

Aruna Rao Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 1:08:13] [Session one: 16 October 2014]

[00:00] Aruna Rao [AR] Born 1955, Pondicherry, India, on father's first foreign posting as diplomat, Indian Foreign Service (IFS), when still French colony. Describes travelling with family to various postings. Mentions Indian High Commissions in pre-independence Southern Africa, Eastern Africa. Describes living in Salisbury (Harare), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Nairobi, Kenya, then part of East African Federation of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, attending Aga Khan Nursery School, Nairobi, Kenya, move to Burma, there before and after 1962 coup d'état. Describes father dealing with political affairs and information in each place, independence leaders contacting him and attending family home in neutral territory of Indian High Commission where couldn't be arrested. Mentions Kwame Nkrumah, Tom Mboya, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Discusses Indians living in Burma as commercial backbone of country. Describes Ne Win's actions, 1963, nationalising schools and banks, freezing assets of Indian community, Indian government sending ships to transport nationals to India.

[05:17] Discusses impact of growing up around so much political activity. Describes father as extraordinary man from humble origins, book written, 'Anecdotes of a Diplomat's Life'. Move to Canada, mentions 13th birthday in Ottawa. Move to Delhi, India after four years. Discusses images, smells from childhood. Story about mulberry trees, mentions BRAC (formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). Mentions Hwange National Park. Describes water festival, Bruma, comparing to Thai Songkran Festival, Indian Holi Festival.

[10:24] Describes smell of flowers on garland adorning Burmese ladies' hair, smelling again years later in Malacca, Malaysia. Describes changing schools several times as Burmese became language of instruction. Mentions attending Methodist English high school. Recalls rigid format of Catholic schools, and fearing everybody. Mentions having 'a lot of fun' at Aga Khan Nursery School, Nairobi, Kenya. Discusses continuity of own culture carried throughout life as expatriates, instilled by mother and father. Describes celebration of Diwali, including in cold of Canada, with wind blowing. Mentions 'Ottawa Citizen'. Describes being part of Indian community in each place, Indian PhD students in Canada adopting family home as own, mother cooking for all.

[15:24] Describes growing up as Hindu, though parents not 'fanatical about anything'. Describes controversy of parents' inter-caste marriage in Andhra Pradesh, India. Father Brahmin, mother not. Story of parent's eloping. Remarks on their bravery and non-traditional approach, criticism mother took. AR attributes own work and reason for pursuing, to mother, observing effect of discriminatory traditions imposed by families and societies. Describes relationship to grandparents. Mentions parents coming from large families.

[22:05] Describes enjoyment of time with cousins on visits to India. Mentions having to fly Air India as national carrier. Describes social taboos and treatment of girls when menstruating, considered 'unclean'. Describes going to cinema in India, watching 'How to Steal a Million' starring Audrey Hepburn. Mentions playing Karom.

[25:17] Description of brother as ‘wonder child’ born after ten year’s of marriage and several miscarriages. Reflects on having no consciousness of unusual nature of childhood, legitimacy of feelings at time. Mentions Alaa and Hani Shukrallah, ‘Al-Ahram Online’, Muslim Brotherhood. Describes difficulty adjusting at middle school, adjusting to climate in Canada, experience of bullying. Reflects on understanding and valuing childhood exposure much later as adult.

[31:55] Describes return to Nairobi, for United Nations Third Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985 [Nairobi], feeling connection to country. Describes ‘horrible’ experience, attending Convent of Jesus and Mary, Delhi, India, history books and learning focused on viceroys, books in library locked in glass cabinets.

[36:22] Describes enjoyment of International School of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, Japan. Describes interest in Drama, and singing, love of books beginning at high school. Mentions William Shakespeare. Describes singing American folk music, beginning in Canada, AR then performing on All India Radio (AIR), and television in Japan. Describes interest in history, learning about post-communist China.

[39:40] Describes limited university choices, with father’s position not affording necessary fees, application process comparing to today, acceptance at Barnard College, Columbia University, United States of America (USA), 1973. Describes love of living in Japan, as favourite place of all. Mentions Notre Dame Seishin University, Okayama, Japan, Empress Michiko of Japan. Description of late 1960s Tokyo.

[45:00] Describes family’s friendship with neighbor. Mentions Sumi-e painting, Ikebana and love of flower arranging. Describes travelling extensively in Japan. Story about tea ceremony performed by volcanic lakes, Hokkaido, Japan. Remarks on artistic sensibility and awareness of every moment, in Japanese culture, impact on AR, appreciating stillness more than vibrancy of Indian culture. Describes response to university offer.

[50:00] Describes difficulty leaving home, journey to New York, USA. Mentions parents driving from Ottawa, Canada to New York City for availability of Indian vegetables and pickles. Remarks that New York grittier in those days. Mentions Choc full o’Nuts, Tom’s Diner, Times Square. Describes living among Orthodox Jews with Vietnamese friend, ignorance of rituals.

[55:00] Describes first two years skipping classes, involved in Drama activities playing Olivia in William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, Cleopatra. Mentions Gaylord Indian Restaurant, 120th Street, 122nd Street, Morningside Park. Describes study of Asian History, thesis on use of religious symbolism for political ends in nationalist movement, with focus on Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in Maharashtra state, India. Describes referring to Ghandhiji’s newspaper and writings on microfiche. Mentions thesis advisor Professor Embree.

[1:00:00] Describes study for Masters in International Education, first exposure to contemporary issues of development, through educational lens and educational policy. Describes work for United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), developing survey related to women and development in preparation for

World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1980 [Copenhagen], while undertaking PhD. Mentions Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines (Ateneo), Mary Racelis, Hoda Badran, James March, Stanford University. Introduction to study of organisational behavior and organisational development.

[1:05:31] Describes always being drawn to issues concerning women, attributing to own experience at home. Two interests coming together for PhD. [pause for break]

Track 2 [duration: 32:22] [Session one: 16 October 2014]

[00:00] Describes fullness of academic life in New York, USA, 'whole world opening' around women's issues. Mentions Copenhagen conference, UNICEF, UNIFEM, BRAC. Describes background of BRAC, originally Bangladesh Resources Action Committee, founded 1971 during Bangladesh Liberation War. Describes focus of women's movement at first involvement, around access to resources, women in development, separate projects for women, integration of women in mainstream development programs. Remarks that took place in development frame not feminist analysis or feminist consciousness frame, 'which was always ten steps ahead'.

[05:00] Discusses richness of feminist discourse against development discourse, essentially gender mainstreaming. Describes preparations for Copenhagen. Describes UNICEF's work on women as key interlocutors for child wellbeing, women as necessary part of vision. Describes work in Rural Poverty division, Ford Foundation. Completion of PhD aged 25. Describes work analysing three programmes. Remarks that in 1980s and 1990s Ford Foundation one of most innovative and significant supporters of women's rights. Mentions Harvard University, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin at Madison, USA, Ingrid Palmer, Population Council, Judith Bruce, Cathy Staudt, Kenya.

[10:40] Describes offer to lead series of regional studies in Asia. Mentions UNIFEM, United Nations Voluntary Fund On Women, UN Women and critical contribution to income generation for women. Describes importance of studies for highlighting issues concerning women within larger infrastructures. Gives example of farmer managed program in Philippines, 1970s, 1980s, studies on participatory management of irrigation programmes. Describes study by Jean Ilio at Ateneo University on gender implications of irrigation programme, definition of head of household, women's decision-making.

[15:25] Describes leaving New York for Population Council Asia office, Bangkok, Thailand. Describes research on education in tribal districts of Rajasthan-Gujarat border, India, as visiting fellow at Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA). Describes work at Population Council, funding studies in Bangladesh, India, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand for publishing. Describes Mary Anderson and Catherine Overholt's Harvard Analytical Framework for assessing gender based differences in access to resources. Mentions Susan Poats, University of Florida, USA, Hilary Feldstein. Describes working with Anderson and Overholt to develop studies into teaching cases, published in *Gender Analysis in Development Planning: A Case Book* Kumarian Press, 1991.

[21:02] Discusses differences between cases, with detailed description of study of Batik industry, Indonesia, displacement of female workers with mechanisation. Describes government involvement in women's programmes, difficulty of advocacy work. Describes support for Maharashtra's Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, India.

[25:00] Describes Gender At Work project in Uttar Pradesh, India on same scheme. Describes overall implementation of regional studies. Describes training as gender trainer. Describes collaboration between Population Council and The Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norway to analyse decade of work on gender training. Description of attendance United Nations Third Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985 [Nairobi] as member of group responsible for 13 panels and workshops. Mentions Florence Howe, Feminist Press, Gloria Bonder, Argentina, Vina Mazumdar, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Delhi, India. Describes personal journey of return to Nairobi. Describes non-governmental organizations (NGOs) housed in University of Nairobi dormitories. [30:00] Reflects on conference experience. Describes chaos of number of people, city unprepared. Remarks that 'extraordinary event'. Discusses 'power' of conception of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) as clear articulation from women of Global South. [pause]

Track 3 [duration: 57:49] [Session one: 16 October 2014]

[00:00] Continues evocative description of Nairobi conference, including Peace Tent. Mentions Tom Mboya, Jomo Kenyatta. Mentions editing, 'Women's Studies International: Nairobi and Beyond', published by Feminist Press. Mentions attendance at United Nations Fourth Conference On Women, Beijing, China, 1995 [Beijing]. Describes move from Thailand to Bangladesh, writing. Story of meeting husband, marriage. Mentions The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

[10:00] Describes traditional Indian wedding, changing 'archaic' vows, husband also 'given away'. Birth of two girls. Remark on family planning. Describes country boats in Bangladesh.

[15:16] Describes leading gender team at BRAC, experience in region, training regional directors of Save the Children Fund in Nepal. Mentions Fazle Hasan Abed, Sheepa Hafiza, Raymond Offenheiser, Oxfam America, Ford Foundation. Describes drawing on principles of adult learning, building team of experts on organisational change and development, understanding on women and development, gender and development, community development work.

[20:17] Comments on power and potential of task to ask fundamental questions, that would not have happened without BRAC. Describes starting from basic questions to develop needs assessment through workshops and exercises. Describes findings.

[25:28] Describes directors of BRAC by gender. Describes project as watershed moment. Mentions Women's Advisory Committee.

[28:10] Describes back story to involvement in Beijing conference. Mentions Anne Marie Goetz, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) writing chapter in book, 'Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development'. Reflects on developing sense of flaws in core systems and structures within organisations attempting to implement anti-discriminatory and progressive gender policies, misguided interpretations impacting power dynamics, development outcomes and women's rights.

[30:40] Remarks that organizations are constructed for men by men. Refers to feminist thought, commenting on fundamental divides between work and family, public and private, observing that organisations structured on divide, relating to patriarchy. Discusses implications. Discusses Beijing Platform For Action, The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) declaration on gender mainstreaming.

[35:00] Discusses positive outcome from Beijing, of construction of women's rights as human rights and broadening of concept of rights, example of Right to Food, Right to Work in India. Discusses acknowledgement of domestic violence and violence against women in public realm. Remarks on extent of current backlash against women. Story about Anita Sarkeesian's analysis of misogyny in video games, resulting in death threats preventing speaking at University of Utah, USA. Mentions Columbine High School massacre. Discusses religious fundamentalism in India. Describes misappropriation of lotus symbol of Hinduism and Buddhism by Bharatiya Janata Party.

[40:55] Remarks that each era has its own complexities, and perspective dependent on individual's economic position within context. Discusses impact of United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 1994 [Cairo] progressive on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, paved way for women entering institutions. Mentions amendments 72 and 73 of Indian Constitution, large numbers of women entering local governance structures. Remarks on rich body of research and studies made, proliferation of women's organisations worldwide. Discusses backlash driven by fundamentalist economic policies, and regional and local conflicts. Discusses violence against women in war context, recognition of rape as weapon of war. Mentions Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

[45:30] Describes disappointment regarding limitations, fundamental discriminations unchanged. Discusses focus on women and girls as unprecedented. Remarks that The Netherlands largest government funding women's organisations. Discusses funding available in field and dominant culture leading to causal relationships. Mentions The Department for International Development (DFID), Pricewaterhouse. Discusses individualism.

[50:00] Discusses events at Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt and regression. Describes changing relationship with donors. Example of first funder Ford Foundation, comparing to current culture of donor agendas. Mentions Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW), The Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) as exceptions. Describes efforts of Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) to change this, developing database to track funds. Describes use of findings for advocacy, example of Dutch feminists

successfully lobbying for MDG-F and FLOW funds. Discusses factors involved. Example of randomised control trials in India.

[55:10] Mentions Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) Grand Challenges, DFID. Describes role as President of Board of Directors, AWID. [pause to stop noise]

Track 4 [duration: 55:29] [Session one: 16 October 2014]

[00:00] Story behind ‘internationalisation’ of all-American AWID board. Mentions University of Virginia at Blacksburg, USA, The International Center for Research on Women, VISA, Kumi Naidoo, Civicus: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (Civicus), Greenpeace International, Azza Karam, Joanna Kerr, ActionAid International, Greenpeace Canada. Remarks on fundamental changes brought by Joanna Kerr to AWID. Describes collaboration with Pregs Govender, Michel Friedman, African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa, for AWID conference, Transformation for Gender Justice and Organizational Change, 1998, in new South Africa.

[05:00] Describes productive energy of independent South Africa. Mentions Ministry of Water, Land and Development Bank of South Africa. Describes role as first female elected Chair of Board for Civicus. Mentions Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, The Young Women Christian Association (YWCA). Describes instigating gender policy at Civicus and working for greater representation and membership from Global South. Explains history of Civicus. Describes first conference held outside western context, in Botswana, 2004.

[10:00] Reflects on rarity of ‘experiment’, remarking that civil society organizations remain fundamentally misogynistic. Discusses obstacles to change as patriarchy, hierarchy, misogyny, gender being viewed as side line issue. Mentions Amnesty International, ActionAid International. Describes Gender At Work as virtual organization. Mentions co-founder David Kelleher. Defines activism with example of first women-led farmworker’s trade union in South Africa, Sikhula Sonke, promoting gender quality in context of high levels of alcoholism, domestic abuse, models of abusive patriarchs. Mentions Women On Farms Project (WFP).

[15:55] Describes Gender At Work’s stance to support and enable activism. Remarks that activism increasingly in choices you make and what you support. Describes petition advocating for International Labour Organization (ILO) to adopt convention to eradicate sexual violence at workplace. Describes areas working in; South Africa, East Africa, Horn of Africa, South Sudan, Palestine, India. Mentions conflict in Malakal, South Sudan. Describes collaborations with BMGF, UN Women, Pathway Project – Action Against Domestic Abuse. Institute of Development Studies (IDS), contributing to ‘Feminists in Development Organizations: Change from the Margins’ by Rosalind Eyben and Laura Turquet, The Palgrave Handbook on Gender and Development: Critical engagements in feminist theory and practice.

[19:48] Describes staff make-up of organisation, internship programme with University of Ottawa and South Africa, India. Describes recent strategic planning process and vision, to work with more organizations, embracing more countries beyond Global South to build field. Describes diversity of work between each

country. Detail of work on Violence Against Women, in Vaal region, South Africa, including work in Health sector, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) groups. Detail of work in India on national Right to Work program, including initiative to increase participation of vulnerable groups in Uttar Pradesh state. Example of Dalit women, innovations designed to challenge gender-based stereotypes and practiced norms.

[26:28] Detail of implementation, leading to pledge by Minister of Rural Development, Delhi, women to receive equal quota of technical jobs throughout India. Discusses approach to issue of Violence Against Women in India in context of organisations. Refers to Jyoti Singh 16 December 2012 incident, Delhi. Explains Vishaka guidelines.

[30:21] Discusses influence of own upbringing on work. Remarks on learning importance of collaboration to be truly effective, refers to collective learning on boards served. Describes work with Mahnaz Afkhami as Founding Board Member of Gender At Work, with Association of Women's Rights In Development (AWID), Civicus, UNIFEM and Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). Mentions being on WLP's Programme Advisory Board.

[35:14] Attributes success of Gender At Work to people involved and ability to experiment with their ideas. Discusses creativity. Comments on far-reaching aspect of powerful writing contributed. Remarks on broad success of analytical framework developed with Kelleher. Mentions Ken Wilber, The Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Srilatha Batliwala, United Nations Millenium Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, Oxfam. Describes first steps taken, questions considered, in creating organization.

[40:23] Discusses motherhood, remarking on difficulty for women in West without help. Mentions Bangladesh, USA. Mentions study revealing incidence of Domestic Violence in Norway, Sweden, Denmark. Discusses 'abdication of formal organizational life'. Describes storytelling workshop with TMI Project for feminists including from Oxfam International, UN Women, UNICEF, ex-World Bank members confronting embedded inequalities in organizations.

[44:20] Detail of own story contributed. Mentions Grand Central Station, Penn Station, Tarrytown, New York. [53:07] Reflects on proudest achievement.