

Madhur Anand & Ali Kazimi: In Conversation

(transcribed from original audio recording on June 12, 2020)

Ali Kazimi: I'm Ali Kazimi, I'm a filmmaker, I teach film at York University. I'm in Toronto. Sort of semi locked in my house, as we all are, while everything starts to slowly reopen.

Madhur Anand: And I am Madhur Anand. I am a writer and a professor of ecology and I'm in Guelph, also at my home, my home office. And I am also self-isolating here with my family.

Ali Kazimi: It's so wonderful to have this chat with you Madhur. I've read your poetry, I've been immersed in your memoir the last couple of weeks and it's been such a rich experience. You know, it's such a multilayered memoir but it's also a biography of your parents and you describe it as an experimental memoir, and we'll come to that because I'm really interested in the form of the book, as well as the content. As I was reading it, it took me through such familiar terrain, both in India and in Canada. And by terrain I mean both metaphorically and literally. It has an epic expansive scale yet it's very very intimate and for me it was a deeply personal interior experience reading it because it, as a good memoir does - it forces you to reflect upon your own life and the lives of those around you.

And I also found it to be a truly Canadian book, in a contemporary way, because it just melds diasporic lives with lives lived in Canada within this context on this landscape. And it really examines the challenges that the second wave of South Asian immigrants faced after '68, in the lives of your parents, and then the experiences of you and your siblings, the Canadian-born offsprings. So for me it, in doing all of this, asserts a claim of both longing and belonging at the same time and I found that so rich and moving.

So let me just start with having said all of that, let's start with the title of the book: *This Red Line Goes Straight to Your Heart* and the subtitle, *A Memoir in Halves*. The halves being your own memoir, which is titled in the contents as *The First Partition*. Your memoir is titled *The Second Partition*, and your parent's memoir is titled *The First Partition*. Your memoir, *The Second Partition*, runs along the X-axis, I couldn't help noticing that, and your parent's memoir runs along the Y-axis. This is where my own training in science comes really handy, noticing these little sneaky details that you've tucked into the book's design and the content. So how did you arrive at the structure and what was the intent of the structure for you?

Madhur Anand: That's such a beautiful introduction, thank you. First of all, I did not know that you were trained as a scientist, Ali.

Ali Kazimi: Well my first degree was in science. So yes, in fact from Delhi University where your father also studied science.

Madhur Anand: Wow, what field?

Ali Kazimi: I did a general degree in physics, chemistry and math.

Madhur Anand: Cool, this is perfect. That's so great. And you know I was also just thinking back to where we met, how we met - do you remember?

Ali Kazimi: I do remember.

Madhur Anand: It was at a physicist's house, a theoretical physicist's Christmas party.

Ali Kazimi: Exactly.

Madhur Anand: Lee Smolin. And he introduced us so I have to thank Lee Smolin somewhere in this interview for introducing us because well here we are now and it started with that. So all the more reason for scientists and artists to befriend one another because you just never know where the connections will be. Okay, I was going to just go on and say a lot about how I, you know, then started to watch your documentaries after that and I was - they really helped propel me in this project in a way because I don't know what you said to me at that party - it was a brief exchange - but you kind of just said something and it was very encouraging and related to your own work and related to maybe the work that had to be done still on this book because it hadn't been written at that time, I was only thinking about it. So I just wanted to thank you for that and somehow I hope that makes it into the transcript of this.

Alright, so the structure of the book, so you've correctly, you know, described the kind of global structure of it, which is these two sides. Why did I do that? It looks really simple, when I look at it now in retrospect the structure looks really simple to me. Almost very obvious and you have your Y-axis, you have your X-axis, and maybe I should explain to, we should explain to the readers of this or listeners to this that typically the Y is used to denote the vertical axis, which represents the dependent variable. So here, the dependent variable is my parents side and X represents the independent variable. I have to tell you I didn't think that through. In terms of how that came out, it's a really lovely coincidence, the choice to put the Y on my parents side and the X on my side was in fact the designer's choice. I don't think she has scientific training but I'm not sure. But it's interesting how that worked out.

When I started to conceive of writing this book it really was to get down my parents' stories and I originally intended it to be solely a biography of their lives. Of course, I always had the intent of using my view and my knowledge as a scientist and a poet to shape those stories but I didn't ever imagine that I would be writing in the first person for myself. But somewhere along the way of the project, my own stories started to creep in. And you know I'm not sure exactly when that happened but you know at some point I realized that when I was writing my parents' stories, initially I wrote them in the third person and as you do when you're telling about other people you write in the third person, it's sort of normal right? But there was a moment where I just

couldn't continue to write it that way and I switched, I switched to the first person, to talk about my parents' lives. And I got so entangled with it that I suppose at some point I tricked myself into thinking that I was them. And then at some point, I was me. I was also me. And so that leap to "I" on my side was very natural and then once I did that, I was comfortable writing the whole other section, a whole other book in fact, in my own voice. That's how that came about.

In terms of putting it together, I discussed it with my editor and you know because then I had a series of my parents' stories and a series of my stories we had talked about entangling them completely throughout but ultimately we decided on this structure. I thought it was important to somehow indicate for the reader the first and the second partitions, the two generations. There was a point actually when completing my parents' side of the stories we accelerated quite quickly to the present time and because I had to find a way to transition from one book to the other, from one side, to the other. I don't know how deliberate it was but I did take a trip with my father to Thunder Bay and to Geraldton, the summer before completing the book. And I had never been to Geraldton before. This is the small town where my father got his first job and was basically where my mother went right after emigrating from India. So that kind of brought the book to transition to my side.

Ali Kazimi: So let's just back up a little bit for our listeners. Your parents were born, both of them were born in what was known as west Punjab, which is now in the country of Pakistan, at the time was British India. In 1947, British India was partitioned into two separate countries - Pakistan to the West and India to the East. As a consequence of that partition, which was brought about incredibly hastily, and there was a complete catastrophe. There was a truly epic movement of peoples crossing both sides of the border. There were Muslims who found themselves in India wanting to go to what was then deemed the homeland for Muslims of India, that was Pakistan. And then Hindus and Sikhs from what was Pakistan moving towards India. And it resulted in this cross-movement of about 15 million people. There was a massive amount of killing involved in it. It's estimated from about anywhere 1.5-2 million people perished in this process and your parents were survivors of this forced migration and sought to resettle themselves in India, were educated there, and then got married and then emigrated to Canada in the late 60s - just when Canada was beginning to open and veer away from its virtually Whites Only immigration policy and your father landed in northern Ontario. That's the scope of the journey, of their journey.

It's fascinating for me to hear you talk about the process because clearly you trust your own intuition, as a scientist you trust having worked in science I know that I was always told to trust my intuition, in terms of where the solution lies to a problem that we are trying to solve. And clearly you've learned to trust your intuition and your own process as a poet, and it's wonderful to hear you talk about that the seemingly simple structure as you say, which in fact is very complex and wonderfully rich, came out of your process of trusting where it would lead and being open to that. Is that very similar to what you do in your own scientific practice, as well?

Madhur Anand: I do think there are similarities. These days as a scientist, I work very broadly. I'm a Global Change Ecologist but I have always been interested in and continue to work on complex systems, complex systems theory, applications to studying ecological systems. And so there are actually structures that I have held onto from when I was a graduate student to today that I come back to, that are as you say, incredibly rich and complex that one can really spend a lifetime studying them. Whether you're a scientist, or a poet, or a writer.

Some of these structures are things like Turbulent Flow - the movement of things from Laminar Flow to Turbulent Flow, there's a sudden transition there. And I've been interested in that since graduate school. And so that's the kind of structure that I've been studying and seeking throughout my career - both as a scientist and as a writer.

Another fascinating structure that I think still has yet to sort of realize all of the possible applications of it, is the concept of the Strange Attractor, which I may entitle one of my sections that, which is this complex outcome of chaos theory, where you think something is completely unpredictable - a certain type of dynamics looks completely unpredictable, completely disorderly, but in fact, once you sort of understand the basic model underlying mechanisms or model of it there is a structure there. It's a beautiful structure, I don't know if you've ever seen the Strange Attractor, it actually looks like a butterfly. Related to that are ideas of sensitive dependence on initial conditions means that you know two things that are very very close together initially, overtime can move quite far apart in this Strange Attractor. But then they can come very close together again. So that idea of whether it's people or places or ideas or even entire fields because I juxtaposed sometimes Science with a love story, they go together side by side. This is me exploring those things both as a scientist and as a writer. So I think that those processes are related. When I look at my body of work as just a scientist, first of all it's difficult for me to make those partitions. When I look at that, yeah of course as a scientist intuition plays a big role, creativity plays a big role, grabbing ideas from very different places plays a big role in my work. That's why I think I can work on topics as broad and as diverse as climate change, invasive species, human disease spread, pollution, maybe a couple of others. I think if you're able to sort of examine systems at a certain level or think of them, think of what are the universalities among these different topics, you can find similarities in them.

Ali Kazimi: What you've described in your own research practice is so much about lives lived right, they're seemingly chaotic but when you start examining them closely, patterns emerge, a clear structure begins to emerge, discrepancies, paradoxes, everything is laid out. Reading the book, I felt I had the privilege of being deep inside your mind and how it works. It was a very intimate experience of seeing the world through your eyes. Not just your own life and the lives of your parents, but literally how you see the world and the connections you make, which makes it so wonderful and magical at times are these surprising connections that come up, which as a reader, it helped me sharpen my understanding of what either you or your parents were experiencing but also, gave me clarity of broader ideas around ecology or scientific art or scientific history.

Coming back to the basics, science also begins with observation, it begins with acute observation of what one is beginning to examine. And you've done that as a poet, your poetry is so beautifully observed and exquisitely detailed in its observations. In the book itself, I found the very same applies - that you observe the lives of your parents, you observe your own life, and the lives of all these other people who have intersected with all your lives. The aunties, your sister's friend Marcie who went with your father to teach there, and the title of the book refers to a line that was given to a doctor there, when she started getting salmonella poisoning and had a line on him the doctor says, this line goes straight to your heart. But then you take that line, both the literal line and the metaphoric line, and you present it to us within the context of partition and now it suddenly broadens the scope of what we are experiencing with that sentence. I've tried to do this with my mother, to interview her about her life. It's a very difficult process, it's a very fraught process at times.

So talk to me about the process you've been through starting to interview your parents and what was that like?

Madhur Anand: So this is where I really do think my scientific training helped me.

Ali Kazimi: Interesting.

Madhur Anand: I can be a very very...at least have the pretense of taking a very objective lens on things, including my parents and family and friends. So that practice, I think, helped me at times, at least to get the thing going, to get the process going. I actually started to want to get their stories down before I even knew I was going to write about them so it was actually just a realization that I didn't know very much about them and if I didn't put it down I'm not sure that anybody else in my family would have done that, just recorded it. The oral history would've just disappeared in one generation. At one point I just felt I couldn't let that happen for my own self, like for my own self, whoever I am. But then at some point I realized I wanted to write about it and then I became more ambitious in interviewing them. As you can tell from reading the book it's not like a journalistic treatment, right? I mean there are elements of that. It's a literary work, right? It's a piece of art.

Ali Kazimi: Absolutely

Madhur Anand: You could probably speak to this even more but all to say really is that I wasn't looking for a single thing. I didn't even know what I was looking for. Certainly as a scientist, I know the importance of having lots of data, as much data as you possibly can gather. For me, everything they were offering to tell me, or I was sort of soliciting a little bit - I gathered it all. And I have hours and hours and hours of voice memos because I taped everything - everything because I didn't know what I would end up using.

My approach was that I had to interview them separately, my parents. You can see that that's how it sort of comes out in the book, as well.

Ali Kazimi: And I like that, I really appreciate that. So in the second half, or the first half - where you start the book, and it's open to the reader, in terms which half you choose to begin with. In your parents' biographies, we alternate between your father's story and your mother's story, and it's written in the first person. And that first person voice is really immersive, it sounds really authentic, it feels authentic, and wonderful.

Madhur Anand: Thank you. It was the only way for me to do it in the end. So anyway, for the process of going back to the question about how to do it, it was challenging and it was fraught and I'm sure the things that you experienced was trying to do it with your mother, I felt some, you know there were many moments where I knew that every time I would sit down with her, I'd have to set aside like three hours with just her and my husband would take my kids somewhere. My dad would go somewhere else. On occasion I actually went to my parents house, picked her up, drove her to a hotel and I stayed in a room with her for a weekend to do this.

Ali Kazimi: Wow.

Madhur Anand: Because I needed her, I needed that much access to her alone.

Ali Kazimi: Absolutely.

Madhur Anand: So I did that a few times and that was it, like 24/7. I had my voice memo on the whole time, even during dinner. I have my voice memo on the table, and we were just having dinner. Because you never know when something would come out. She's a fountain of stories, a fountain of stories! And also, because I ended up doing things in the first person, I had to also immerse myself in her voice. So even when she was saying things that wouldn't necessarily be things I used directly in the book, I still needed to hear how she spoke. So anyway, that's what I did. And what I wanted to say about the fraughtness of it and the difficulty of it is - it was difficult because I knew that for pretty much every discussion we had would end in her sobbing. Breaking down and sobbing for one reason or another. I can't tell you how many times I have on tape, "That's it I can't say anymore, that's it, please don't ask me anymore questions."

Ali Kazimi: I can feel that because there's a degree of cause and pain, particularly in her story that emerges and also what emerges in these two parallel accounts of your parents' lives, is how different their perceptions are of their lives - both together and apart. And particularly with your mother's story and your story, I found that as a man I was getting this privilege to be privy to lives of women who had lived through turbulent times and those are stories that are not often shared and nor are they often contrasted with the male experience. So in a way your father's story provides this sort of patriarchal framework within which we are often presented in the world and your story and your mother's story then offers us not just a different reality but makes us acutely aware of what is often left out and what is remained unspoken.

In your mom's voice, there is this pathos. It's really interesting, I'm not surprised to hear you say that your talks would often end with her sobbing. You encouraged her to push through the pain and clearly she loves you dearly and trusts you implicitly in your process. But was there a point that you thought "Okay, I don't want to do this, I don't want to push her into this anymore?" Or question yourself about that?

Madhur Anand: Well, you know, whenever she started sobbing we stopped, we stopped in that moment. I think that she herself has been telling me many of these stories in all my adult life, right? Many of them I already knew, I just was asking to be recounted because I was interested in gathering a few more details, right? So I would stop her, and you know again, I don't know if this is true or not but my feeling is that my training as a scientist helped sometimes. I could be completely wrong about this but you know even with my father, because it was also difficult to interview my father about things...but you know at times I felt like when things were getting really really emotional to the point where they would look like they were going to explode, I would sincerely ask for some detail that would take her mind in another direction. So for example, she would be talking about riding to school on her bike, the experience of getting her first bike, which you know was quite a liberating moment for a young Indian woman at that time.

Ali Kazimi: Absolutely.

Madhur Anand: It was physically liberating, it's incredible. I've read a lot of history about this actually and it was a very very important transition once bicycles were introduced. And when young women were actually allowed to start riding them, there were all these ideas around how young women shouldn't ride bicycles because they could jeopardize them, their womb getting children and stuff like that. So anyway, my mom described, she took great pleasure in riding her bicycle. If something got really emotional and sad I would ask, "What kind of bicycle was it? What colour was it?" or I would ask some specificities and somehow that would bring her, that would hold on to...it would just hold the structure in place just enough to go a little bit further. And I wasn't doing it for that purpose because I really wanted to know those details. But I think it certainly helped things move forward. Because if I had just simply asked her "Tell me about your disappointing life or whatever, tell me about your greatest disappointment," that's not going to go over well. Anyways, that's not what I was interested in per se. I was interested in everything and in a way to communicate it, in a way that all those residuals if you will, all that potentially none useful or apparent noise or data suddenly become critical to telling the story.

Ali Kazimi: No absolutely it's the details that really flesh out the lived experience. I chuckled when you described your mother seeking out bargains and going to BiWay and Fabricland looking through the flyers to see what the best deals were. Because in many ways that is such a typical experience for South Asian parents but also for immigrants as a whole. You're trying to save money and you're always looking for... and BiWay, which was a discount store that was around when I came too in the early 80s, was a store that I haunted as a foreign student looking for stuff. And it's those details that really add to everything.

Madhur Anand: Just when you even say the name, like I'm there! As a child, I'm there! I'm in that shop. It's so vivid.

Ali Kazimi: But within all these memories...what you bring out are also the discrepancies. So for example, in your father's story, he speaks about a certain Dr. Sharma being his mentor when he came, when he was in Montreal. And yet, in your memoir, your side of the memoir, when you meet Dr. Sharma and you interview him, he outright denies that he was your father's mentor and he says, "Well, there was this Jewish professor who was in fact his mentor, not me." But your father in his account goes through a fairly detailed story about what Dr. Sharma did for him. And you just let those be and you let us reflect on the nature of memory, and the nature of truth itself and one's experience. So talk to me about that moment and others like that that are there, that you came across.

Madhur Anand: I'm so thankful that you read the book so thoroughly because I wasn't sure that the reader would notice that discrepancy and you did, so I'm glad that you did. So maybe I should preface this again by saying that of course, the pathway that I went down to write this book was certainly not to try to get a single story or some sort of correct version of the past. Maybe that goes without saying with works of literature. One could ask, "why did I go to meet Dr. Sharma?" Well first of all, I was so surprised to find out that he was still alive and still teaching at Concordia. He hadn't retired yet. I think he's 90.

Ali Kazimi: Wow, remarkable.

Madhur Anand: It is remarkable, right? So just realizing that and discovering that, in and of itself, was like - *gosh, this guy is still alive, I need to go talk to him for so many reasons*. Not just because he was part of my father's life but other things too, to have someone with that memory, that living memory of this time. I didn't even tell my father I was going to see him. I contacted him by email. I found him on the Concordia website and I'm like okay, this is a Dr. Sharma. I don't believe there was a photograph and there wasn't very much information on the faculty page of the physics department of Concordia University, which was Sir George Williams University in the sixties, it amalgamated. So I wrote to him, and Sharma's a very common name, right? So it could have been anybody. But I wrote to him and I said, "Are you the Dr. Sharma who blah, blah, blah, blah, blah" and he wrote right back and said yes. So then I wrote back to him and said, "Could I come and visit you, talk to you about just in general...?" Again, my approach was that I never really had a specific goal in any of my interviews with anybody. So I had to kind of say something broad but not too scary or off putting and not too intrusive to talk about my father and general things, physics, and the history of the university, and he never wrote back for a long time. And I thought - *gosh you know, what did I do? Did I scare him away with my request?*

So finally I wrote to him again and said, "Look, I'm coming to Montreal, I'd like to come and see you in your office. Is that okay?" So he said "Yes. You can come." He gave me a time and so on. Anyways, I recount that experience in that chapter so I won't go any further but starting at

that point, I think I start the chapter where I arrive at his office in Concordia. Now that was a really really interesting process though because I would, I don't know, I don't want to go too much into it because it really is a story in itself, the backstory of that Dr. Sharma encounter. But it was quite hard to get anything out of that, even though I swear I arrived at his office at like one o'clock in the afternoon and I was there for four hours.

Ali Kazimi: So clearly you connected.

Madhur Anand: Well, I think it was my stubbornness because when we started it was like we had nothing to say to one another and you know he was so reserved, and suspicious might not be the right word but I can't think of a better word right now about my intentions. And sort of not understanding, right? Like he's a scientist, he's a physicist. What was I doing there? And the funny thing was, I was using all my faculties as I did in writing the book, in writing and researching the book, as I've explained. So I would be talking to him trying to get some personal stories about my father but then when I saw that he was uncomfortable or there was a big pause - and there were moments where like I swear we were just sitting there, just sitting with each other in silence, for like ten minutes. Because I didn't know what to say next, and he didn't know what to say next, but neither of us wanted to stop. I don't know if you've ever encountered that? It was so tender, it was so tender. Like he's not telling me to leave, I'm not giving up and leaving but we didn't know where to go next in our conversation, right? This is a ninety year old physicist who I don't actually know at all and we have such a tangential relationship with but he wanted me there somehow I could sense. I'm sure this is what some journalists must feel like when they're trying to talk with people.

Ali Kazimi: I don't think so, I don't think so. You're more than the journalist. I don't think...

Madhur Anand: Thank you for that I guess, I don't know want to offend any journalists but..

Ali Kazimi: You're making a commitment here - clearly there was a commitment that was beyond just the facts, right? This was a deep...

Madhur Anand: Oh totally, the whole experience of it, right? It happens to me time and time again as a poet, you know. I want to immerse myself, go somewhere, do something and I try to tell the person why I'm there. But I can't, I'm just here, I'm here to just sort of see what happens, it's an experiment, right? This is the experiment of the thing. What do I want to say, there was one more thing I want to say about that encounter...so for example, if he was getting uncomfortable about the personal stuff, which he wasn't, he told me a lot of personal stuff about his life that I say I couldn't write about because he told me I couldn't write about it. But it's all there, he knew I was recording him. He wasn't afraid to tell me.

Ali Kazimi: And he trusted you.

Madhur Anand: He did. I mean, he also said “You can't write about some of these things” and I didn't, you know. And I would flip. And again, this is where my science training thing helped but not in a very conscious way. But I flipped and said okay, “Show me some of your research papers. I want to know the type of work that you've done.” And I do refer to his own PHD thesis in the chapter. And then he looks at me saying, “Why do you want to - are you a physicist? Why would you possibly want to know what paper, what research I have done?” It was so funny, it was like he was interrogating me and then I'm like, “Well you know, I'm just interested in it, and I understand, I'm a scientist don't forget, also.” Then when that part was exhausted, I'm like “Ok tell me about so and so.” And I was constantly permuting through those states to get the full story. It was a really neat application of that, which I think is in fact what the entire book is kind of like - a constant permutation, flipping from the human, to the poetic, to the scientific, to the personal. Because ultimately when I would fail with everything else, “okay, you know let's get back to my dad” and coming right back to the familial ties. “Tell me about...what did he...” and I asked some specific thing, “What do you remember about this or that?” So it was this constant permutation of these three things that finally got that story.

Now coming to your actual question, which is how to deal with discrepancies - it was surprising. I mean it's always surprising to hear different versions of stories. Somewhat disturbing but also not that disturbing in a way, as well because I know about, well look, I had already interviewed my mother and father and their versions, their memories of some very specific times are very different. And sometimes they're different because they were different people and they had different experiences, right? They were just physically in different places and they were interacting with different people so it's a very different thing. But sometimes it was really a different interpretation of the same thing, of the same places, of the same event. There was one moment when I was interviewing them that this became so crystal clear to me how this could actually be not a problem at all - that one could have a completely different memory and that it be equally valid, okay. I don't know if you remember, but there is a story, there's a section where I recount these little fables that they tell me.

Ali Kazimi: Yes, and many of those fables are familiar to me.

Madhur Anand: Oh, that's wonderful. So, there's this one fable where it's about a man and his sons and building some sticks out of a bundle and I won't go into the details but all to say that my father told me that fable on one occasion, my mother told me that fable on another occasion, they've completely reversed, inverted an important detail, but it still works, in both cases it still works as a fable. And so I thought, *my god, that is just such a powerful example of how there's just many truths, there are many truths.*

Now the question of memory and perception - I actually think it's possible for even though there's a discrepancy of it at some point, I think it's actually entirely possible for both stories to be true. So that's where I leave it. I leave it open to the reader...that's the space of imagination where one can then apply that to everything that my father has said. You can go back and then

you think, *oh my god, so what actually was the case here?* But I think that that questioning is vital - is *vital* to keep this story alive.

Ali Kazimi: Absolutely and that space as you said, allows the reader to then inject their own imagination and become an active part in this process. And therefore, immerse themselves in the book even more. In closing, I want to ask you what has this process been like for you now that the book is completed? You've gone through this fairly intense, deeply personal process both within yourself and with parents. What has emerged at the other end for you? Where have you arrived at?

Madhur Anand: I don't know, I don't think I have arrived anywhere yet.

Ali Kazimi: But the book is complete so there is that one sense of completion there.

Madhur Anand: I do feel a sense of completion, so you know I feel like there's something that has been gnawing at me for a long time, and I have done it. So it is satisfying in that sense. And it's released me to move on to other projects.

Ali Kazimi: When you say it's released you, what does that mean? It sort of implies that you've managed to get out stuff that was holding you back and there were constraints there, so speak to me about that.

Madhur Anand: No, it's just that these were things that I had been thinking about and were just taking up a lot of my emotional and intellectual space for so long and now it's gone. So there's room, there's just physically room for more things. I can think about another genre, for example even. I've been thinking a lot about fiction.

Ali Kazimi: Hmm, I was going to ask you that.

Madhur Anand: Yeah because you know, one could've been tempted and many writers do render stories like the one I've told into fiction. And I flirted with it in moments throughout the book. Some of the things really do verge on fictional accounts, like at least in terms of the style in which I write them. But I reigned myself in, I wanted it all to be true and we'll see what happens but I feel that I'm allowing myself now for whatever reason to perhaps consider fiction.

Ali Kazimi: Well I eagerly look forward to that Madhur.

Madhur Anand: Thank you so much.

Ali Kazimi: I want to definitely see where this leads you and thank you so much for this wonderful offering to us. I found it deeply enriching and I'm so glad that these small stories, which bring the world to us in such sharp focus, have been put out there, particularly, within a Canadian context and the context of today, where we're truly beginning to look at issues of

inclusion and diversity and examine questions of race over time. And your parents stories both speak of their own painful encounters with race and you speak about it too, as a child growing up. And all of that I think is essential, so essential in today's Canada. So thank you.

Madhur Anand: I do want to thank artists in Canada, working in Canada, who have brought us these stories one way or another, similar stories. You know, there's still so few of us doing it and I want to give credit to those who are because they may not realize it but they are helping the second generation to reconnect and to understand stories that as we admit, are often just not spoken of, right? I've actually met lots of people from my generation who say that their parents never spoke of partition. It's fine, they don't have to per se, but if we don't, there's a reason for it, there's a reason they don't, right? And yet, if we don't sort of somehow get those stories recorded...people are only starting to come out with them now. I want to acknowledge this larger project called the Partition Archive, which is starting to get down stories. Sometimes all you have to do is ask, you know? It's not going to be necessarily forthcoming, and I think this is a very important message about this contemporary time, this current moment. Sometimes all you have to do is ask and then somebody feels like there's permission to actually say it, to talk of the past, to talk of these atrocities, to talk about major aggressions and microaggressions. Before we all leave, I want to tell you that I watched your GG video that they made of you and congratulations by the way on that again.

Ali Kazimi: Thank you.

Madhur Anand: When I saw that video and I heard you describing your experience of discovering the footage, the film of the Komagata Maru, and realizing that you were the first person to have seen it. And then you're like okay, that moment of *I'm the first person to have seen...why am I the first person to have seen it?* And then you knew you had to do it. Those are the moments where I was in tears watching you say that. Because I thought...yes, so sometimes we become vessels of something larger.

Ali Kazimi: Absolutely.

Madhur Anand: So I want to thank those of you who were those vessels, as well, because it inspires but it also creates a conversation. And literally we're having a conversation today because of all of this, I think. You know, you asked me, in one of the questions that you talked about, was when did I become aware of the impact of partition on my parents' lives, and I was actually trying to think of when because I couldn't really, because they never spoke of it, so it wasn't really through them. It was through Deepa Mehta's *Earth*, another artist filmmaker who treated the subject, and I want to mention that because I saw that film probably right after it came out in 1999, so way before I ever conceived of doing this project. But I do remember very vividly watching that opening scene where there's a group of young people in their twenties sitting on a blanket in a park in Lahore, and thinking, first of all thinking - *huh, maybe that's what my father was like when he was young and that was the place where he was when he was young, of that time, even though it was a bit earlier.* And of course there's a character in there

and I'm only realizing this now, but sometimes you only realize things in retrospect. There was that narrator who had Polio.

Ali Kazimi: Yes.

Madhur Anand: And that's not something you usually see in Bollywood films, which is anything that my parents would have exposed me to or that was available to me. So treating these topics through art is so so important for all of these reasons because it allows us all to enter into it from different perspectives. And I think it's just so important and I wanted to thank you for your work on that.

Ali Kazimi: Thank you. And thank you for your work and adding to this conversation, which I know will keep continuing. It's been wonderful chatting with you and as I said, I'm looking forward to your fiction book. Now that you've announced it. No pressure.