people think I'm an expert in Indian cooking. The truth be told, I didn't know the first thing about cooking, because my father thought it was better for me to be a scientist.

I think it's still not easy. I know it is going to be recorded; I don't know how much of it you want to use, but I am willing to say here that, to a certain extent, it hurt me at Rollins, with my boss. I don't think my boss had any awareness of how prejudices work; how impressions work. I mean, because I'm an Indian doesn't mean I'm going to be weak and subservient, and I think that's what was expected of me. And then I didn't toe the line. I think it came as a surprise to her.

I think that those problems still exist for Asians. You're expected to be quiet; you're expected to be in your corner; you're expected to toe the line. I don't think those things will change, even for our children. I think being a person of color is problematic, no matter where you are. I had that experience at UCF, I had that experience at Rollins.

In general, talking about my professional experience, whether it was at UCF or at Rollins, I think it is always tainted with the fact that I'm a woman of color. Only I didn't realize that until very, very late in my professional career. I started realizing that only last summer, when the Black Lives Matter movement picked up, and I became part of a race and gender reading group organized by Fulbright. And as I started reading, I began to realize that my profession was always marked by the fact that I was a woman of color, and I never really got the support or the recognition that I needed and I deserved.

I don't know if you have read the book, *Wenxian*—there's a book called *Yellow*, by Wu. We read that as part of the reading club. It talks about race beyond black and white. It broke my heart to read that book. I was taking notes as I was reading. At every chapter—I was relating it back to my own professional career and my own life. I could not believe how ignorant I was, coming to this country as an older Asian American. I didn't know the prejudices that existed. Had I known, I would have worked to—I don't know, I guess I would have tried, but I don't know if I would have been successful.

WZ: Thank you so much, Jay. I really enjoy talking with you and benefited from your professional guidance, your support over the years. I just want to thank you for all your contributions to Rollins College, for those amazing accomplishments over the last eighteen years, and also wish you the best for the next chapter of your career.

JS: Rollins is a very special place. Rollins is home; Rollins will forever be home. My most cherished memories are at Rollins. My most dear friends are at Rollins. So I will always carry Rollins in my heart.

I truly appreciate this opportunity to have this chat with you. I'm so excited that my journey is going to be a part of the Rollins oral history program.

WZ: Great. Thank you so much. I'll stop recording now.