



Satish Sharma

India Restaurant

Mulberry Arkansas

Location: Mulberry, Arkansas

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Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson

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Project: South Asian Arkansas

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Today is April 11th, 2019. It's a Thursday. I am in Mulberry, Arkansas, and I am here with Mr. Satish Sharma.

Mr. Sharma, would you go ahead and introduce yourself for us? Tell us your full name and tell us what you do.

[0:00:16.0]

Satish Sharma: My name is Satish Sharma. I run a couple gas station plus restaurant here in Mulberry.

[0:00:28.8]

Annemarie Anderson: And so you have this place in Mulberry. Do you have some—in Fayetteville, right?

[0:00:35.2]

Satish Sharma: Farmington. Farmington, just right by Fayetteville.

[0:00:35.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool! So tell me about first moving to Northwest Arkansas. Where'd you guys move from?

[0:00:47.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, we moved in Arkansas in 2007—that's like twelve years—from Chicago. So then I bought there a gas station in 2007 in Farmington, so this one, I bought

it in 2012, November. So then this is more on the interstate and we see a lot of drivers, you know, run from California to the East Coast, a lot of them, so then I started to, you know, thinking about, you know, open the restaurant, Indian restaurant. So then I did.

[0:01:35.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great! Well, tell me a little bit about starting India Restaurant here. What was the, I guess, reception at first?

[0:01:45.6]

Satish Sharma: Like I said, we see a lot of driver, you know, run from California to the East Coast and all this, so that's why, you know, made me think about opening India Restaurant here.

[0:02:00.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Tell me what you serve.

[0:02:04.7]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, we have American food, too, and we have a whole menu Indian restaurant, you know, mostly main items, you know, like all these, so big time, all the big menus, you know.

[0:02:20.8]

Annemarie Anderson: What are some of the specific dishes that you guys serve? Could you describe some of them for me?

[0:02:25.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, like we have all kind of food, you know, veggies, like mostly Indian name, you know, item, so then we got our chicken item, so then we have lamb and we've got goat, so, you know, then seafood too.

[0:02:47.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Where do you source your food from? Do you work with any local grocers in Northwest Arkansas?

[0:02:56.4]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, we have a lot of time, like I said, we moved from Chicago, we still go back and forth, you know, a few times, and some things we get from there. So I'll source, you know. Then the restaurant people, they keep some of the thing, then the local Bentonville Indian store, so we get it from all over.

[0:03:27.7]

Annemarie Anderson: So kind of going back to first moving here, why did you guys decide to move to Northwest Arkansas from Chicago?

[0:03:33.4]

Satish Sharma: I don't know. One of my friend, he move here before me, so we just came to visit, you know, and saw his gas station. We like it. So there are a couple thing, you know. One was Chicago weather, too, you know, it's very, very cold. Another reason, looking for a little business. So there are a couple of things there that, you know, so that makes us to move here.

[0:04:02.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. And before you—were you in this line of work before? Were you a business owner before or was this new for you?

[0:04:12.3]

Satish Sharma: Like here? No, I had a little experience, you know, not on the restaurant side. So then we start opening up restaurant, it's a lot of—it's not easy, you know. You got to have some kind of good recipes and all this. So then we started here, had a little trouble in the beginning, so then we have a contact in Chicago restaurant, so we have a little employee training there, follow their recipe, you know, so that's what—then things get better, you know, a little at a time.

[0:05:00.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, definitely. Tell me about hiring people to cook in your restaurant. How did you decide who to hire?

[0:05:07.7]

Satish Sharma: Well, yeah, that's the tough part, hard to find, you know, Indian cook, you know. So far, so good, you know. We got lucky, so we hire people and we train them. So it's working.

[0:05:24.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's good! Can you talk a little bit about some of your employees?

[0:05:27.8]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, like I said, we have employees, and they were not professional cook or anything, so we took them there in Chicago, have a training there, so follow their recipes. So then we [unclear] and my wife, she got involved a little bit, too, and she's a good cook, and that's our food. It's not something we never seen it or anything. But she's a good cook, but she got involved here more than even me, so she's the one went to Chicago, too, with them. Then she work in the VA Hospital, she come in the weekend here, you know, when she's off Saturday, Sunday, so help them and check out what they do. She's a big help.

[0:06:24.8]

Annemarie Anderson: What's your wife's name?

[0:06:25.2]

Satish Sharma: Sudesh Sharma.

[0:06:26.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's nice.

[0:06:28.9]

Satish Sharma: Yes, she's an RN in the VA Hospital, Fayetteville.

[0:06:31.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's nice! Yeah. So talk to me a little bit about what's your typical day trying to run the restaurant and your other businesses.

[0:06:41.8]

Satish Sharma: Well, this is my routine, I mean, for a few years, so many year. So I live in Fayetteville, too, so in the morning, I go there, Farmington, spend almost half of the day over there, then head over here more and spend half day here. So it's a little bit, you know, long driving too. So I live like 50 miles away, so usually I come every day here. So now it's like it's normal, you know, routine for me.

[0:07:21.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Well, tell me a little bit about—are there any dishes specifically that people request for you guys to make?

[0:07:35.2]

Satish Sharma: Yeah. Like I said, on the menu have more famous dishes, not everything, but more commonly you can get from any other Indian restaurant too. So that's our more important main item, you know.

[0:07:56.3]

Annemarie Anderson: How did people in Mulberry kind of react to there being a new Indian restaurant here?

[0:08:02.8]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, Mulberry's a little small town. It's not that many people here. So we depend more on the highway traffic than the local. Local is not much going on, you know, so.

[0:08:20.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Did you guys kind of like educate anybody about Indian food by being here or impact the local community in any way?

[0:08:29.3]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, some people, they come and ask and all this, you know. We give all the information, how much we have, you know.

[0:08:38.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great! And so tell me a little bit about—so I saw you sell some, like, Indian drinks and other stuff, but do you sell any dry goods or any, like, grocery items as well?

[0:08:54.2]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, we don't have groceries here, like I said. It's not much local, you know, so we don't. That's why we don't keep the grocery, but we keep little drink, you know, basic drink and all this.

[0:09:14.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. And tell me about some regulars that you might have that kind of stick out in your mind who come and eat here often.

[0:09:23.4]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, we have a lot of regular come on here, because we have good food, you know, good recipes, so people come here and come again and again, too, you know.

[0:09:38.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Are there any specific people who stick out in your mind that you could talk about?

[0:09:43.2]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, I mean, we receive a lot of people coming back, you know, so like I said, our food is good, that's why people will come back, right? Yes.

[0:09:58.6]

Annemarie Anderson: So what do you think that this restaurant provides for maybe not the community of Mulberry, but you guys are kind of interesting because you're right on I-40. What do you think it provides for like truckers or other people who are coming through?

[0:10:14.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, like I said, we have American food, too, so we get American local customer, too, you know, like cheeseburger, hamburgers, you know, and all this. Then plus we have Indian food too.

[0:10:30.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me a little bit about maybe the relationship you might have with other South Asian groceries. You talked a little bit about going to shop in Bentonville. Are there any grocery stores that you work with up there, any people?

[0:10:50.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, like I said, we have a couple of stores there in Bentonville, so when we buy, we buy in bulk. It's not like, you know—so a lot of time they want to come and deliver to my other store, so then I bring it here. [Laughter]

[0:11:05.0]

Annemarie Anderson: And who do you work with up there?

[0:11:07.2]

Satish Sharma: Like I said, two stores there. What's the name? One's named India Mart, and one other guy there. So that's where I get the stuff.

[0:11:19.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's good! Is it like Suvidha or World Food Mart?

[0:11:23.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, like I said, we get stuff from all over. Sometimes restaurant depot, we cannot get local anything, you know, like we buy the Indian cheese bulk, so we make a trip to Kansas City. There's nothing local here, restaurant people, so we do go Kansas City or somewhere else to get the stuff.

[0:11:49.9]

Annemarie Anderson: When you first moved to Northwest Arkansas, I mean, what was your kind of initial reaction? Did you miss Chicago any?

[0:11:56.4]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, in the beginning, you know, we had a little—my daughters was in high school, and they don't want to come here, you know, because their friend over there and all this. Yeah, looks a little bit different, you know, when you come from a bigger city to little bitty small town, you know. So then you get used to it after a while. Then my daughters, they like it, you know. They say, "Oh, we move here." So they went to high school here. I think they were junior and a senior, two year. So then my daughters went to UA, undergraduate, four year. So my older daughter, she did pharmacy in Searcy, so she's pharmacist.

[0:12:47.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. At Harding?

[0:12:48.9]

Satish Sharma: Harding, yeah, yeah. So then my little daughter, she did medical in Kansas City, so now she's doing her residency in Michigan, so she's going to be doctor like surgery. It's not like medical doctor. Surgery takes a little more, you know, right, a couple more years.

So then I have my oldest son, so he was done with high school when we move here, so then he was in the college there, university there, and so he did good, too, and he did Ph.D. in chemical engineering, so right now he's working in the Pfizer Company.

[0:13:36.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Wow.

[0:13:37.5]

Satish Sharma: Right. So we did good. My kids did good, so I'm so proud of my kids.

[0:13:43.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, that's great. You did well by them.

[0:13:46.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, yeah.

[0:13:47.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, tell me a little bit about how the community has changed, I guess, the South Asian or Indian community in Northwest Arkansas, how it's changed since you guys moved here in 2007.

[0:14:00.3]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, there are not that many people, you know, like I said, South Asian or something. Now there are a little bit more than twelve years ago, so more are there in Rogers and Bentonville and Fayetteville. We're growing up a little bit. [Laughter]

[0:14:26.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

[0:14:27.1]

Satish Sharma: In numbers, right?

[0:14:29.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. Are you connected to the community in any way?

[0:14:33.0]

Satish Sharma: Yeah. Like, I work seven days a week and I know some families.

Sometime we go there, you know, like Indian temple or something, but not much. Like I said, I work seven days, plus I go drive long distance, so then I don't have much time to socialize with other people.

[0:14:58.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense.

[0:14:59.0]

Satish Sharma: Right.

[0:15:00.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, busy all the time.

[0:15:02.6]

Satish Sharma: Yeah.

[0:15:03.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, could you talk a little bit maybe about—let's see. So could you describe some of the dishes that you guys have, and if you want to use the Indian names for the vegetables, that's fine. Tell us what you guys have, because you have a buffet out there, right?

[0:15:26.3]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, we have buffets, too, mostly lunchtime. Yeah, like all the veggies, like so many veggie dishes, like Paneer Makhani and Paneer Korma, then a kind of eggplant called Baingan Bartha and Dal and mix veggies. There's Palak Paneer, is like a spinach and paneer. Then Aloo Gobi is like potato and cauliflower. So then Malai Kofta. So these are all the veggies dishes.

Then we have all the chicken, like Chicken Tikka Masala, Chicken Curry, Chicken Kadahi, then Chicken Korma, Chicken Vindaloo. Vindaloo mean potato. It's mixed with a little chicken and potato. Chicken Saag is like chicken and spinach. Chili Chicken, that's very famous dish. Then Butter Chicken.

Then we have lamb or goat, Lamb Vindaloo, Lamb Korma, Goat Curry, Lamb Saag. So then we have all this fish and shrimp item, like a Fish Curry and Shrimp Curry or Shrimp Masala or something. Then we have beef items, too, you know, Beef Masala, Beef Curry, Beef Saag or Beef Korma and Beef Vindaloo.

So then we have all kind of bread. That's what we cook in the clay oven. So it's like called Naan, so Garlic Naan, Onion Naan, Keema Naan, Aloo Naan, Chicken Naan, Paneer Naan, plain naan. So all kind of naan we cook in the clay oven.

[0:17:30.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great! And how did you guys go about deciding what to put on your menu?

[0:17:37.4]

Satish Sharma: Well, then I check on a couple other restaurants, too, and we go sometime, you know, and eat out there in Indian restaurant, so we check their menu, compare and check on the prices. So we stay to keep the competitive prices, you know. So these prices, we keep good price here. It's not like city prices, you know. So city price a lot more higher than our prices, because we depend more on the drivers, so we keep very competitive prices, not too high or anything.

[0:18:17.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. And tell me a little bit about what it's like to try to manage a restaurant. How is that different than managing another business?

[0:18:26.9]

Satish Sharma: Yes, restaurant business is a lot of work, more work, you know, than any other business like gas station or something. A gas station, we get order once a week,

you know, and everything is there. A restaurant, we are always out of something, so then I go and get it or something like that, you know. Got to have the stuff, right, to make it. So then I have two or three producers, store, people, some of them I call them and they bring in my store in Farmington. Farmington is kind of like more close to the city. Mulberry is, you know, more country and hard to get stuff like this, yeah.

[0:19:12.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. What are the biggest challenges of running a restaurant?

[0:19:16.5]

Satish Sharma: I don't know. Like I said, a restaurant is more—it's a tough business, too, plus more risky, too, than any other business. Usually a restaurant come and goes quickly and all this, like they don't make it. So here we are in the gas station. A couple year in the beginning, I had problem, too, you know. I had spent too much money on the advertisement, billboards, and all this, and the radio. So then restaurant like especially here, like I'm sitting here out of town, you know, on the highway, so it takes time to build the business. Then if your food is good, there's more people know word of mouth, you know, tell other people. These days, you know, everybody has a phone and not like over time, you know. So it takes time. For especially the restaurant business.

[0:20:26.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. What's been the greatest rewards of this?

[0:20:31.9]

Satish Sharma: I don't know the reward or anything. At least help survive, you know. In the business you always find ways to look for how you can make a little more money to survive. So that help out, you know. So now I'm doing it from—it's been more than six years, so now I'm doing okay, you know. More people know my name and more people can tell other people. Start getting a lot of new driver, new customer. So it's working out, you know.

[0:21:12.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, definitely. And, well, what do you see for the future of India Restaurant?

[0:21:20.7]

Satish Sharma: I don't know. I mean, I can't say much in the future, you know. Like I said, we try to do better every day. It's not like you have to plan for it, you know, always find ways, always, you know, all we can do better and all this. So we try always. I don't know what's going to happen in the future.

[0:21:53.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. Well, let's see. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or anything we haven't talked about?

[0:22:04.3]

Satish Sharma: No, like I said, I told my whole story. [Laughter] From Chicago, went here, and like I said, in the beginning it was kind of a little, you know, like I said, moved from bigger city, you know, everything, to a little small town, so then I had problems with my kids too. They don't want to move, hard to convince them. And finally they agree. Now they have a good education, good all this. They appreciate, too, you know. Otherwise, they may be lost somewhere, too, you know what I mean, in bigger city with millions kids and all this, you know, and million problems, too, right? So we did okay.

[0:22:53.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. And for the record, because I forgot to ask you, could you tell me your birth date?

[0:22:59.1]

Satish Sharma: Yeah, I'm sixty-one year old.

[0:23:03.2]

Annemarie Anderson: What day and year were you born?

[0:23:04.4]

Satish Sharma: I was born in 1957.

[0:23:09.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Great! Thanks.

[0:23:11.6]

Satish Sharma: Sixty-one year, I'll be sixty-two soon.

[0:23:15.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, happy almost birthday.

[0:23:14.8]

Satish Sharma: Thank you. [Laughter]

[0:23:16.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, thanks for talking to me.

[0:23:17.9]

Satish Sharma: You're welcome.

[0:23:18.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Appreciate it.

[End of interview]