

## **Kavita Ramdas Oral History Content Summary**

### **Track 1 [duration: 1:29:33] [Session one: 15 March 2016]**

[00:00] Kavita Ramdas [KR] Born 1962. Describes name meaning. Eldest of three daughters, recognising as most defining aspect of childhood. Describes context of society's negative response to girls with anecdote, parents' strong stance of pride and rejection of focus on boys. Describes diverse origins of mother and father's families. Mentions Tamil Nadu, Madras Presidency, British rule. Mother aged seven, father 14 on independence of India. Discusses impact of parent's growing up in country free from colonial rule, sense of responsibility to country and next generation, and profound influence on KR's childhood perspective. Describes parents as unusual among country's middle class, as educated, English-speaking elite of India, class denoted by education and British link versus wealth.

[05:00] Describes history of maternal grandfather in British Indian Navy and own father in Indian Navy around time of country's independence, parent's meeting through father's position as Flag Lieutenant to grandfather, romance of circumstances. Describes as love marriage, exception to rule. Story about grandparents meeting on tennis court. Describes British cultivation of maternal family's English-speaking caste given educational opportunities, to counteract power of Brahmins in Southern India. Mentions mother's grandfather studying at Edinburgh University, Scotland, United Kingdom, serving in British Indian Railways. Describes father's Tamil speaking family, paternal grandmother married age six, remarking on feisty, open-minded character supporting son's marriage to KR's non-Brahmin mother. Describes father's vehement opposition to caste system, remarking that easier for upper class to make such pronouncements. Mentions parent's marriage ceremony.

[10:00] Story about controversy of uncle's marriage to Muslim woman. Discusses Hinduism in context. Describes childhood moving around according to father's naval postings, living in England and Burma while father at sea. Mentions grandfather Ambassador to Burma. Move to Bonn, Germany, 1973, father India's Naval Attaché to Germany. Describes time in Germany as formative, parents' moving family out of diplomatic enclave in United States (US) Army base, to integrate with local community. Describes living as only non-white family in village of Bad Godesberg, attendance of German secondary school, Nikolaus Cusanus Gymnasium, Bonn, journeying with Roman Catholic nanny from Kerala, India. Mentions regularity of Roman Catholic mass around the world, mentioning church in Mumbai, India, Kachin, Myanmar. Anecdote about own weekly attendance, singing in choir. Discusses position in German society, mentions Turkish guest workers.

[15:00] Describes mother's upbringing and habits and adaptable disposition. Discusses own exposure as child resulting in sense as global citizen before adulthood. Describes significance of return to India in pivotal political moment, 1977. Mentions Indira Gandhi's Emergency Rule. Describes upheaval at home following mother's meeting of radical feminist, socialist nun as major influence on perspective, ensuing clashes between parents. Anecdote about mother wearing male cologne to illustrate to daughters concept of freedom of choice without pressure from society. Mentions Old Spice. Describes school in Delhi founded by Indian and Welsh communists. Mentions London School of Economics, UK, Communist Party of India.

[20:43] Describes becoming card-carrying member of African National Congress (ANC) age 15, while at school, campaigning in Karolbagh area, West Delhi, India, for Nelson Mandela's release. Mentions United States of America (USA). Discusses exposure to radical, egalitarian thought, commenting that exactly what mother wanted. Describes compulsory community service element at school, at Delhi slums and school for blind. Reflects on first impressions of poverty in India as privileged member of middle class and mother's influence on perspective. Discusses view of communism in India at time. Mentions State of Kerala, State of Bengal. Describes shared socialist solidarity with other countries, India's participation in Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Mentions Josip Broz Tito, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Fidel Castro, as heroes of time, disinterest in USA, interest in Soviet Union. Anecdote about invasion of Afghanistan.

[25:30] Discusses curriculum emphasis at various schools attended, secularism in India, quality of English language spoken. Mentions British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Anecdote about All India Radio announcers. Mentions Surajit Sen. Describes learning French and Russian at school in Germany. Describes dreams of becoming doctor, settling for the Humanities.

[29:11] Describes books read in childhood. Mentions Enid Blyton, 'Noddy', Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, P.G. Wodehouse, the Brontë sisters, Graham Green, Somerset Maugham, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway. Describes being passionate about mythology, reading Norse, Greek, Roman and Old English, being 'smitten' by Thomas Hardy and Ayn Rand, influence of 'The Diary of Anne Frank', KR beginning to write own. Story about reading Leon Yuris, identifying with Jewish story despite growing up with nation to nation support for Palestine. Describes domestic responsibilities growing up. Describes mother's love of baking, unusual foods taken to school. Mentions Tiddy Oggy, peanut butter sandwich.

[35:00] Describes close relationship with sisters and mother. Reflects on mother's radical activism as father promoted higher and higher in Navy. Mentions mother's work on violence, literacy in slums. Reflects on own feelings growing up, on value system instilled, freedoms compared to peers, physical aspect of relationship with body. Describes parents' openness about sex, affection between parents, normalization of nudity. Describes mother's open approach to education on masturbation, same-sex love. Describes open house, friends' admiration for KR's parents. Reflects on unusual environment, own conflicted response as adolescent.

[40:10] Describes exploring identity, phase of dressing traditionally with *sari* and *bindi*, at same time singer in rock band. Story about falling in love with bass player. Describes extended family members, witnessing maltreatment of widowed aunt as turning point in life. Refers to 2009 TED Talk given. Discusses evolving feminism, comparing to sisters' experience. Describes mother's arrest at protest following rape of young woman in custody [Mathura rape case], reflecting on father's supportive response. Describes mother's campaigns within Indian Navy, highlighting issue of domestic violence in armed forces, effecting significant change, including class transformation with Naval Women's Association, embracing officers and sailors wife together for first time. Comments that mother a 'born radical'.

[45:36] Discusses career path and choice of subject, describes love of writing, winning Royal Commonwealth Society Essay Competition, 1979, First Prize trip to England. Describes suffering nervous breakdown and hallucinations. Story about attending United Nations (UN) summer camp, Switzerland. Mentions Inuit, Canada. Story about second year at college, conflict regarding first sexual encounter despite progressive upbringing, stress, exhaustion, leading to more serious nervous breakdown.

[50:05] Describes prolonged illness, mother's intuitive remedy of creating focus on others with KR's first job aged 19 working in orphanage. Describes as first moment of realisation that work would evolve around women's issues. Describes orphanage scenes, own first response role. Refers to own medication, homeopathic treatment, reflecting on experience of mental illness in Asia where shunned. Describes encounter leading to place at Mount Holyoke College, USA. Mentions Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Describes meeting husband Zulfiqar Ahmad. Mentions that first time meeting Pakistanis, at college, USA.

[55:50] Describes relationship as 'profoundly important' to personal development and growth, exposure to 'larger Muslim experience'. Describes husband as atheist, culturally Muslim, political scientist, historian, literature student. Discusses political aspect of religions. Study of International Relations, Hampshire College, USA, taught by Eqbal Ahmad, coincidentally husband's uncle, describing as 'remarkable person', meeting Ibrahim Abu Lughod, Edward Said, Adam Hochschild, Arlie Russell Hochschild in milieu. Mentions Arlie Russell Hochschild's 'The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work', Adam Hochschild's 'King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa' and 'Bury The Chains'. Mentions Pakistani/Jew intermarriage. Describes long courtship, marriage in Chicago, USA while working at McArthur Foundation. Describes wedding requiring official permission from Indian Navy as coincided with father's promotion to Head of Indian Navy, controversy of marrying Pakistani, court case filed against father for compromising national security.

[1:01:30] Describes marrying into remarkable Leftist Pakistani family. Mentions husband's exile in USA, sustaining head injury in Pakistan during student protests against Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq regime, husband's uncle Eqbal Ahmad one of Harrisburg Seven arrested for kidnap attempt on Henry Kissinger in protest against Vietnam War. Reflects on unconventional nature of own wedding and marriage. Describes husband's desire to stay at home to raise child, own feelings during pregnancy, complications during delivery. Mentions working at MacArthur Foundation.

[1:06:00] Reflects on unconventional set up of parenting within marriage, husband as primary carer, KR as main breadwinner.

[1:10:25] Discusses this experience in context of work in feminism, contributing to learning and understanding. Describes richness of converse experience, of discoveries and expansive discussions with husband, personal confrontations with notions of equality, feminism and patriarchy. Describes physical vulnerability, suffering incontinence following childbirth. Mentions Depend underwear. Describes experience of United Nations Fourth Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995 (Beijing) in

condition, supported by senior women there explaining how to manage. Mentions undergoing surgery. Describes rapid early awareness of feminist notion of the personal as political, political as personal.

[1:14:26] Describes work at time of Beijing, running programme on Domestic Poverty, taking delegation of Chicago, USA activists, as part of Ms. Foundation for Women. Describes presence of mother and sister, Sagari Radhika Ramdas at Beijing, in individual roles. Mentions Hillary Clinton. Describes impression of 'power' of women together in one place. Describes unforgettable experience of meeting Iranian women, own incontinence and encounters with other women with disabilities developing notion of having to negotiate what body is able to do versus taking body for granted.

[1:19:00] Reflects on Beijing as very important event for raising issues. Story about response to Tim Worth, head of US delegation's speech, exposing racism, police and domestic abuse in USA. Mentions mortality rates among black women in USA greater than in Bangladesh. Mentions public housing. Describes own exposure to Black American community, gaining knowledge of realities, important friendships. Mentions Connie Evans. Reflects on anti-racism stance in context of socialist concerns growing up. Mentions South Africa, Israel, Palestine. Discusses caste issue in India. Anecdote from World Conference Against Racism, 2001 about Dalit-Brahmin encounter while head of Global Fund For Women. Describes gunpoint encounters living in Hyde Park, Chicago, USA.

[1:25:00] Reflects on Chicago as important part of life, describing classes within society, 1990s. Hyde Park full of radical thinkers and activists. Mentions Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Rabbi Arnold Wolf, Martin Luther King. Anecdote about being married by Jewish Judge Willard J. Lassers involved in anti-death penalty movement and civil rights movement in USA. Mentions Kale Williams, Helen Williams, Quakers, fair housing movement in Chicago. Reflects on tight connection to progressive causes. Describes First learning of women's funding movement. Mentions Sunny Fischer, Chris Grumm, Chicago Foundation for Women, Jane Saks. Describes shifting consciousness on domestic issues, recognizing "Third World issues right here at home in the United States" while Princeton University peers immersed in international issues. Mentions World Bank. Describes role at MacArthur Foundation, travelling worldwide for research on community economic development programme. Mentions Ford Foundation, New York, USA, Flint, Michigan, USA, Detroit, USA. Leading to KR running recommended programme on economic development and poverty alleviation. Describes being head hunted for position at Global Fund For Women.

## **Track 2 [duration: 53:30] [Session one: 15 March 2016]**

[00:00] Reflects on candidacy as Head of Global Fund For Women, succeeding organisation's founder. Describes background of organisation. Discusses pioneering aspect of organisation as first global fund for any cause. Remarks that name should have been copyrighted. Mentions United Nations Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi, 1985, Anne Firth Murray, Frances Kissling, Laura Lederer, Council on Foundations (COF), Hewlett foundation, Dame Nita Barrow, Barbados. Describes

husband's collaboration on vision statement submitted by KR. Move to Palo Alto, California, USA, first impressions after Chicago.

[05:30] Describes steep learning curve of position. Mentions Nicky McIntyre, Guatemala, International Gay And Lesbian Human Rights Commission, (IGLGRC), Taliban, Afghanistan, USA, Sakena Yacoobi, Mahnaz Afkhami. Describes first fund granted for work of Sakina Yacoobi and secret schools in Afghanistan and Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, leading to Afghan Institute for Learning. Describes momentum gained through word of mouth, organisation receiving letters from all over world in numerous languages, translated, then working with local advisors. Discusses Global Fund For Women model, networks arisen from UN conferences, remarking on sense of global women's movement at time, connecting Global North and Global South, notion of 'sisterhood'. Mentions Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Association for Women's Rights In Development (AWID), Robin Morgan.

[10:00] Describes vision at time, creating pool of resources for women in Global South, role of Global North to raise money. Describes experience on fundraising side, diversity of women making donations including those with minimal incomes, letters received with thumb print signatures. Mentions Esther Hewlett, Laurene Powell Jobs, Abigail Disney. Discusses original logo and evolution of. Mentions Par Avion stamp. Discusses realisation of original vision of global ownership of fund, source of funding not solely from Global North. Describes achievement through management structure and staff and board composition.

[15:00] Describes success through commitment to majority board membership from Global South, provision of space for women to raise primary issues. Discusses elements never envisioned, including 9/11, US invasion of Iraq. Describes creation of 'Now or Never' fund in response to George W. Bush's cuts to Family Planning funding, conservative backlash against women. Discusses climate at time impacting on growth of Global Fund For Women. Mentions Afghanistan. Describes dialogue at time, confronting Western feminist perception of oppression, notions of liberation. Describes own experience of personal and professional worlds meshing as never before. Anecdote about KR questioned about responsibility as mother while taking professional position. Describes husband's support and family dynamic at time.

[20:00] Anecdote about trip to Israel, Palestine. Describes conflicts as mother with amusing anecdote. Describes daughter playing soccer, KR's exploration of issues relating to girls' relationship to their bodies in work on feminism and at home. Mentions cricket. Describes Title IX in American schools, impact over 40 years. Describes travel across Latin America and Africa. Mentions Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ghana, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, commenting on differences and overlap of issues, consistent presence of patriarchy. Remarks on supportive men encountered. Mentions slum colony in New Delhi, India, privileged world of Palo Alto.

[25:00] Describes notion of connectedness strengthened through shared experience. Describes unlearning assumptions made about the rich. Describes Global Fund For Women board meetings conducted so consistent with efforts and aims in field, acknowledging issues practically, mentioning Anne Firth Murray's mantra that way

work is done as important as what is done. Describes relationship with younger members and inevitable hierarchy in work place, KR striving for shared leadership. Describes challenges of role, lessons learned. Mentions Clinton Global Initiative.

[30:10] Describes discussions when appointing first men to organisation. Describes warm, unusual, non-traditional shared learning community, learning from each group of women involved with organisation, in office, on board and activists on ground. Story about KR's first board meeting with Marjan Sax of Mama Cash. Mentions work with sex workers and transgender people. Story behind creation of Now or Never Fund as reserve, enabled by Anne Delaney. Mentions New York Women's Foundation, Laurene Powell Jobs, Diane Wexler

[35:00] Describes initiative coinciding with US invasion of Iraq, George W. Bush cutting funds from women's causes globally, creating conflict of focus in crisis. Describes redesign following conversation with Christopher Harris of Ford Foundation. Mentions Nicky McIntyre. Describes start of asking for larger donations, fund evolving further with successful pioneering grassroots contribution to campaign with idea from Rita Thapa of Nepal Women's Fund. Mentions Queen Noor of Jordan, Nancy Pelosi, Frances Kissling, Iman Bibars, Mary Robinson.

[40:00] Describes organisational changes made in commitment to being truly global including strategy for lingual access, political statement in launching Middle East and North Africa Initiative. Describes being chaired by Jacqueline Pitanguy, with anecdote. Mentions George W. Bush. Describes own legacy at Global Fund For Women as being political. Mentions Israel, Palestine, US invasion of Iraq. Describes controversy of standing for women's rights to be safe and free around question of immigration in USA. Mentions board meeting in Egypt. Describes expansion in Africa tripling grant making in Sub-Saharan Africa. Describes conscious decision to travel to Gaza and West Bank meeting women's groups, meeting with Israeli women's groups. Discusses feeling that everything in funding world more corporate and privatised. Mentions Millennials, Bernie Sanders, 9/11. Remarks that rise in activism today.

[45:15] Discusses need for new way, new economy, new polity, new ecology, fundamentally new structure. Describes three aspects to focus in role as Senior Advisor to President of Ford Foundation, adjusting traditional US domination and implications for American foundation. Mentions experience in India with reference to a newly ascendant India, newly ascendant China, newly ascendant Egypt. Discusses country roles, with human rights example. Mentions right to protect and defend SWAT team, Black Lives Matter movement, Europe, USA, Second World War, The Executive Program in Social Entrepreneurship, Stanford University Graduate School, USA. Discusses philanthropy today and changing role of philanthropists. Mentions India, China, Brazil, Mexico. Refers to decline of American empire.

[50:50] Describes proudest achievement.