



Ravi Pattepu

India Mart

Bentonville, Arkansas

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Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson

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Project: South Asian Grocers and Restaurateurs of Northwest Arkansas

Annemarie Anderson: All right. So today is March 13th, 2019. I'm in Bentonville, Arkansas, with Ravi Pattepu.

Ravi, would you go ahead and introduce yourself for the recorder? Tell us who you are and what you do.

[0:00:14.2]

Ravi Pattepu: Hi. This is Ravi, and I'm from southern part of India. I came to U.S., Bentonville, Arkansas, a couple of months ago, and I'm currently working as a store manager, India Mart. I run the business here in Bentonville as a manager, and I look after day-to-day operations of the business.

[0:00:39.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Great. What's your birthday, for the record?

[0:00:41.2]

Ravi Pattepu: 1993.

[0:00:43.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool, cool. Okay. What day and what month?

[0:00:46.4]

Ravi Pattepu: February.

[0:00:49.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Cool. Well, tell me a little bit about coming to the United States. What was it like? What was your first impressions? You came to Utah first, right? Did you go to school there?

[0:01:02.0]

Ravi Pattepu: No.

[0:01:03.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Well, tell me a little bit about that. What was it like in Utah?

[0:01:07.0]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, Utah is the greatest place. I like the Utah is like more LDS people. It's a religious community where people are so religious compared to the other states, and where they incorporate you and where they educate you, wherever people comes from, different areas, different parts of country, world. Like, they sell the community. I like Utah very much because the LDS people are really great people where they can educate different world people and they can give more opportunities to the people's culture. They accept—they're so like a mission, the mission I like very much.

[0:01:51.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. I mean, was there like an Indian community there that you were a part of?

[0:01:56.2]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, here in Bentonville, like, there are many people from southern India and different parts of India, those who are working currently in Walmart and J.B. Hunt. It's a huge—now most of the people are migrating, too, from different parts of the States. In the United States, they're migrating to Bentonville because of the opportunities they're creating here.

[0:02:18.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, what brought you to Bentonville?

[0:02:21.8]

Ravi Pattepu: Bentonville, because of this business, my manager. Actually, the founder of India Mart, who lives in Texas, Irving, he also has one more store in there and he operates from Texas, and he told me to “Make sure this process, this business can handle by you so that I can concentrate more on Texas business store.”

[0:02:47.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Did you work for an India Mart when you were in Utah?

[0:02:50.2]

Ravi Pattepu: No.

[0:02:51.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. So you just got this job?

[0:02:53.9]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, and the owner is from our same southern India, so I know him from there.

[0:02:58.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Cool. So, if you don't mind, would you tell me a little bit about like where you grew up in India and your childhood there?

[0:03:07.0]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, southern part of India, especially in Hyderabad, I grew up. Yeah, I went to school there.

[0:03:13.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, let's talk a little bit about India Mart. Tell me, I mean, what are your responsibilities? What's like a day-to-day for you working there?

[0:03:26.7]

Ravi Pattepu: We operate like seven days a week. India Mart operates seven days a week from morning, 10:00 a.m., to evening, 9:00 p.m., on a daily basis, and on our day-to-day businesses we need to order the stocks, what fresh produces we are getting every week on a weekly basis so we get fresh produce every week twice in a week, like Monday and Thursday, so that we need to keep ordering the stock from different vendors to make sure everything comes in a proper way so that what we are having in the stock and what we are lacking. So we need to keep on ordering, and we are to make sure the business runs smoothly. What are the people requirements, we are to know the people requirements and what they are actually buying and what they need, if they want any particular brand, if they place an order. So we need to make sure to order from which vendor we are getting their product, and we have to order that and make sure the customer is happy at the end of the day.

[0:04:26.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Makes sense. What kind of things, I guess—so, I mean, I've been in the store, and there are lots of different vegetables, fresh vegetables. There are lots of different, you know, packaged ready-to-eat goods too. How do you guys decide what products to bring in?

[0:04:50.0]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, but all Indian groceries, on a day-to-day basis, what we use in our daily lives from our childhood that not available in all the American stores like Walmart, Sam's, or Costco. They don't available because they don't have much veg produce, some

what we eat, like some different vegetables. Particularly, they don't grow up here. So what we are to do, those veggies, those vegetables only can have availability to the Indian people and different parts of Indian community that can have—we will only keep those products which are not available in different stores, in American stores especially. So in that way—because from everybody knows, what our foods and what our recipes, what we can use in our day-to-day basis, because in the end, food is completely different from other foods. So there is a piece we use, the ingredients we use are completely different. So those products only we put here, and we make sure that every Indian people get those, access to those ingredients and products, so that we sell in our store.

[0:06:05.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, cool. Could you talk a little bit about what are some of those things that are especially important to have? Maybe vegetables or other things.

[0:06:16.6]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah. Like vegetables, something like tindora, like okra and Chinese okra, and karela, bitter melon, Indian bitter melon, and winter melon. Those are not available in different stores, in other stores like American stores, that we order from different vendors and we get from different vendors every week and that we sell here. And other vegetables, like usually tomatoes and all, everybody can sell in Walmart, Sam's, everywhere, Walmart, everywhere, they're all available, but the other ingredients which are not available will be available here, like curry leaves, especially curry leaves. None of the other people don't use much, but Indian people, without curry leaves, they

don't cook any curry. That is the most important ingredient, and some [unclear] spices, cumin seeds and mustard seeds and cloves and all those, yeah, cinnamon sticks and all those.

[0:07:23.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Could you talk a little bit about some of the customers you serve on a day-to-day basis, maybe some people who are regulars who are also always in the store?

[0:07:34.8]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah. Here people are all—everybody knows us because most of the customers are repeated customers. So Bentonville is a small place where we can recognize easily people, and especially from our community, southern part of India, northern part of India. Those are all regular customers who we recognize them, we can on talking to each others, and if you go to temple, if you go to church, anywhere they can meet as—even the cultural activities like going on in the Bentonville Community Center are NWA, Arkansas community. All these people only, we gather every time when there is an occasion, when there is a festival. We meet them, we greet them. And if anybody's having a party, even we go and interact with them. That is the way we can contribute to our community in leisure times.

[0:08:41.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Is there anybody specific who sticks out in your mind when you think about customers that come in? Could you talk a little bit about them?

[0:08:53.4]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, because we are here in Bentonville from last so many years, like eight years. The business is because those who are coming from the day one when we are opened India Mart from still customers, those are repeated customers. We don't want to lose any customer go away from us, because business, how you dealing with the people is very important, how you greet them, how you make sure that customer is happy, because customer is the king in this competitive world. So what we need to make sure is we are to keep the customer happy. What his requirements, we have to analyze and we have to assess him and we have to make sure all his needs available. He should not go back without leaving anything, oh, he didn't find a particular item. There is a particular item he is not able to get what he wants. So we always keep in mind that whatever the customer needs, it's our priority to make sure whatever the is requirements, we have to fulfill his requirements and make sure the product is availability all the time. That is the main focus of our business.

[0:10:06.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Great, great. So what year did you come to Bentonville?

[0:10:12.9]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah. As I already told you, here I want to make sure—in this competitive world, like in this competitive field, we need people who are total trustable because the owner is not having here every time on a daily basis, because it’s a competitive and confidential business. Like, it deals with the money, so if owner is not here, someone has to be trustable person on that position to run the business without any [unclear]. So he told me, “Just you go and take care of that business so that I can more reliable on you.” So he told me he push me. He help me to move from Utah to Bentonville.

[0:11:02.4]

Annemarie Anderson: And what year was that? Was it 2017 or 2016 that you moved here?

[0:11:08.5]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, 2017.

[0:11:10.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Cool. So you’ve been in this position since then.

[0:11:13.3]

Ravi Pattepu: Yes.

[0:11:13.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Cool. I just wanted to get those details just to make sure we knew.

Well, tell me a little bit about—you've talked a lot about South Indian and North Indian people are a large part of your customer base, but from talking to different people within the South Asian community, they have talked about how different immigrant groups, like Mexican stores, other Latino stores, and even some Middle Eastern stores, are also important to sometimes finding ingredients that they can't find anywhere else. Do you have customers who are not just South Indian or North Indian? Can you talk about that?

[0:12:07.4]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah. Mexican food and the Indian food is completely different. We don't have much Mexican customers here, but rather, like American people are most—more American people come to our store because they knew our food and they are habituated to have this food, and many of their coworkers will—like when they have potluck and all this stuff, occasions, these people will come to our store, and they want particularly chicken tikka masala that ready to eat. Even we have some products ready to eat, so the customers will like to have that, and especially the dessert parts. They like *gulab jamuns*. They like sweets, Indian sweets, and they like [unclear] sweets and desserts. They will come to our store and they buy those products.

[0:13:01.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. I guess let's talk a little bit too—you mentioned the events in the community. What was your first impression of Bentonville, of moving here? What did you think about it?

[0:13:16.8]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, the first impression of Bentonville, yeah, when I initially moved here, I thought, oh, it's a cool place, but not much crowded and not very—like, it's not a fun place, actually, when you compare to other states. Yeah, Bentonville is a small place which you cannot go out and hang out with friends or family. But as far as I know, it's a cool place to live and it's a very beautiful city and it's a very growing city, yeah, compared to the other states, and very calm, and the roads are very clean and the traffic, there is no traffic jams, no traffic. Everywhere you can go. Within minutes, you can go to your destinations. Yeah, that's the coolest. I like about Bentonville.

[0:14:06.6]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet. I mean, what was it like to kind of get involved in maybe the Indian community here or even outside, trying to like develop friends and different relationships?

[0:14:20.5]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, here, NWA site, like Northwest Arkansas, it's a community group where we can connect with different parts of the people from the same Asian community, like India especially. So you can go there and you can click—nowadays, everything is

online, social network. You can catch your friends, family through Facebook or Twitter, Instagram, where you can keep on posted what are the events going on in and around Bentonville. So if you go to your page, they will post you the event date and time so that you can catch up those events. Like every festival—especially India is like more festivals, more gods. Every time there will be any other occasion, so they keep on posting. Like, here we have temple too.

[0:15:09.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Are you a member of the Hindu temple?

[0:15:12.8]

Ravi Pattepu: I'm not.

[0:15:13.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Do you belong to any religious organization?

[0:15:13.8]

Ravi Pattepu: No, just because we are more occupied—in our seven days a week, I usually occupied more in business, so we don't get morning when we go to store at 10:00 a.m. and return back at 9:00 p.m. Especially all those events where we connected during the weekends, and the weekends is the more busiest time for us, so we are to be there at that store weekends, especially Saturday, Sunday, Friday evening. Those are the very busiest days. Yeah, so we rarely get time to go out and participate.

[0:15:53.9]

Annemarie Anderson: But do you ever get to?

[0:15:56.2]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah, in Bentonville, I never participated any events so far. I wish I can participate more when I have the time to.

[0:16:05.9]

Annemarie Anderson: You were talking about some of those events. Do you know anything about them?

[0:16:14.6]

Ravi Pattepu: Yeah.

[0:16:17.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you talk a little bit about them?

[0:16:18.6]

Ravi Pattepu: Especially the puja and [unclear]. Like recently, they conducted a [unclear] event, yeah, where everybody, all the devotees come and participate in that events. And the Tamil community, they provide like different events. They keep on adding to the society, like keep on posting—they celebrate, all come together. Even they

put some events like dance programs, kids' dance programs, skits, and quiz like kind of programs they even conduct to—like, the main concept behind is to participation and know each other and help the community back home in India. That's the main concept.

[0:17:06.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And I know that there's a big group called Cricket for America. Are you involved in that in any way? Maybe you are and maybe you aren't.

[0:17:17.9]

Ravi Pattepu: No. Earlier, we used to sponsor some of the events. Like, those who are conducting those programs, they ask for some sponsorships like India Mart promotionally. It's a mutual benefit for us. Even when they keep posting like **six and palm plates** and all, they give us some space to add our advertisements, okay, where we can even advertise from those events. Like that, our owner used to sponsor them, some of the events in the earlier.

[0:17:47.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. I mean, what do you think the India Mart means for the community here, whether it's people from South India or North India or other parts of South Asia or just people from anywhere? What do you think it means for the community?

[0:18:03.6]

Ravi Pattepu: India Mart is not only about for South and North India; it's about all the people from different parts of India. Even like some other community people also come in, like even white people comes to our store and buy the products, yeah.

[0:18:20.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. How, I guess, I mean, so what are the reactions of your customers?

[0:18:33.3]

Ravi Pattepu: As of now, the customers are really happy about what we are doing, the business here, so they are more happy than as—because we have vast product list than the other competitors, what they're having, and we maintain our store clean. And all the products' availability are very good, as far as I believe, yeah. Even we keep on asking the customers like how we are doing business, whether, “Are you happy with us? Are you happy with our product list? Are you happy with our fresh produce?” So we keep on taking the feedback from the customers so that we have an opportunity to grow ourselves.

[0:19:18.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's good. I have just a couple more questions for you. I mean, do you see yourself in Bentonville long term? Is this something that you want to continue doing for a long time or would you like to do something else?

[0:19:39.2]

Ravi Pattepu: No. As a business, we want to grow, as with the family, because it's a long-term business we are planning here. So as long as the city's developing, people are coming, people are moving from different places, so we would like to expand ourselves, and we want to grow our business. It's a continuous process and it's a long-term planning we are having.

[0:20:05.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. What do you hope to see for the future of India Mart?

[0:20:12.2]

Ravi Pattepu: As the future, we want to grow our business. We want to sell more and more customers, so we want to see our customers are more happier, what we are doing. And in future also we want to grow and we want to open different stores and different location, because people from Fayetteville and Joplin, Missouri, they don't have any Indian stores. From there also people come to our store, especially during the month, once in a month or fifteen days. Whenever they having long weekend, they come here and they take all the requirements, what they need. So people are asking for us to open stores where they don't have any Indian other groceries, especially Joplin, Missouri, and Fayetteville.

[0:21:04.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, definitely. I mean, are there any challenges of managing this store and trying to make sure that you have everything that you're trying to make your customers happy? What are the challenges of that?

[0:21:17.5]

Ravi Pattepu: The challenges, like main, especially fresh produce. We want to keep our fresh produce available every time during the weekend and weekdays. That's the main challenge, because what happens is it will take a long time because that needs to—like, most of the sellers and most of the products come from India. It will take a long process. During that only most of the product validity expiration dates will go on, so we want to make sure, like, we keep having the best quality products, whatever we are selling as of now. We want to keep more and more product availability. We want to expand the number of products so that every customer needs to have like available all the products, what he needs. As of now, we are doing best, but we want to make sure more and more products we need to keep and make sure every customer requires what they need. Availability of products we need to increase. That's our focus areas.

[0:22:26.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool. Where do you guys source your produce from?

[0:22:30.0]

Ravi Pattepu: From different vendors, not only from one particular vendor. There are different—some fresh produce come from Florida, Texas, Irving and Houston. Yeah, different vendors, different products comes from.

[0:22:45.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool, cool. Well, is there anything else that you want to say that you haven't talked about?

[0:22:53.2]

Ravi Pattepu: As a manager, I want to make sure our customer be happy at the end of the day. Once the customer visits our stores, he need to walk out with 100 percent satisfaction. That's our primary goal as a business manager.

[0:23:09.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Thank you for talking to me, Ravi.

[0:23:13.7]

Ravi Pattepu: Thank you.

[End of interview]